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James Clifford: Tradition and Transformation at UC Santa Cruz

Interviewed and Edited by
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Santa Cruz
2013

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Introduction

James Clifford came to UCSC in 1978, and remains affiliated as a distinguished professor emeritus. Like the books concerned about culture, travel and interpretation that have anchored Clifford's publishing career, these oral history sessions go beyond this moment of encounter and uncertainty. They offer a retrospective likeness of the paths and places that have inspired Clifford as a thinker, and the experiences and debates that have made this '78 arrival not just a stopping point on a larger journey, but a certain type of homecoming.

Clifford was born in 1945, the son of an academic administrator and a Samuel Johnson scholar at Columbia University. From a young age he was impressed in particular by his father's "almost pre-industrial work rhythm," a professional cadence through which he had summers off and dedicated his time to the material and teaching that he enjoyed. Clifford discusses the particular type of freedom he enjoyed as a young person with a New York City subway pass, a freedom which gave him access to the Greenwich Village folk revival, new intellectual currents on stage such as the Theatre of the Absurd, and rising playwrights like Edward Albee. Clifford explains his interest in learning from the liminal areas of his upbringing as a city boy by listening to rural music in Manhattan clubs, or by picking a long-necked banjo in Washington Square. In this way, New York proved to be a route to a different America, a rural, folksy, surreal America that was alive in old-time songs and mountain melodies. The city brought together a wide range of movements and ideas and trajectories for Clifford, providing a blended, leveling context which proved to be crucial in his development as a thinker and a scholar.

Following undergrad studies at Haverford College and a stint as an antiwar activist, Clifford pursued a history doctorate at Harvard. He relates that he wasn't interested in focusing on traditional history, and received the most important components of his education from his fellow grad students, who helped him expand intellectually across a range of disciplines outside of history. In keeping with this disciplinary boundary crossing, he ultimately wrote his thesis on a little-known French anthropologist, Maurice Leenhardt. As a result of this breadth of study, which was neither straight-ahead history or orthodox anthropology, when he started applying for jobs in academia he viewed the idea of a traditional history appointment as a "nightmare." Looking back, he believes that line of work would have constrained him and led to a much more conventional scholarly career.

He soon found his freedom, his "permission" to explore diverse fields, when he interviewed for a junior position in UC Santa Cruz's history of consciousness program (histcon). The program was originally UCSC's only graduate department in the humanities. Given UCSC's initial focus on undergraduate education over graduate or professional education, it was constructed loosely and run by a shifting group of faculty who were primarily affiliated with other, undergrad-centered departments. As a result, the program was characterized by an unusually wide scope of study, and attracted some gifted, groundbreaking students, but was left in such a constant state of faculty flux that its future was uncertain and unpredictable. In '78 Clifford interviewed for one of two histcon appointments, which were the result of the first effort to structure the program with full-time, dedicated faculty. His knowledge of Michel Foucault and other figures of 'French theory,' acquired during his time in Paris

doing dissertation research, proved to be an important common ground between Clifford and his new senior colleague, Hayden White, and in the structuring of histcon that they undertook together. They were charged with infusing the “fundamentally anarchic” program with a sense of ballast, foundation and direction.

Clifford relates how he and White were regarded as the “new order” in histcon, both hopefully as a revitalizing force and suspiciously as a disciplining element that could extinguish the program’s iconoclastic vibe. These suspicions were heightened by the timing of their arrival, which coincided with a significant campus reorganization targeting key elements of the original UCSC experiment, including restricting the autonomy of the residential colleges and devolving hiring and firing power entirely to the academic departments. This move towards the traditional university, and away from the distinct UCSC vision, was controversial at the time. Clifford maintains that the efforts to structure histcon were in a different vein from these larger efforts in that they embraced the intellectually expansive scope of the ‘old’ histcon, while establishing rigorous expectations, faculty continuity and theory as a *lingua franca*.

In any case, with theory and ‘theories,’ plural, providing a new “commonality of discourse,” the program in time developed a cadre of dedicated and renowned faculty, and a contingent of graduate students who were exceptional for their creativity, their self-direction, and in many cases their political activism. Histcon became extremely successful, with an extraordinarily high figure of eighty-five to ninety percent of graduates getting placed in tenure-track or postdoctoral positions. The program’s interdisciplinary scope, with students engaged in wide array of topics that were too expansive/transgressive

for many more traditional departments, earned it an international reputation as a place for cutting edge work. Clifford outlines how he attempted to employ consistent standards and guidelines with his students in this shifting context, where the program itself was constantly being redefined by its mix of students, faculty and staff.

Beyond histcon, in these sessions Clifford considers his role as the founding director of the Center for Cultural Studies, a campus research institution that championed a vision of the 'greater humanities,' and strove to establish links both in and outside of the humanities division. He reflects on the 'cultural studies turn' in academia more broadly, which prioritized interdisciplinary, ground-up approaches to study. Just like his young years in New York City brought together a range of disparate movements, from backcountry folk to off-Broadway avant-garde, the cultural studies turn made space for both so-called 'high culture,' like classical art, and popular culture, such as advertisements, billboards, and rock and roll. Clifford discusses the impact of cultural studies on him and on the campus through the Center. Given this oral history's guiding focus on UCSC, readers who are interested in Clifford's detailed take on theory, anthropology and his own published work should consider both his books and *On the Edges of Anthropology*, a 2003 compendium of interviews oriented more specifically around his intellectual work and interests.

Clifford moves towards a close by reflecting on the gradual implosion of histcon in recent years, noting that at its peak it had nine full time faculty positions, and now is approaching two. He discusses the reasons and rationales for this shrinkage, from devastating budget cuts to a lack of age diversity among the core faculty, and looks towards an uncertain future for this program, which

has long been UCSC's flagship in the humanities. In search for a sustaining thread, he closes with a reflection on the campus as a physical space, going beyond clichés of its beauty to sketch out his vision of the land as a generative presence, as something that is fundamentally nourishing and creative in ways we don't yet have language to articulate.

These interviews were recorded in late July and early August 2012 in Clifford's residence on the west side of Santa Cruz. We sat in his living room overlooking a eucalyptus-screened valley and held the discussions transcribed in the ensuing pages. In addition to my minor word and sentence-level edits, Clifford has edited the transcript throughout, in his words, "for diction, continuity and completeness, without altering the essential ideas or tone." In other words, the final text reflects both Clifford's point that it consists of his stories, which are "composed, not spontaneous," and his preference to present those stories "at their best."

In addition to his editing work, in our sessions Clifford was a wide-reaching and perceptive narrator. Among other topics, his stories gave a unique, interior vantage point on the dynamic and elusive 'spirit' of histcon. In a way, histcon is one of the places where the original UCSC vision, which ran counter to so many standardizing and bureaucratizing trends in academia, found a lasting harbor. Clifford has been a key figure in the program's remarkable story, which has demonstrated the power of interdisciplinary, open-ended scholarly work to transcend the walls that so often break up knowledge and inquiry in the academy. Beyond this engagement and this perspective, he is an attentive citizen of the larger UCSC community, and his deep-seated, forward-looking musings

on the campus as a whole are imaginative grist for anyone interested in looking at the idea and meaning of location from new angles.

In preparation for these sessions, beyond speaking with Clifford's colleagues and reviewing his internal documents, I consulted his published works. One of his key books is *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late 20th Century*. This reading, coupled with our sessions and the editing process, have led me to consider the role that translation and revision play when it comes to storytelling, listening and understanding—in other words, in our efforts to communicate with others, shape the past, and negotiate the present.

Tracing an oral history back to its pulse—elicited stories about past events—involves negotiating a series of translations in which details are both lost and gained. Even the most unpolished transcript, complete with false starts and excess articles, is still on some level a translation, a representation, of the audio (which Clifford has opted not to release for this project). Some factors are downplayed, others emphasized when sound and silence are interpreted by print. Going further down the line, audio is in turn a media translation of human interaction, a certain framing of the in-person conversations that happened between Clifford and myself in his living room. And even on the foundational level of a narrator's memories, revision—in the form of recollection and reshaping—plays a sometimes invisible but always crucial role. To paraphrase an email dialogue Clifford and I had in discussing the value of adhering strictly to the audio record in transcription, stories are often rehearsed and are always a reconstruction. They are a rearrangement of the past into a coherent narrative that becomes, gradually, the foundational 'facts' of our lives, through which we can establish connections with others, translated by difference and subjectivity.

As a whole, this project has given me an opportunity to consider the role of translation in understanding others—whether across distance, or languages, or from spoken story to the written page—and the role of revision and composition in not just how we explain ourselves to others, but how we extract meaning from our past, and explain ourselves to ourselves.

In conclusion, this oral history has been the product of collaboration with a series of key people. First my gratitude to Jim Clifford—he has invested a significant amount of time and energy into this project, from interviews to editing, in spite of dealing with deadlines for his upcoming book. He has been a thorough and thoughtful narrator, and has provided insights both on and off the audio record in our wonderful discussions about oral history, folk guitar, and travel in northeast California. Outside of the sessions, Hayden White’s perspective was an important resource in preparation, as was my email correspondence with Donna Haraway. The staff of McHenry Library’s Special Collections were of great help in my research; now, as always, I’m grateful for their guidance. Thanks goes out to Kayla Judd for logistical help. And last, I am so fortunate to have had Irene Reti’s experience and clarity in guiding this project to this conclusion.

Copies of this volume are on deposit in Special Collections and in the circulating stacks at the UCSC Library, as well as on the library’s website. The Regional History Project is supported administratively by Elisabeth Remak-Honnef, head of Special Collections and Archives, and University Librarian Virginia Steel.

—*Cameron Vanderscoff, Interviewer*
Santa Cruz, California, May 2013

**New York: Old-Time Melodies, the Avant Garde,
and Joining the Family Business**

Cameron Vanderscoff: Today is Monday, July 30th, 2012. My name is Cameron Vanderscoff, here for the Regional History Project. Today we're going to do part one of James Clifford's oral history.¹ To start, what sparked your interest in academics? What impact did your family have in terms of directing you towards teaching?

James Clifford: Well, an enormous impact. In retrospect, it seems I was destined to become an academic, and I don't think that's just retrospective rationalizing. I was a faculty brat—the son of James L. Clifford, who was a professor of English at Columbia University, and Virginia Iglehart Clifford, who was in her own right an intellectual—or became one—and an academic administrator. She was a dean later in life at Union Theological Seminary in New York, and interested in religious education. My father, who was intellectually I think the big influence, was an eighteenth-century English literature specialist, particularly interested in Samuel Johnson and was himself a biographer of Samuel Johnson. Part of being the child of a father like that in an Anglophile household was that we were in England on his sabbaticals. So that meant that I did eighth grade in an English

¹ All interviews were conducted in the living room of Dr. Clifford's residence in on the west side of Santa Cruz.

school, and then later I went to the London School of Economics for my junior year of college.

I think I always assumed that the professorial life was the good life. And it really *was* a good life as I observed it in my father. He loved his work. He was adored by his students. He was in the graduate school at Columbia and taught pretty much the courses that he wanted to teach. It was a different university than it is now. Much less driven by productivity measures and quotas, much less driven by money concerns, much more a “life of the mind” kind of place. My father was in love with eighteenth-century English literature, and he communicated that love to his students. He also enjoyed very long summer vacations, and that impressed me. (laughter) I saw that he left New York at the earliest possible moment in the spring and we went to Vermont, where my parents had bought an old farmhouse and fixed it up over the years. And we came back at the very last possible moment, so we had three-month summers in Vermont, long summers. I said to myself, “What other kind of a job gives you those hours?” Later on, when I would become discouraged by bumps in the academic road, I always remembered why I was still in the game. I was in it for the free time. (laughter)

I saw clearly, in my father, those two elements: he was doing what he loved and what excited him, and he was doing work that wasn’t alienated—he had this control over his time, an almost sort of preindustrial work rhythm. That made an impression on me. And I think the academic life still has—even for all of its difficulties and for all the fact it’s more regimented and driven by productivity and outcomes and audit culture and money—I think it still has those features. I don’t think I ever really doubted that I would be an academic. I

was good in school. I enjoyed it; it was just—what I did. I joined the family business. (laughs)

I did have a moment in the sixties; there was a kind of prescription that you should rebel against your family, that you should leave and get out. So I went through a little bit of that. But I think, in retrospect, that my gestures of rebellion were kind of superficial.

Vanderscoff: Reflexive.

Clifford: Yeah, kind of notional. I really knew, always, that I would be a professor.

The other big influence on my development and my becoming an intellectual of some sort was New York City, being a kid in New York with a subway pass and the freedom of the city—or so it felt. Of course, there were neighborhoods that I did not go to, and so it was a racialized freedom of the city. There were “dangerous neighborhoods,” where white kids couldn’t get out of the subway.

But that said, there was a lot of the city that I felt free to go to as a teenager. For me, that meant Greenwich Village, the subway line down the West Side to Greenwich Village, to Washington Square and the folk revival, which I was a part of. There was off-Broadway theater when it was still really off-Broadway and you could afford a ticket. And that’s where I encountered Brecht and Pirandello, Edward Albee and Eugene Ionesco, the Theatre of the Absurd. I mean, it was really an extraordinary—Albee was new and the Theatre of the Absurd was something exciting. I felt I was discovering all that on my own. I wasn’t being taken there by my parents. That was very important, I think, for me.

Vanderscoff: And this in context with the social consciousness of the folk revival in Greenwich Village.

Clifford: Yeah, for sure. I was a folkie. My father loved to sing. He was a sort of failed opera singer, but loved to sing Gilbert and Sullivan and musical comedy. He was a great theatergoer and music lover. He took me to the Metropolitan Opera. He took us to all the Rodgers and Hammerstein classics as they came out in the fifties. That was really remarkable. He loved to sing, and I'm sure that encouraged me and so that when the folk revival came along—I must confess that my first love was the Kingston Trio, who are definitely uncool—

Vanderscoff: (laughs)

Clifford: —given where I very quickly moved onto: Pete Seeger and the Weavers and everything. Seeger's long-necked banjo and that kind of singing was a really big attraction to me. So I had my banjo and I went down to Washington Square and I played there and pretended to be Pete Seeger, who is still a hero of mine. He's in his nineties and still writing protest songs. Astonishing.

So I discovered that music and, as you say, the politics that went with it, which were lefty politics of an internationalist sort. It was the Weavers and Odetta and Josh White and a really fantastic world of music, which morphed for me into old-time country music through the New Lost City Ramblers. And this led eventually, in college, to bluegrass and country music. I'm a great lover of country music, really of almost all kinds. And that was an ironic return of the repressed for my parents. They were both Hoosiers from southern Indiana,

which is why, as you can hear from my voice, I don't sound like a New Yorker. I have some sort of washed-out Indiana plus New York plus California voice now. But they were from Evansville, Indiana, and across the river was Kentucky and this lower-class music. Their families were solid middle, upper middle class, and the hillbilly music that came across the river on the radio—well, that's what they turned off on their radio. And then eventually my parents go to New York, a hyper-sophisticated place, where they raise a child who comes home singing that very same music. (laughter) I guess it was something American that I was getting in touch with, a different, popular America, some roots agenda that I found in the folk revival as well as the popular politics and the internationalism that came with it.

Vanderscoff: Woody Guthrie's America, in some sense?

Clifford: Well yeah, Woody Guthrie's America. This was a bottom-up view of things, often very radical and irreverent but also totally reverent, some it deeply Christian. I was, by then, an agnostic. My parents were both liberal Protestants, but I was not ever seriously a believer. Still, I did love to sing those sacred songs— You had to finish every country set with a sacred number. Mostly, it was about the harmony, and it was about the sentiment. But it was also about the weirdness. You know, old-time country music, when you listen to the words of those songs—they are really strange. They are *really* strange. (laughter) This guy goes for a walk with his girlfriend, and then suddenly he's stabbing her and drenched in her blood and he's sending her down the river, and you say, "Wait a minute, where did that come from?" Aside from just good old American violence against women, which is an old tradition— No, there's something weird about

the way it's told. Deadpan. Or a guy grows up happy and then some strange, arbitrary concatenation of things happens to him and suddenly he's in prison singing a song about his wasted life. There's a kind of almost cinematic, sped-up movement of events in the lyrics of these songs, which, if you stop and think about them really makes your head spin. And all the curious relations with animals. These are people who grew up with animals and they had songs that begin, "I wish I was a mole in the ground," stuff like that. So there was something to think about.

I didn't, at the time, really understand that this was a mode of—that this was where you could go for authentic American surrealism. I'm saying that as though it's what I had in mind then, but I got the idea later from the great critic Greil Marcus, who's written a book about this *Hidden Republic*. Marcus says that this "old timey" music, which nurtured Bob Dylan and the Band, *The Basement Tapes*—it's where American surrealism can be found.

Well, I absorbed all this, more or less unconsciously, along with the theater of the absurd and God knows what in New York. And it gave me—I think, in retrospect—what later I would think of as a "cultural studies" mentality. I was exposed to high culture. We went to the Metropolitan Opera and the legitimate theater, as they used to say, but I was also exposed to this weird underbelly of America, and to New York City itself, which is just an amazing place, always changing: lots of different languages, different people. It didn't feel then as diverse as it feels now, racially and ethnically, but it was obviously a world city. Growing up there had a big impact on me. I think it turned me into an intellectual with a populist bent. I was ready for cultural studies. I was ready for work that said: "Look, high culture, low culture, popular culture, oral culture,

ethnographic culture, they aren't essentially different—it's all culture." I was ready and I think primed for that. Or so it seems in retrospect. New York did that for me.

My mother had a very strong aesthetic sense, which I think has also been a big element of my thinking. She was a painter and she loved art. When we traveled she was the one who would drag us off to churches in Rome to look at frescoes, or into art museums, or to see the mosaics in Ravenna or something else that she was moved by. I know that I picked up something important there—part of this mix that I got.

How could you find a kind of work that would let you think and write and dream about this kind of stuff? Well, you'd have to be an academic—if you wanted to be paid for it anyway.

Vanderscoff: So it was always very clear to you that you would go to undergraduate college. Clearly, that was the context of your family.

Clifford: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Vanderscoff: So what was the quality of your own undergraduate years? How did they start steering you towards a particular major or discipline?

Clifford: I attended Haverford College, which is a small Quaker college outside of Philadelphia. It's part of a threesome of Quaker institutions: Swarthmore, Bryn Mawr and Haverford. But Haverford was and still is the smallest of them all. It was a men's college then, back when I went in 1963. And when I say small, I mean small: 550 men. Fewer students than at one of the colleges at UCSC. With a beautiful old campus: great trees, old buildings, and a duck pond. I went there as

a kind of anti-snob gesture. I was accepted on early admission and just declined to apply to the other, better-known, and Ivy League universities.

I think that's an element of my style: the snobbery of anti-snobbery, if you know what I mean. I would go to Haverford because it was even better than Harvard. That was my thinking. Haverford turned out to be a wonderful place to learn and live: scholars who really want to teach, and small classes. So when I came to UCSC and heard people talking about the ethos of the college and what college life should be, I knew that—that's what I had experienced, and with the Quaker ethos, which is a strange mix of radicalism and authoritarianism.

The Quakers have always been pacifists and anti-authority types, but they have the inner light, the Quakers. They really know. (laughs) Well, Quakers established Haverford and it gave it a liberal cast. It had liberal social rules about women in dormitory rooms, which in those days was important. It mattered. (laughs) And it had and still has a working honor code that's one of the really well-known and effective academic honor systems going.

Vanderscoff: Run by the students?

Clifford: Run by the students, policed by the students. So you might say, in a Foucauldian mode, that self-surveillance had achieved its perfect culmination at Haverford. And we have to remember who invented the penitentiary—the Quakers with that inner light. I didn't think like this at the time.

But we did see a contradiction in the fact that when we arrived at Haverford in our first year, going to Quaker meeting was still compulsory. They had pared it down to one or two times per semester, but it was still compulsory.

They took attendance. And of course the contradiction of a Quaker meeting that's compulsory was just, you know—and we made this point.

Vanderscoff: Come one, come all, but you better be there. (laughter)

Clifford: We made that point. And by the time we had left, Quaker meeting was no longer compulsory. It was voluntary because what had intervened during my undergraduate years was the sixties. And they hit hard. We all know where we were in freshman year when [John F.] Kennedy was assassinated. (By the way Quaker meeting really helped get us through that crisis, as a community!) And of course, we all were grappling with the Vietnam War, which by the time we graduated was not just a political issue, but a personal issue because the draft was after us. We all experienced each new Beatles record and each new Rolling Stones record, and we took drugs, and we experienced a lot of politics, marches on Washington. Between '63 and '67, when I graduated, was pretty intense. And that moment was a big part of college life for me.

I spent my junior year in England at the London School of Economics [LSE], where I encountered Marxism. I took some fantastic courses there from Marxists who really knew what they were talking about: Ralph Milliband, George Lichtheim, and a glimpse of Perry Anderson. That was inspiring. It turned me into a Marxist—of sorts. I've always been a Marxist of sorts, never a rigorous enough one for the real Marxists, but someone who can never do without Marx in my thinking. LSE gets the credit for that.

Vanderscoff: So what were you majoring in at that point?

Clifford: I just stumbled into history, you might you say in a fit of absent-mindedness. You had to have a major. I did well in a history course or two. There was a professor at Haverford who was thought to be tough and charismatic and I was attracted to him: Wallace McCaffrey, a Tudor and Stuart English historian. And then I went off to LSE where I did some history, intellectual history of Marxism and nineteenth-century socialist thought.

So when I came back, I just finished up as a historian. Then what? Well, I wanted to stay in school because that was my career path. I also wanted to stay in school because if I stayed in school I could still have a draft deferment. I went to Stanford for a year on a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship. That was during the fall of '67 and the spring of '68.

Now the spring of '68 was one of those moments that we think of as historically "hot." During the spring of '68 Robert Kennedy was killed; Martin Luther King was assassinated; a whole lot of American cities were going up in flames. May '68 in Paris, and other European cities—the whole world seemed to be in crisis. Except Palo Alto! At Stanford nothing was happening. Nothing. The smell of sun tan oil permeated—as it did every spring—the campus. You could stroll up to Lake Lagunita, or take a jog. I said to myself, "You have to get out of here. This is not where it's at." And anyway I was forced out of grad school by the draft, because I had lost my deferment. So I went to teach school in Vermont for a year. There were places that needed teachers, and you could still get a deferment. I did that for a year, and learned I wasn't cut out for teaching adolescents! Anyway, my own political consciousness was raised to the point where I thought, "I don't want to be channeled anymore. I have to confront this war." So I spent some time in antiwar work and the antimilitary movement,

actually, in the GI coffeehouse movement, which was a way of organizing around military bases and providing support for guys who were antiwar in the military.

Vanderscoff: Like psychological counseling, or—?

Clifford: It was mostly legal counseling. We got them lawyers if they wanted to become conscientious objectors or if they were AWOL. I had to study up on military law, which, as we said, is related to law as military music is related to music! Of course we also tried to radicalize our clientele. It was a pretty naïve operation overall. What was good about it was that we had at least gotten outside of the so-called student movement. In the military we were dealing with people who were not students, of a different class. In fact, we were trying to subvert the U.S. Navy in Newport, Rhode Island, where there's a big base. On a main street in town we started a bookstore called The Potemkin Bookstore. It was a GI coffeehouse really, where we had meetings and speakers. I think Noam Chomsky came out to speak, and Howard Zinn. We tried to raise the consciousness of these guys. But I sometimes felt that at least half of our clientele were from military intelligence!

Vanderscoff: COINTELPRO [Counter Intelligence Program] and so on.

Clifford: Yeah. We did this for a while. And eventually I was disqualified from the military, based, I think, significantly on that activity.

Vanderscoff: Oh, so you think surveillance of that activity led to them—?

Clifford: Well yeah, I failed my physical. I was passing out subversive literature and not cooperating. And this was a Boston Army base where they didn't try to "make a man of you." They were into weeding out troublemakers. Well, the depths of my political commitment were such that no sooner had I got my 4F than I was heading back to grad school, where I continued to do some political work. But mainly I was back on track to being an intellectual and a professor.

Vanderscoff: Did you view returning to academia as a divergence from political activity and political engagement, or did you see some way in which they could meet?

Clifford: That's a good question. I don't know if I can sort out what I know now from what I thought then. I think I thought I could continue my political work in some authentic way inside the academy, that it wasn't a zero sum thing. In retrospect, there was a significant element of self-deception there. Whatever I could do as an academic politician—and that was essentially reading Marx and opening up the canon—wasn't really political work. By then the U.S. defeat in Vietnam was evident, and I'm not sure our work in the university really had much to do with hastening the U.S. withdrawal.

Graduate School and the Move Against Disciplinary Constraints

Clifford: So, after this hiatus, I returned to graduate school doing social and intellectual history of modern Europe, at Harvard.

Vanderscoff: Why did you pick Harvard in particular, given that it is the epitome of those Ivy Leagues you were sort of dodging when you went to Haverford?

Clifford: At Stanford, I formed a friendship with a young professor, Paul Robinson, who's since made a wonderful career as an intellectual historian and is still a good friend. He had just arrived at Stanford and so had I. We hit it off, and I was his TA. When twentieth-century Marxism came up in his course I gave the lectures. Paul said, rightly or wrongly, "Look, you need to go to Harvard and work with my teacher, H. Stuart Hughes," a major figure in European intellectual history. So when the time came, and I was in New England, I just sort of said, "Oh yeah, Harvard, that's where Paul told me to go."

What I learned there was not a lot from any of the faculty, really. This was a sixties generation and we were into constructing ourselves as rebels, wherever we were, even though it was always in some way a compromised rebellion. So we rebelled against history and its canons and its rules. We were all Marxists of one sort or another. I had a group of friends who were really wonderful intellectuals. We taught each other and survived in a rather conservative department.

I was an intellectual historian. I ended up writing about the history of anthropology, which had become a deepening interest. I also was a tutor in an interdisciplinary program: the nearest thing, in a way, to history of consciousness at Harvard. It was a program called history and literature, a well-established major where you would bring historical and literary texts together and teach and think about them together. It was team teaching, and the tutors in the program

were graduate students. My partner from literature was Richard Sieburth, who's now a professor at NYU and a brilliant literary historian, critic, poet, and translator—something of a polymath. We co-taught an introductory seminar—Richard from comparative literature, me from history. As it turned out, I was often more interested in the literature we were teaching than the history. And since Richard could teach anything, he taught that, and I taught the literature. There really were no disciplinary borders, so I got a practical training in literary analysis.

When I came out of Harvard, I wanted to be juggling—if I could—history, literature and anthropology. Those were the three disciplinary balls I wanted to keep in the air. My nightmare, I suppose—I don't know if was an explicit one then but it certainly is in retrospect—was that I would get a job in a history department. History departments are conservative on the whole, and they discourage interdisciplinary juggling. You have to write history if you want to be respected and you want to have tenure. There are pretty clear rules about how history is supposed to look. I really didn't want to do that. My commitment to history as a discipline had always been loose. I had stumbled into it and never really identified with the profession. For me, being an intellectual historian was a way to use literature and art and sociology and anthropology, or whatever tools the problem seemed to require.

Vanderscoff: Engaging in broader aspects of culture.

Clifford: That's right. And it wasn't just coming from intellectual history. Social history was becoming more "cultural." My heroes in grad school were Raymond Williams and Edward Thompson. E.P. Thompson was writing a kind of popular,

bottom-up ethnographic history of the English working class. And Williams was writing a social-embedded intellectual history. The book that influenced me a lot was *Culture and Society*, a book that dates from the late 1950s, where Williams locates the humanist idea of culture in the context of industrialism, class society, social change, the emergence of mass society and communication. I saw that it's possible to do intellectual history which isn't just about this or that thinker influencing others, but where the ideas have their own autonomy and complexity, embedded in change and in relations of power that were identifiably about the economy and class society, high culture and popular culture. So there was a Marxist underpinning to it all, but a not a reductive one, an approach that left a relative autonomy for the cultural. And that's what I later understood was what the cultural studies tradition in Britain was all about, a tradition I eventually came to identify myself with. Of course, one of its founding fathers was Raymond Williams. Also Thompson. I didn't know that at the time. I discovered that later, and we can talk about that in due course.

These were the formative people, at least for me. You can see they were doing social history, but also in a broader sense cultural history. And then, as I was leaving graduate school, French theory—so-called—started to filter in. We can talk about it. I did my thesis research in Paris at a very exciting time and that world became part of my thinking. Actually, a part of the reason that I got the job in history of consciousness [histcon], was probably because I could talk that talk. Of course, it was my new colleague, Hayden White's, shtick, too.

Vanderscoff: So you emerged from Harvard with a strong sense that you wanted disciplinary work to be somewhat permeable for you?

Clifford: Well, I didn't want disciplinary work at all. (laughter) Like I said, in grad school we were rebels and we rebelled against the discipline. But it did also give us a certain kind of home base—something to push off of. When you get into an operation like history of consciousness, as we can talk about later, there's nothing to push off of. You really are in the interdisciplines. And that leads to its own excitement, but also its own vertigo and its own panic. You're always asking: "Well, how much do I have to know? Everything's connected to everything. How do I know what to read?" There's no canon, nothing to rebel against.

But that was the world I was moving into. I didn't know about it, but I'd come out of grad school pushing off of history and into anthropology and into literary studies. I was ready for histcon, I guess, and I was lucky enough to land in the job.

Vanderscoff: I'd like to ask you a question or two, while we're on the topic of your dissertation, because it seems to me that your research in that was the beginning of you fanning out from this notion of "Why work within the channel of a discipline?"

Clifford: How I found my dissertation was a matter of a certain kind of wandering and good luck, and it was not something that I set out to do. It's something that kind of happened to me. I got a traveling fellowship by saying I was going to do the history of anthropology. Raymond Williams had placed the humanistic culture idea densely in its time. But he didn't talk about the anthropological culture idea: culture with a small 'c' and a final 's.' Cultural relativism we might call it, which is now, often in weak forms, the dominant idea

of culture. This is culture as whole ways of life: semiotic systems, symbolic systems that can include things that you eat, how you eat, how you dress, along with *Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake*. That's all culture in an anthropological sense—a leveling and relativizing definition. So I thought, maybe I can talk about that idea and its emergence in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, through figures like Boas and Malinowski, at least among anthropologists. And if the social underpinning for Williams was industrial society and class transformation in nineteenth century Europe, my underpinning would be empire. It would be “cultural” ideas in colonial situations.

So that's what I set out to do. I thought I proposed a thesis with one section on Boas, one on Malinowski, and a third on Durkheim and his nephew Marcel Mauss, the French strand. That would have made an incredibly superficial thesis. You could write many books about each of these figures and the traditions they founded. But that was my cover story. I went to Paris and pretty quickly found out that there was a lot more to French anthropology than Durkheim and Mauss. The same for Malinowski and British social anthropology—there was a lot more there than I imagined. The preeminent historian of anthropology, George Stocking, was just then writing his book *Victorian Anthropology* and it was clear that the British field belonged to him. So pretty quickly I focused on the French. As I said, Paris in the early seventies was a pretty exciting place, and I ended staying two years instead of one, hanging out in bookstores, going to lectures, reading in various libraries. Toward the end of my stay, I stumbled onto a thesis that I never could have imagined writing.

Most of the time I was researching the milieu of the early and mid-twentieth century that lay behind the better-known intellectual world of Claude

Lévi-Strauss in the fifties: Durkheim, Mauss, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl and a lot of other people including writers like Michel Leiris and Georges Bataille who were marginally allied with the surrealist movement. Dada and Surrealism also leveled culture. If Duchamp's urinal can be a high cultural object in a museum then everything goes, right? I was interested in the connections between what would become academic anthropology and art—the art world. A lot of that ended up in my second book, *The Predicament of Culture*.

Of course, the other thing that was going on during my time in Paris was structuralism and post-structuralism. I attended Foucault's lectures at the Collège de France for a season, and I went to hear some of the other famous figures and drunk up the environment of what would become French theory. So when I came back to the U.S. I had some "inside" knowledge. I was in the intellectual import/export biz—knowing about things that hadn't yet been translated or wouldn't be translated, Leiris especially.

But I wrote a thesis about something quite different: an obscure French anthropologist named Maurice Leenhardt, who died in 1954. The French were usually thought of as armchair anthropologists, so-called. But Leenhardt was an exception that confirmed the rule. He had done his fieldwork as a missionary in a place called New Caledonia, way out in Melanesia, that I knew nothing about. But I stumbled on this man, and then I got gifted with all of his private papers and letters from the field. I eventually read them and ended up having to write a whole book about him, which I hadn't planned to do. I never could have set out to write the biography of a missionary. But it turned out to be wonderful, because it took me into the guts of a nasty colonial situation. New Caledonia was France's Botany Bay. That's where they sent their convicts. It was a settler colony

founded on violent dispossession of the Melanesians with a lot of ongoing conflict. Leenhardt, who was a Protestant missionary in a Catholic colonial situation, was an advocate for native people, as well as an ambiguous element in the colonial system. So I had to think about the complexities of being a liberal—although he was thought of as a radical in his time—in a fraught historical context.

That wasn't intellectual history. I guess it was just history I was doing, although Leenhardt's ethnological ideas were an important part of the book. But in a "cultural studies" vein, it was about the relative autonomy of cultural and political ideas, the horizons within which they could be meaningful. And it opened the Island Pacific to me, an area of research that's ongoing. So I had that under my belt. I could talk Foucault. I could talk Barthes. I was engaged with literary and artistic modernism. That was what I had to work with. I came back to Harvard, finished my thesis, and went on the job market. I really didn't want a job in a history department. But who else would hire me? That was my Ph.D.

Vanderscoff: So did you have a sense that you were emerging into an academic world that wouldn't have much of a place for you, necessarily?

Clifford: Well, I was afraid of that. I mean, so much was happening. At the time it was just called theory: code for French theory, but also the Frankfurt School, Marcuse and Durkheim and Adorno. Also, the Russian Formalists and the role of linguistics as a foundational element in the human sciences in the emergence of semiotics and structuralism, which was something that Hayden was very well versed in at that point. He was really pushing that when we both arrived at UCSC in 1978. It wasn't centrally my interest, but I knew about it and I

understood the vibe and was excited by it. Hayden taught me a lot in my first years at UCSC. Without history of consciousness I guess I would have taken a job as an intellectual historian somewhere. And I know I would have written much more conventional work than I eventually did.

Vanderscoff: So intellectually, a huge fork in the road occurred for you there?

Clifford: Oh, I feel really blessed to have landed in history of consciousness. And I know Donna Haraway, who followed me into the program, feels the same thing and will say the same thing.² She had left a conservative history of science program at Johns Hopkins to come to us. And for her, as for me, it was permission to be an intellectual and go where the ideas and the topics and the politics took you, without thinking about whether, “Is this good history? Is this really good literary analysis?” Or, if you’re a social scientist, “Do you have a good sample?” So that was great.

First Encounters With UCSC and History of Consciousness

Vanderscoff: This seems like a good time to turn towards UCSC. Dialing back just a few years, as a student in the seventies or the sixties, what was your impression of this campus and its college system?

Clifford: Well, I actually didn’t know much about the college system. I knew that UCSC was an experimental place, and felt what everybody felt about that—from

² See Irene Reti, interviewer and editor, *Edges and Ecotones: Donna Haraway’s Worlds at UCSC* (Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 2007) for Dr. Haraway’s perspectives and insights on history of consciousness. Available in full text at <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/haraway>

a distance, both excited and “Well, is this kind of a hippie place? Is it irresponsible? How good is it? What’s it like?” But overall, a sense of excitement. And the actual design of the campus; that is, the way the colleges were set up to cross-cut the disciplines, with the weak boards of study, that whole radical attempt to actually keep the disciplines from asserting themselves—that’s an experiment that I honor, in retrospect. It didn’t work out. There were practical difficulties that made it difficult to sustain. Somebody once said, “You can’t set up an interdisciplinary college and expect it to maintain itself across generations unless you have a hundred year old wine cellar.” That was basically saying you can’t just set up Oxford and Cambridge and expect instant traditions. When the first money crunches came along, the colleges came under pressure because they were seen by the rationalizing bureaucrats as an extra bureaucracy, an extra set of committees, an extra set of everything. And no one was going to get rid of the disciplines. Something had to go. So people thought. And UCSC had a reputation for being ungovernable.

When Hayden and I arrived, in 1978, it was the moment of so-called “reorganization,” when the special, educational role of the colleges was abolished and they were turned into social and residential units. The incoming chancellor, Robert Sinsheimer, represented the new order.³ And so, by

³ Robert Sinsheimer was chancellor 1977-87. For his take on UCSC and the ‘new order,’ see Randall Jarrell, interviewer and editor, [Robert L. Sinsheimer: University of California, Santa Cruz During a Critical Decade, 1977-1987](#) (Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 1991). Available in full text at <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/sinsheimer>

association, did we. I didn't know anything about this at the time, and I had no coherent sense of what the college experiment was.

Vanderscoff: So that didn't play at all into what you looking for in UCSC?

Clifford: No, not consciously. But I was excited by a wide-open field of interdisciplinary work—an ethos of the place that had been part of the college experiment and that has survived the colleges, at least did for a long time and it's still there, I think. I also had some inside knowledge that may have given me a slight advantage when it came to interviewing for my job, because I kind of knew what the UCSC style was. I had two friends from undergraduate days who were students in the history of consciousness program.

Vanderscoff: Oh, really.

Clifford: When I was in grad school, maybe around 1974, I came out here to visit these two friends. They were both students in the history of consciousness program: George Stavis and Tim Ackerman. George was, and is, a great banjo player. (We had been part of a bluegrass group together.) George and Tim and another Haverfordian, Jack Bowers, who still resides in Santa Cruz, were members of the hottest rock group in town, called Oganookie: O-G-A-N-O-O-K-I-E.

Vanderscoff: Thank you for spelling that.

Clifford: They were the house band at the old Catalyst, which was the big place in town—a fantastically high-powered band. They all lived in a big plantation up in Ben Lomond with a whole entourage. It was a very sixties scene. George was

Norman O. Brown's teaching assistant. And Nobby—as we all called him (*Nabi* or *Navi*, in Hebrew, meaning “prophet”)—knew that rhythm and ritual and music were important parts of what he was interested in. He taught a course on *Myth and Ritual*. He could do the ‘myth’ part but he really couldn't do the ‘ritual’ part and George would get his banjo out and do the ‘ritual’ part. (laughter) Or so George told me. Anyway, he was friends with Brown. And Tim was a very serious religious studies scholar and a wonderful rock and jazz drummer. But their energy was mostly going into being rock n' roll stars and not academics. A lot of people in histcon were working a couple sides of the street. I think many of them were doing politics, or whatever it might be—or just plain old hedonism.

While I was hanging out with the band, I went along to a histcon event. Gregory Bateson was being introduced to the department. Bateson spent the last years of his career at UCSC, and he was an important, if passing, presence in histcon. They were having a kind of get-to-know each other meeting which was held out at Page Smith's house.⁴ The whole program was there looking him over. I went along, just tagged along with my friends. Page Smith's house was a striking place, very upper class. At that time, Smith had just written a book on the chicken, the history of the chicken book, which he had written with a biologist whose name escapes me for the moment.⁵ The book was about anything

⁴ For Dr. Smith's perspective on the early history of consciousness program see Elizabeth Spedding Calciano, interviewer, and Randall Jarrell, editor, [Page Smith: Founding Cowell College and UCSC, 1964-1973](#) (Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 1996): pp.69-70. Available in full text at <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/smith>

⁵ Dr. Charles Daniel.

and everything—the history and biology and mythology and folklore and you name it of the chicken, including recipes. Page Smith was in love with chickens. It was a Scientific/Dada exercise of a sort.

Vanderscoff: (laughs)

Clifford: And an exercise in writing a different kind of scholarship, an all-inclusive history that didn't fall into the discursive shape of a proper history book or a proper biology book. In fact, it was more like those early modern texts where everything gets thrown in, that Foucault writes about at the beginning of *The Order of Things*, before the modern paradigm sorts things out in a classificatory way.

So, that gives a sense of the intellectual climate. I remember there were chicken pillow covers and chicken figures all over this house. And it was all very blue blood, a very aristocratic-feeling place—tall bookshelves with ladders, and so on. I recall only bits of the evening. All the students, who were dressed the way you might imagine students might be dressed at that time, sitting on the floor. And then there was Bateson, folding himself—this very large man—folding himself into an armchair and sort of disappearing down into it. I remember he was all knees and forehead deep in his chair. (laughter) And then facing him, Norman O. Brown, perched nervously on the edge of a straight-backed chair. This is a cartoon that I'm reproducing for you out of my highly reconstructed memory. I don't remember much of that evening, probably because I understood so little of what anyone was saying. (laughs) It was all in some mysterious code. Bateson sat there and he talked and talked. Bateson was a

rather obscure thinker by that point. He used his own special language. They were regular words but they all had different meanings than what you would expect them to have. I learned that because I had to deal with his students when I arrived. I had to translate what they wrote.

I do recall Bateson talking about how we needed more biology in the history of consciousness—an idea that makes more sense to me now, more than thirty years later. Well, Bateson was folded into his armchair speaking in a way that sounded to me like mumbling. And Brown was on the edge of his chair interrogating him very intensely. He kept firing questions and Bateson would give these long murky answers back. And I've never forgotten the final question from Brown: "Well, I must ask you, I-I-I—" Brown tended to stutter when excited. "I must ask you—was the first word a hieroglyph?" Bateson mumbled something unintelligible in reply. And I was sitting there saying, "Where *am* I?" (laughter)

Vanderscoff: Where have I been transported to? (laughs)

Clifford: Of course, I'm making fun of it in my memory, but there was an intellectual intensity to the evening, and there was a community that had come together. They all took really seriously whether Gregory Bateson should be part of the team. And for several years he was integrated, in a peripheral way. Bateson worked with a group of histcon students who formed a cluster called "Mind and World." As I said, I had to deal with them when I arrived, because their teacher was gone by that point (he spent his last years at the Esalen Center in Big Sur), and I had to help them finish their theses. I was the one who was supposed to know something about anthropology.

Vanderscoff: Right.

Clifford: Even though, by then, what Bateson did was anthropology and epistemology and about ten other things. But the soiree at Page Smith's helped me in the sense that I sort of got a feel for the program. It helped, perhaps, at my later job interview because I knew something about its style. I knew something about how, in histcon then, you had to both be very casual and very intense at the same time. They wanted to see that you were an intense intellectual, but you couldn't flaunt it, you couldn't come on too strong. A sort of laid-back intensity. I heard that a couple of the other candidates for my job destroyed themselves by being too elitist, too formal.

So I knew a little about the program. But I didn't really know what it was.

Vanderscoff: But you had this odd window into that world.

Clifford: Yeah, I had this odd glimpse. And it did make me wonder if it could be too flaky? But then Hayden and I were supposed to be the new order, after all. So we couldn't be flaky, could we? We could just take the freedom and run with it.
(laughs)

Recollections of the History of Consciousness Hiring Process

Vanderscoff: So how did you hear of the opening in history of consciousness in the first place?

Clifford: I don't recall. I was going on the job market and this is my first real job. I was a new Ph.D., with some lectureship-type thing at Harvard. So I wrote an application that made it through. I'm not quite sure how, frankly. I thought

UCSC was cool, so I applied. I remember that the application asked for a curriculum vitae and a short essay. The question was, “What is the history of consciousness to you?” A Rorschach. (laughs)

I wrote something like, “Well, I’m not too comfortable with the ‘consciousness’ part, but if you can change that to the history of culture, then I can contribute something.” So I said some stuff from my emerging meta-anthropology, and it was good enough to get me to the shortlist. There were others on the shortlist who had published books. They were really much more qualified than I was, because I had published one article at that point and had one or two other things in the works.

But I somehow I snuck through. And when some of the stronger people basically blew their interview it came down to me and a candidate who was already here, a lecturer named Brian Murphy, who was associated with the only really faculty-organized element in histcon. This was the political and social thought group, organized by John Schaar and Peter Euben. Brian Murphy was a popular teacher with strong support. It came down to him or me.

Hayden White was the new fearless leader. His hiring, without a search, had been worked out and negotiated at higher levels and there was no question about that.⁶ He represented a new beginning. But then, perhaps inevitably, all the anxieties about the new order, all the emotional investment and questions that

⁶ For Dr. White’s angle on history of consciousness and UC Santa Cruz, as well as his notions on teaching and scholarship, see Cameron Vanderscoff, Interviewer and Editor, *Hayden White: Frontiers of Consciousness at UCSC* (Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 2013). Available in full text at <http://www.escholarship.org/uc/item/20b91099>

people had about, “What’s happening to histcon? Will it lose its soul? What will the new histcon be?”—all that angst got projected onto the one junior appointment that had been negotiated along with the senior slot. Luckily, I didn’t know anything about this at the time. I just wandered naively into my job interview.

But it was all very intense. As I said, there was a lot of interest in this position and a lot of investment in it. Hayden was *ex officio* on the search committee. The actual work of the committee was done by other faculty associated with histcon, such as Loki Pandey and Peter Euben. Hayden didn’t impose his man, or his woman—well, in those days it was likely to be a man. He didn’t impose his candidate. He said, “I want a wide search, but I must have a veto.” I think he basically told people, “Find me someone interesting, but it has to be someone I’m comfortable working with.”

I wasn’t Hayden’s candidate because I had never heard of Hayden White until the job came up. (laughs) Oh, I had, dimly, but I’d never read anything by him. And he didn’t have a clue about who I was. But when I made the shortlist Hayden needed to check me out. So he called me up—I was a recent graduate living in Cambridge—and invited me to lunch down at Wesleyan where he was still working. We met in a restaurant and talked for a couple hours. I guess I spouted enough French theory, or was a good enough chap, or seemed malleable enough. (laughs) Anyway, we got along.

And when it came down to the final meeting, which was very long and went far into the night and involved very bitter arguments, he vetoed Brian Murphy and the job went to me. There was a lot of bad feeling about that afterwards, or so I have since understood. The departmental manager, Billie

Harris, said that the next morning there was graffiti on the door about a betrayal, etc. But I have to say, to everyone's credit, no one held it against me. When I arrived in the spring of 1978, I never had the slightest intimation from the people whose candidate had lost that I—well, they never took it out on me in any obvious way. So that made for a good beginning.

Vanderscoff: But it remains something of a mystery to you exactly what it was that the committee and Hayden saw in you?

Clifford: Well at my retirement party Loki Pandey relived this hiring moment, saying something like: "Actually in the middle of the meeting there were all these fights. And the stakes got higher and higher, until Hayden suddenly said, 'Look, we're only hiring an assistant professor. And if we don't like Clifford we can fire him after a few years.'" (laughter) Hayden denied this. Well, so much for the history of my hiring—as told by me. I'm sure other people would have different versions.

Vanderscoff: I have one last question on this particular topic. When you met with Hayden White, how did he describe what the nature of your position would be?

Clifford: I can probably reconstruct some of it. (pause) I don't remember what he actually said, at that restaurant in Middletown. I was basically just trying to not to screw up. (laughs) Hayden makes an impression, and I'd never been in his presence before. No doubt I was a bit overawed. He has energy and charm and authority, and a bunch of other qualities that I was encountering for the first time. But I imagine it was freedom, I think it was freedom and intellectual openness

that he talked about. Something like: “Look, this is a great opportunity to make something original and experimental.” And he probably said, “We shouldn’t think of this as a coming together of disciplines, as some mixing of different disciplines. We needed to think of it as something beyond disciplines, that’s theoretically rigorous and based around problems.”

At that time Hayden was a semiotician, in a broad sense. He had imbibed the idea of the “text” from Barthes and others in French post-structuralism. It offered a way to move across discourses—discursive formations, he might have said rather than ‘disciplines,’ because by then Hayden had been reading a lot of Foucault and writing some of the first really good interpretations of Foucault in English. The way the new program could really move between different discursive formations was to focus on textuality and semiotic practices. And for that you needed theories of language, notions of signification, so we could be thinking theoretically across disciplines with concepts like the text. But with Hayden there was never any key tool, or essential concept, or royal road. There must always be more than one. And the ones he was most interested in at the time were ideas of textuality, signification, and rhetoric.

I’m sure he talked about that when we discussed how we might develop the program. His vision was that in histcon everyone could be working on different projects. From its inception, it has been a kind of independent study Ph.D. program in the sense that you weren’t filling in blanks that a discipline had laid out for you: “Here’s the next problem.” You know, the way disciplines set up fields where certain work has been done and then now here’s the next work to be done. It wasn’t going to be that way at all. His idea was that students had to pursue original projects, using whatever tools were needed. But there had to be a

lingua franca. There needed to be something that would make it possible for everyone to talk to each other and to make the projects feed from each other. And in Hayden's view, that lingua franca was called "theory."

Maybe we'll talk about that next time when we talk about the first courses we taught. One of the key things I learned from Hayden, right from the start, is that if you're doing theory you're doing theories. There is no sacred or imperial or adequate or materialistically perfect theory. There just isn't. There are theories, which are specific tools that can formulate and analyze and represent different aspects of the real, different kinds of projects. And if you're a theorist you need to know what the limits are of your theory and know that other theories can get at other aspects of the real.

So that was our teaching philosophy. We were always trying to get students to realize what theoretical assumptions they were making as they were making them, even when they just thought they were "telling it like it is." What are the theoretical assumptions? What are the pre-encodings of your thinking? What are the structures that you're bringing to your problem, and how do they both empower and limit you? And then what are other structures that could do other jobs for you?

So you weren't doing theory if you were only doing one theory. I guess it's an idea from Foucault: the toolkit of theory. Foucault and Deleuze. Hayden put that idea into practice as a vision for history of consciousness. I think that was exactly what history of consciousness needed at that time, that kind of an attitude, which left space for everybody's project but tried to set up this domain of traffic across them.

But I'm getting into our next topic. Maybe we can talk next time about what it was like to arrive here.

Vanderscoff: Well, so we'll close off the record for now and we'll return to your arrival in UCSC next time.

Interdisciplinary Discipline:

Shaping a New History of Consciousness

Vanderscoff: Today is Tuesday, August 7th, 2012. This is Cameron Vanderscoff for the Regional History Project, here with James Clifford for his second interview. We stopped off last time talking about how you came to be hired in the history of consciousness department. What was it like arriving here at UCSC? What did you find?

Clifford: I arrived in the late spring of 1978 to take up a position that began July 1st. So my first year of teaching was the fall of '78. And that was true also of Hayden.

I have some indelible memories of arriving here. It was hot. I was, like so many people, knocked out by the campus, which is just an amazing place. I recall being in what's now the student center area. It was then just the Whole Earth Restaurant and a bit of a bookstore. In the quarry nearby, there was a performance of *The Trojan Women* going on. I remember being told, "Come along, come along." And on my way into the quarry I encountered Norman O. Brown. He was wearing sandals and shorts and had on a big, wide-brimmed hat because the sun was beating down. Attached to the hat were six-foot long grapevines,

two of them, sinuously trailing behind like giant vegetable antennae. There was a Dionysian feeling—anything could happen.

Brown had—I don't think I said this before—Brown had kind of interviewed me for the job. I came out a couple of days early to stay with the old friend I've mentioned before, George Stavis. By then he had dropped out of the program but was still living in Santa Cruz. Hayden had said to me when I met him at Wesleyan, "You must look up my friend Norman O. Brown." So I called when I arrived on Saturday and Nobby said, "I like to walk. What are you doing tomorrow afternoon?" So before I knew it we were on this very long walk. Nobby was famous for his walks—walking and talking nonstop. I didn't know what I was in for. He was looking me over, and he relentlessly questioned me while we wandered around in the labyrinth of fire trails above the campus. I had no idea where I was.

Vanderscoff: (laughs)

Clifford: At the end, I felt completely exhilarated and completely wrung out, as though every bit of anything that I had to say had been somehow extracted from me. Others who walked with Brown will know what I'm talking about. He became a kind of teacher-provocateur, even a kind of parasite on many of us younger faculty. He gave us the compliment of taking us seriously, grilling us for what we knew, extracting from us what we knew—always at some level in the service of whatever his own project was at the time. You always had the feeling that Nobby was very interested in you and what you knew, but that also it really was not about you, it was about his current visionary obsession. (laughter) But it

was flattering and exciting, because there was no small talk on these walks, no academic gossip. It was about big ideas. It was about historical happenings.

I wanted to get that said, because Brown was an important part of my early years in history of consciousness. For faculty of all ages, but especially for many of us younger faculty he was an inspiration and gave us a sense of what UCSC could be that was unique. He thought big, and respected no boundaries of field or specialization.

The other thing I remember on my way to see *The Trojan Women* that first summer was running into Jerry Neu, who is still a professor of philosophy at UCSC. Jerry had been the chair of history of consciousness for a brief period, just the year before. He locked horns with the student groups, or something like that, and left unhappy. Well, whatever happened, when introduced to me, he immediately said, "Oh, you're the new histcon sacrificial victim." That made an impression!

Vanderscoff: (laughs)

Clifford: Jerry had been wrestling with what I'll call for convenience the "old histcon," a program that was fundamentally anarchic in both the worst and the best senses of that term. I'll talk a bit about the old histcon in a minute. I suspect Jerry had been trying to introduce some order and failing as so many had failed before. He was an untenured junior faculty person himself at that point, and that will tell you something about the program. If they were throwing junior faculty at the job of being chair of history of consciousness, something was wrong. There wasn't much faculty continuity.

Hayden and I, in any event, were the New Histcon. People talked about it that way and there was a feeling that this was going to be a fresh start. Both of us were interviewed at some length by the student newspaper. It was an event; something new was going on in history of consciousness. At the time, history of consciousness enjoyed a place of centrality. People felt excited about what might be going to happen—but also worried. There was a sense that history of consciousness was in danger of losing its soul. That was always an issue.

Histcon, as we found it, was basically held together by students. There were no permanent appointments in the program. It was a board of study, because all of the departments—what we now call departments—were called boards of study then. Boards of study, in the early campus, were weak by design. The philosophy board, or the literature board, or the politics board were designed not to be full-fledged academic units, but something a bit looser and with less power. So, it was easy enough to make history of consciousness a board of study.

I might add that no self-respecting university anywhere would ever set up a department called the history of consciousness. I mean, that would just be unthinkable. The fact that such a department emerged at UCSC is a Santa Cruz story. It's in some ways a fluke, or a very specific result of the history of disciplines at UCSC. The weak boards of study eventually were promoted to departments. And by then history of consciousness had full-time FTEs, so we just went up on the tide with all the rest. It could not have happened anywhere else. In another university, they might conceivably have something called the history of consciousness—although I rather doubt it—but it would have been called a program, never a department.

History of consciousness when we came was, as I said, really organized around student affinity groups. They had names like the 'praxis group,' 'the feminism group,'"—I recall that there were two feminist groups—a divide between lesbian and straight having formed itself within feminism at that time. There was the 'praxis group'—those were the Marxists. There was a cluster called 'mind and world,' who were basically Batesonians. And what else? Was there a literature group? There may have been. There was the 'political and social thought' cluster, which was the only really organized cluster, because it had two committed faculty, John Schaar and Peter Euben, who were trying to build a permanent track with a curriculum—Thucydides to Hannah Arendt—that could be given every year. But that was the only element of real structure, and the rest was very, very fluid. The student groups came in and out of existence.

On campus many people thought of history of consciousness as a kind of scandal, as something fundamentally irresponsible. But at the same time, they were attracted to it and they were attached to its existence. It was something that was specifically Santa Cruz, and it was an expression of the founding vision of the campus.

Vanderscoff: There was a particular charisma to it.

Clifford: Yeah, it had that right from the start. I'll talk about its name in a minute. As you know, the campus was founded in an attempt to cross-cut and even in some ways defeat disciplinary knowledge and not allow normal departments to form or get any real power. The interdisciplinary colleges were the counterweight. They were supposed to have power equal to the boards of study. The colleges had equal weight in hiring, in firing, in promotions, and all of those

things. It was unwieldy, but it was a genuinely radical experiment that defined Santa Cruz. It couldn't be sustained.

Vanderscoff: Because you came right in the midst of reorganization.

Clifford: That's right. There had been a series of budget crises. Boom and bust is the budget story at UCSC, and I've been through a series of them during in my career. There had been one in the early seventies or mid-seventies, so people were saying, "How can we trim this thing down?" UCSC had a series of chancellors—one was ousted by the faculty. And the faculty was itself factionalized into several powerful groups. Santa Cruz had the reputation of being ungovernable. No chancellor had lasted more than a couple of years after Dean McHenry.⁷

So when we arrived in '78, a new chancellor, Robert Sinsheimer, was coming in.⁸ He was a very distinguished scientist and he lasted. And many, if not

⁷ For Dean McHenry's insights on early UCSC history, see Elizabeth Spedding Calciano, Interviewer and Editor, *Dean McHenry: Founding Chancellor of the University of California, Santa Cruz* (Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 1972, 1974, 1987). For his take specifically on histcon, see volume II pp. 761-768. Available in full text at <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/mchenry>

⁸ Following Dean McHenry's retirement in 1974, Mark Christensen was chancellor for a contentious eighteen-month tenure in '74 thru '76. He was succeeded by Angus Taylor, who held the position from '76 to '77 while a search occurred for a permanent replacement. For further study on this period of UCSC history, see Randall Jarrell, interviewer and co-editor with Irene Reti, *Daniel H. McFadden: the Chancellor Mark Christensen Era at UCSC, 1974-1976*, (Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 2012). Also, see Randall Jarrell, interviewer and editor, *Angus E. Taylor: UCSC Chancellorship, 1976-1977*, (Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 2012).

most of the people at UCSC, wanted him to last, because they knew the anarchy that had been going on for five or six years with chancellors coming and going wasn't good for the campus. We needed stability. But the price of stability was high—the first decisive first step towards making Santa Cruz an ordinary university. The colleges were reduced to essentially residential and social units with no structural educational functions. They lost their power in hiring and firing. That was decisive. That was so-called reorganization. Hayden and I came in just at that moment. So in part we were associated in people's minds with whatever the new order was going to be.

Vanderscoff: A part of the new structure.

Clifford: A part of the new structure. And we were seen by some, I think unjustifiably, as part of some new conservative move that was going to kill off the old Santa Cruz. Or professionalize it, let's say. We were seen as a professionalizing force. I think that was to some degree true, but also a kind of paranoia. We were new guys on the block with a new agenda just at this time of change, coming into a program in crisis in a campus that was itself in crisis. We were part of the new crowd that was going to bring stability and order and so forth. Many felt ambivalent. They wanted it and they were afraid of it.

Vanderscoff: When you accepted the job to come here, were you aware that there was this substantial reorganization going on?

Clifford: I knew nothing. I was completely naïve in this domain. As I said, I knew a bit about history of consciousness. I had been a visitor out here. I had a sense of its style. I was intrigued by it. I certainly never imagined I'd spend my

whole career here. I thought I'd be here for a while and then go somewhere else. People thought, "You're crazy, if you go to this place you will be tainted forever and no history department will ever hire you." But I was a child of the sixties and reckless enough to want the adventure. And I stayed because it was wonderful.

People felt an ambivalence, as I said, about history of consciousness. A lot of people felt, "Well, an interdisciplinary Ph.D. program? This has to be irresponsible, because in a Ph.D. you really have to know something profoundly. And in interdisciplinary work you must always, by definition, be superficial." So you would have people saying that we should only be accepting students who already had a Ph.D., who already had depth in some area. Histcon could only be, what, a second Ph.D.? You couldn't do serious interdisciplinary work until you had a Ph.D.? But all knowledge is interconnected, and you have to do interdisciplinary work if you're really following an idea out. You can't say, well, "Wait until you've grown up." (laughter) That's not going to happen. Knowledge doesn't neatly fit in disciplinary boxes.

People did feel both worried and attracted to history of consciousness. It met a local need. UCSC was primarily an undergraduate university. The program was founded in its early years by folks who thought: "We need some graduate students, if only to TA classes and just give a graduate dimension to things. But it makes no sense to organize a little Ph.D. program in, say, philosophy or history when we don't even have a department of philosophy and history. So we'll have an interdisciplinary Ph.D." That made sense in the humanities and social sciences, which is histcon's domain, essentially. The natural sciences had their own story. They never really undermined the

disciplines there to the extent that humanities and social sciences did in the early years.

So the program filled a gap. But when I came people would say to me, in effect: “History of consciousness is a fundamentally irresponsible, anarchic program. And the students there are all these politically driven, narcissistic, irresponsible intellectuals—except for my TA.” Or, “Except for so-and-so who works with me, who’s fantastic, who’s just brilliant.” After I had heard that from about the fifth person, I thought, “Okay, there’s a structure here.” Ambivalence. The question in the mid-seventies was, “Shall we kill it or shall we beef it up?” The decision was made to beef it up. That was when Hayden was identified as the new chair, and he negotiated a junior position, which turned out to be me.

And I discovered that the students really were remarkable—which was probably why people couldn’t bear to kill the program. It was attracting risk-takers who didn’t belong in the disciplines. Some were diamonds in the rough, others self-directed, genuine intellectuals, others artists and political activists. I’ll never forget an incident outside the department office, when I had just arrived. I ran into a history of consciousness Ph.D. student, Martha Herbert. She’s now a well-known neurologist at Boston General Hospital and at the Harvard Medical School, who’s an expert on autism, and quite influential.⁹ Martha and I chatted for a while in the hallway. Then she said, “Well, now I’m off to the beach to get some reading done.” I thought, “Oh, how Santa Cruz.” She had a big, thick book in her hand. So I asked, “What are you reading?” She showed it to me, and it was

⁹ Dr. Herbert was the first recipient of the Cure Autism Now Innovator Award, and went on to receive her MD from Columbia after her involvement with histcon.

Das Kapital, Volume Three. Yikes! Going to the beach to read *that*? I mean, it wasn't even volume one. Volume three is really hard! And I thought, something special, something different about this place.

It was true. People like Gildas Hamel, who's a lecturer in the history department here now, was a history of consciousness grad student. The program was made for Gildas. He was trying to do something really original and hard that he couldn't do anywhere else. He wanted to do a thesis on what people ate, how they dressed, all about daily life in the Palestine of Jesus Christ, and in a most concrete and specific, ethnographic, materialist kind of fashion. There was no program of history or religious studies that would allow him to do that, but somehow he cobbled together enough faculty here to support him. And he had the drive and the deep scholarship—he acquired the languages—to do this amazing work of scholarship. Gildas is the kind of a completely unique student who was attracted to the program and found the space he needed.

Sharon Traweek was another. She's now a professor of anthropology at UCLA. Sharon was doing an ethnography of particle physicists at SLAC, the Stanford Linear Accelerator, a big atom smasher up at Stanford. Her work had to do with physicists and their relation to technology, to detectors—how they jury-rigged these things. It was about men and machines and masculinism and notions of time, a whole lot of things. Where could you do that? Gregory Bateson had encouraged her. He was gone when Hayden and I arrived, and we just had to help her do this. She had the drive and the interest to carry it through. Ethnographies of scientific institutions are now rather common in science studies. But Sharon was working before such work was recognizable. In history of consciousness, she could do it. So these are just a couple of strong examples.

Another example I might mention is Huey Newton, the Black Panther leader who was already here and doing a Ph.D. when we arrived. And that's one in which—and I will speak for myself, and I think for Hayden too—we felt more ambivalent about the result. Huey Newton was a very smart guy and an organic intellectual who was obviously very politically engaged. But he was doing a lot of things, and only one of them was earning a Ph.D. He ended up producing a thesis which was based on the FBI files he had gotten through the Freedom of Information Act. He wrote a dissertation called *The War Against the Panthers*, which for me at least, didn't add up to a Ph.D. dissertation. It was basically an account, almost a personal account, of how J. Edgar Hoover and company had persecuted him and the Panthers. There was a lot of data in there, but there wasn't a lot of framing and analysis. The analytic dimension and certainly the scholarly contextualizing were missing. His committee approved the thesis and we weren't happy that they had done so. Hayden had been on Newton's qualifying exam committee, where various understandings and undertakings had been made that were not followed through on in the dissertation.

That raised a red flag for us. And it wasn't only Huey Newton that raised this flag. There were faculty who had been involved on people's committees, whose attitude towards the thesis was, "Well, it's good enough for histcon." Basically they thought: "I wouldn't pass this in my own department. It's not really a good history Ph.D., but after all it's histcon. So I'll sign it." There were real questions of standards that needed to be addressed, clarified—let's put it that way—because nobody really knew what the standards were. They were slippery. When we, the new order, arrived, we had to do what we could to make

clear where the lines fell for what was going to be an acceptable interdisciplinary Ph.D. in history of consciousness.

Vanderscoff: So introducing some sort of across-the-board rigor that had heretofore been lacking?

Clifford: Yeah. And of course you can't just impose rigor. Even in a regular discipline there are fuzzy lines about what is acceptable and what is isn't. That's normal. There has to be a consensus, and that has to develop. One thing we did do was to require that on everybody's Ph.D. committee there would be at least one member of the core board of study. They would be there basically to make sure that people were upholding adequate standards. It wasn't that we were trying to be policeman, though I suppose in a sense we were. No, the idea was just to interpret to people what a history thesis could and should look like, and where the edges were. Because people didn't know. We needed to develop a culture, a set of understandings. It took a little while to do that. Before we had enough core faculty in the program, we had faculty that we knew were on our wavelength and we made sure that they got onto committees.

So that was part of the changes we brought. It was because we really felt we needed a Ph.D. that looked like a Ph.D., one that would be serviceable when students went looking for a job in academia. It had to be enough like a regular Ph.D. for them to get a job. But of course it was history of consciousness, so it also had to be innovative. It had to be different, too. This was a difficult line that had to be walked—between being viable in the world of disciplines and also doing cutting-edge, innovative, and even reckless interdisciplinary work. We never sat down and made rules, but there was a developing of a consensus as we

worked together on these committees with existing faculty and with each other to find out what would be good enough, and where the red lines were. Anyone could see brilliant work, but when it was problematic, or work that was good but not great, how could you tell? We began to develop a kind of lingua franca about that.

We also held onto the name, history of consciousness. I remember very acutely, and I think many of the students will tell you too, that the name could be an embarrassment. "Well, what are you doing?" "I'm in a program called history of consciousness." People would roll their eyes, and you had to know how to respond, what kind of an answer to give. So when we arrived, the people who hired us said to Hayden, "Well, of course you'll want to change the name of the program." And he said, "Oh, no. This is what we have. This is notoriety. We need the name." He brazened it out, taking as our logo the sphinx. Hayden had giant posters made with the sphinx on them. For several years, all of the posters for the speakers who came were plastered around campus with this giant sphinx.

Vanderscoff: The riddle.

Clifford: The riddle, the enigma. Is it east? Is it west? Is it male? Is it female? Is it animal? Is it human? I mean, actually it's a great logo. We didn't have all of those parameters of hybridity at that time. It was mostly enigma, I think, when we began.

They also said to Hayden, "Well, of course, you'll want joint appointments for you and this new hire, the junior hire." And he answered, "Absolutely not. Joint appointments are double jeopardy. We will be professors of the history of consciousness." So we were the first ever, Hayden and I,

professors of the history of consciousness. (laughs) It's sort of outrageous just to say it. But on the other hand, you never forget it when you hear it, and that's the point of branding, isn't it? Maybe Hayden today would recognize that this was the beginning of a sort of neoliberal regime of branding, that we understood the brand made the commodity. (laughs) But in any event, that's how it worked. And it's still working. It's one of the reasons the department is still in existence, even though it's at rather low ebb right now, given funding constraints. That name—

Vanderscoff: Has this cachet.

Clifford: It has cachet, and the brand is still too valuable to get rid of. But be that as it may, it has always been a bit scandalous, a good filter against applicants for admission who had narrow professional ambitions. And our new order was thought, by many, to be a trend towards the professionalization of history of consciousness. As I've said, there was always fear that the department could be losing its essence.

Vanderscoff: It would be snuffed out, somehow?

Clifford: It would become just another academic department. And it would lose that special anarchic openness. There was something to that, because we understood we wanted a program where the students who actually finished could get a job in the academy. There were, and are, no other departments of history of consciousness. You had to be recognizable to a literature department or a film department, or an ethnic studies department—some department or departments. We worked to make our Ph.D. thesis scholarly enough, citing

literatures that were known and respected. Things like that, while not losing the radical, experimental element. That's not an easy dance to do, but I think that overall—and it's not just Hayden and me, it's all the appointments that were made after us—we found different ways of managing the performance.

By the eighties and nineties we had the best employment statistics of anyone—certainly in the humanities and social sciences—at UCSC. And even coming out of a department with this name, history of consciousness, our people found good jobs in disciplinary programs. I'm satisfied with that outcome. A good part of the reason the department has had such a wide influence is that our students went into many different programs where they carried the message.

Of course, we were never a conservative, professionalized department. I think it was in the second year I was here, that we offered a graduate seminar taught by Norman O. Brown on *Finnegan's Wake*, where the final project for all the students in the course was to perform a wake. They did it all night long in the theater arts complex: it was songs, it was drinking, it was dance, it was film, it was improvisation. There was a mock funeral where Brown himself was carried on stage in a coffin. It went on and on. The event expressed Nobby's idea that *Finnegan's Wake* was really an oral text. It was a text that was not really meant to be read. Or at least it had to be read aloud, and once you start reading it aloud how can you not sing it? And since it's got all this dance hall popular culture stuff running through it, all that had to be performed, not read. So students didn't write papers. Their final projects were performances at this all-night event.

Nobby dragooned other people in to do things. Because he knew I could play the guitar and sing, I had to work up a song that James Joyce had written, a pacifist song he'd composed during World War I while he was living in

Switzerland sitting out the war. The song was about an ordinary Irish guy named Mr. Dooley who saw right through the wartime jingoism, the militarism and the hypocrisy of leaders who were casually slaughtering Europe's young men.

There were lines like, "Who's the man when all the gallant nations run to war/goes home to have his dinner by the very first cable car?/And as he eats his cantaloupe and contorts himself in mirth/to read the blatant bulletins of the rulers of the earth." Chorus: "It's Mr. Dooley, Mr. Dooley, the coolest chap our country ever knew/they are out to collar/the dime and the dollar/says Mr. Dooley-ooley-ooley-oo." Then religion comes in for its knocks: "Who's the funny fellow who declines to go to church/since Pope and priest and parson left the poor man in the lurch/And taught their flocks the only way to save all human souls/was piercing human bodies through with dum-dum bullet holes. It's Mr. Dooley—" I had to make a tune for it. [starting to sing] "—Mr. Dooley, the mildest man our country ever knew/who will release us/from jingo Jesus?/prays Mr. Dooley-ooley-ooley-oo." (laughter) Jingo Jesus! It went like that. And everyone was singing, "Mr. Dooley-ooley-ooley-oo."

Vanderscoff: So Joyce didn't write a melody for it, it was just lyrics?

Clifford: No, I had to come up with a melody.

Vanderscoff: So you co-wrote it with him? (laughs)

Clifford: That was fun and certainly in the spirit of histcon. But I have to add: we never gave a Ph.D. to anyone for doing a performance or writing a novel. As I said, we had many practical discussions about what constitutes a thesis, what are

the limits of inventive scholarship. Why not give a Ph.D. to a novel since it can contain so much social analysis? There were students who wanted to do that. But there's a certain law of genre, of recognizability—which is really just convention—that we needed to respect, up to a point. Well, what was that point?

I ended up developing a list of criteria, to clarify for students my own template for what makes something scholarly. I like the word 'scholarly'—an old word—better than 'academic.' I thought that Ph.D. theses didn't have to be dry. They did not have to be impersonal in their style. They didn't even have to be linear in their form. They could be collaged together in different ways. They could be poetic and they could be personal—yes. Nowadays we might say positioned rather than personal, communicating a sense of where the account is coming from, both subjectively but also historically. Okay. Personal, but not in a "Take it or leave it" manner. You couldn't be absolutist on experiential, aesthetic grounds, or on political grounds, or on mystic-religious grounds, or even on empirical grounds. "These are the facts." Because we assumed that the facts, empirical reality, was always constructed and selective. Our job as intellectuals and theorists was to understand how the facts were constructed, and show what the methods and theories were that were underlying our own constructions as we did them.

I assumed that the shape of the thesis could be very open. There was no template for what an academic thesis had to look like. But there were certain elements that I thought needed to be present if it was to be scholarship and not a poetic essay or a novel or something like that. Here's the list I came up with, for the record:

First: responsibility to literatures. That's just the idea that you're not alone in this. You're working in traffic. Other people are having these or similar ideas. Other people have addressed these problems and are addressing them, and you have a responsibility to acknowledging that. It doesn't mean you have to do a complete review of the literature. With interdisciplinary work, that task would be Sisyphean. But the thesis needs to make clear that you're working in traffic, and it's not just you having some sort of unique insight or discovery. So that's one thing: responsibility to literatures.

The second: even if the work takes a nonlinear form there should be an extractable argument or arguments that one could disagree with, about which there could be a discussion. You could disagree with it. Rather than, "This is what I feel. Or, you had to have been there." No. There has to be an argument somewhere. There may be other things in there too, evocative things, but there needed to be arguments.

Third, among your many readers—which might involve your community, or political allies, or it might include your mother, or your superego—among the readers needs to be a skeptic. There needs to be a reader who wants to be shown evidence, who's going to ask you to actually be convincing.

And the fourth element—connected to the others—is a certain modesty: a modesty which assumes that if it's scholarship then you're writing in a tradition among other literatures. You can't claim that "I have discovered the new, the ultimate, the revolutionary truth," either a religious or political claim like that. Rather, a sense of "Well, this is what I know now. This is what I've put together now based on the best evidence, based on the best ethical positions, whatever it may be. But this is what I've got so far. I could be wrong." That kind of modesty,

I think, distinguishes scholarship from other forms of writing, which can be very beautiful and powerful.

So those are my four things: literatures, arguments, the skeptical reader, and modesty. Teaching in history of consciousness, where the borders were always challenged, I needed these very general guidelines. My students would patiently listen to me give my little speech about scholarship and then they'd go ahead and write their thesis. But they knew, at least, that these were what I'd be looking for, and in practice there was always room for flex.

It was sort of a rolling thing, this idea of "What is a histcon thesis and what is a Ph.D. thesis?" If you look historically at what dissertations have been, even in the disciplines, you'll see they have their own history and they change. There isn't a single form that you have always had to fill out. The form itself is in process, under pressure. And we were in the middle of that—a complex set of negotiations about what academic knowledge is, what its forms should be, what its rhetorics should be, how the genre of the dissertation could be inventively performed in a way that people would accept. In retrospect, that was one of the really interesting tasks, both analytic and pedagogical, that we grappled with. And it was a co-constructed task. We were working it out as we went along with specific students and specific projects. That was the nature of the program.

This might be as good a place as any to say that none of what was co-constructed in history of consciousness could have happened without the work of Billie Harris and later Sheila Peuse. When I arrived at UCSC, their job was called board assistant, and it became department manager. Billie was there to greet me. She taught me to hug properly! (laughs) As the program grew, Sheila was hired as Billie's assistant and took over when she retired. Those two really

held the program together. They were the glue—not just practical and administrative, but also social and, well, moral. Billie and Sheila dealt with so many student needs—problems that were practical and personal. That required a lot of institutional knowledge. Also wisdom and discretion. All sorts of things that we, the faculty, couldn't touch, that made the program work and feel like home.

They tried not to intervene directly in academic affairs. But they gave us faculty good advice, when we needed it. I'll never forget one day Billie asking me, casually, "How's your seminar going?" I said something like: "Oh, fine. Everyone seems to like it." And Billie said: "Well, ____ was in here yesterday, in tears..."

Billie and Sheila were the department's public face—or voice, I should say. They have such seductive accents! Billie's theatrical English, Sheila's gentle Scottish brogue. And a program with a name like ours could get some pretty wild inquiries, which they fielded, tactfully separating the good prospects from all the rest. They protected us.

The role of veteran staff in our successful programs needs a lot more recognition—Billie and Sheila, Pam Lawson in literature, Tanya Honig in linguistics, to mention a few. Their perspectives on the programs (and the faculty!) they managed over the years would be fascinating oral history, I'm sure.

In retrospect, Billie and Sheila made history of consciousness a great place to work, which is why I never really considered moving elsewhere—that and the fact that I married Judith Aissen, a professor of linguistics, who was rooted in another well-managed, intellectually exciting department.

Theory as Structure in the New History of Consciousness

Vanderscoff: How did you go about determining the curriculum, the subject material, the reading lists for the first class that you taught with Hayden and the initial classes in the years that followed? How did you go about determining those?

Clifford: Well, that's interesting. How did we go about determining it? Well, basically Hayden determined it. That first class anyway. We co-taught it. I'm sure we had some consultations and he probably put in some readings that I suggested, but basically it was his vision. The first course was called *Theory and Methods in the History of Consciousness*, and it was three quarters. In the fall of 1979, we accepted a big class, maybe fifteen or sixteen, and this was the class that initiated the new order. It was exciting. There was a lot of expectation and a lot of overdetermined emotion flowing in this *Theory and Methods* course.

It was a review of major interpretive methods in what we called at that time the human sciences. So there was a long section on Marxism. There was a long section on hermeneutic philosophy. There was a long section on semiotics and structuralism. There was a long section on psychoanalysis, there was—I forget what else. There was something on political theory, some of its forms. Why these things? Well, these were what we thought were the important tools. So we were imposing a curriculum on the program. Anyway, the course was perceived that way.

That actually was a misunderstanding of the intention, although it's a very understandable misunderstanding, given the moment and the high stakes about the future of the program. As I've already said, Hayden believed doing

theory meant doing theories. If you embraced only one theory, one that was the organizing principle for all the others, or that was really going to get you through to the essence of things, then you weren't doing theory. You were doing ideology. You were doing religion. Because the idea was that theory was a bag of particular tools. Part of being a critical intellectual was understanding what psychoanalysis could get at, and what Marxism could get at, when to look for formal structures, when to historicize. We were multi-theorists teaching multi-theory.

Of course, the selection of our theories was debatable. There was a lot of discussion and contestation of "Why this tradition and not that tradition?" But we weren't proposing some unvarying set of requirements for history. Theory was a lingua franca. The program could still be what it had been before: a place where individuals entered with projects, or problematics, we might say, that they wanted to explore. We understood that these would all be different, that there would be an unpredictable diversity of topics, and that no group of faculty could possibly master all of them. Often, as advisors, we would have to deal with students working on topics about which we had only a kind of intuitive grasp.

So, how do you make a program with all these dispersed interests? You needed something that everybody shares that gives a commonality of discourse. We were thinking of theory more in that sociological sense, not as some method, the key to all methodologies or something like that. And of course, theory had to be useful. But any practical or political problem that you undertake, you're going to be involved in issues of representation and interpretation. And if you take interpretation seriously as a problem, then hermeneutic philosophy is going to be

crucial. If representation is an issue, then semiotics and structuralism and linguistically based approaches are inescapable.

People sometimes felt that we were an invasive new order. I remember Peter Euben, a colleague who I saw a lot of in my early years, using the phrase “literary-critical imperialism.” That seemed to fit Hayden’s agenda, at the time. But not really. Hayden was (and is) what I call an anarcho-formalist. If he had come in and tried to actually impose a method, he would have suffered the same fate as all the others who have tried to bring intellectual order to history of consciousness. The anarchic principles of the program would have defeated him, and he would have gone out slamming the door and would have gotten a job somewhere else.

Hayden’s view, which I shared, was that there are a lot of ways to do things, and that there are a lot of problems and topics and a lot of approaches. All we asked was that people be conscious of their approach and of their methodology, that they not try to fool themselves and others that they were just telling it like is. So Hayden’s view, his anarcho-formalism, was, “Let a hundred projects bloom, many of which I may think are misguided, but just do them well.” In other words, be rigorous. That’s the formal part. Formalism was a mark of rigor. And that meant being aware of your tools, being aware of your rhetoric, being aware of issues of representation that are always part of the effort to tell it like it is.

So it turned out, I think, that Hayden, me, Donna Haraway, and the others who joined the faculty had a very broad notion of what sorts of topics and issues could be raised in the program. We encouraged that eclecticism, but we also pushed a certain kind of theoretical awareness, which came to be a signature of

the program. But history of consciousness was never an exclusively theoretical program. Very few students actually did theoretical theses, the sort of thing that Hayden writes himself. Very few people did that. But they embedded theory in their problems in a more or less self-conscious way. That was what we were after, and I think were pretty successful in the resulting theses.

But I should stop and admit that there's a certain complacency in my account. What I'm saying now is the product of someone looking back on a project they've been part of, that was thought by many to be pretty successful. I'm perhaps deluding myself a bit about our success and retrospectively creating a coherent attitude to what we were doing. At the time, we were feeling our way. It was very improvisational and we didn't know what we were doing or where we were going. These stories that I'm telling you now are stories that I have developed over the years to help me sleep better at night, about my own life and what I have done. Everybody in their life constructs stories that turn out, eventually, to become facts—what really happened in their life.

If you ask other people, you get different stories. My friend and colleague Barbara Epstein would certainly dispute what I've just said about the anarcho-formalistic openness of the program. She has done so on and off over the years quite stringently. She thinks a hegemonic post-structuralism dominated the program and made it very, very difficult for students and some faculty to do different things or think in other ways. So for her there was a dominant approach. I don't agree with Barbara, but I have to respect the fact that she sees it that way. She has been with history of consciousness a long time and she's an observant person. So there must be something to it. But in that case you'll have to ask her for her stories about how the program took shape.

Feminism, Opportunism and the Program's Expanding Scope

Vanderscoff: I'd like to talk a little bit about some of the different narratives there are about history of consciousness and how those came to be. What led to the hiring of subsequent faculty beyond you and Hayden? What were you looking for in the positions that Donna Haraway and Teresa de Laetis came to fill, and what did you get? What perspectives did they bring to the program?

Clifford: After Hayden and I arrived under the banner of theory, the Next Big Thing to hit was feminism. And why did feminism arrive as it did in history of consciousness? Well, for very pragmatic reasons. As I said, the university was in a period of crisis and transition in '78, when we arrived. Another person who arrived just at that same moment was a new dean of the humanities, Helene Moglen, who had come from SUNY Purchase. She was a very well-respected literary scholar and feminist.¹⁰ She came determined to build women's studies and feminism at UCSC. Helene didn't mince words. For example, she looked at some of the colleges with their more or less romanticized versions of the good old days and she called them boys' clubs. (laughs) There's a strong sense of attachment to Cowell College by many people, and a certain mythology of the founding vision—"the pursuit of truth in the company of friends." But if you look at the pictures of the first faculty, you'll see they're almost all men. Helene was not afraid to point this out, which got her into some trouble and actually led

¹⁰ An oral history with Helene Moglen is forthcoming from the Regional History Project in summer of 2013—Editor.

to the defeat of some of her projects because she underestimated the power of the college networks. But that's another story.

Helene brought feminism and academic rigor. That was her message, and history of consciousness was a potential instrument. Hayden was the tactician, trying to figure out what to do. Looking for allies. Of course, as I think he'll say himself, it was improv. There was no master plan. The only organized part of program was the political and social thought group, Schaar and Euben, and their appointments were in the politics board.

Vanderscoff: So they had one foot elsewhere.

Clifford: Their FTE were entirely in politics. Hayden early on tried to get a formal half-time appointment for Schaar and Euben in history of consciousness, but the politics program and the provost nixed it.

Hayden White and Jim Clifford were full professor and assistant professor in the history of consciousness, and if we were going to grow we needed more full-time colleagues. We needed tenured bodies in the program and Hayden found them wherever he could.

I think he sat down with the new dean and Helene basically told him, "You want senior appointments? Make them feminists and I'll give them to you." Hayden said, "Well, okay. We can do important, interesting work a lot of ways. Why not feminism?" So always opportunistic, he got with the program and we hired the first two senior professors in feminist theory anywhere in the universe. Feminist theory, not women's history. Women were being brought into the academy that way: women's history, women writers, gender and society in sociology or anthropology. But these were add-ons to the disciplines. "Okay, let's

add women to history. Let's add gender to sociology." That kind of thing. Whereas feminist theory claimed a certain kind of autonomous space, with the idea that feminist theory would be relevant to every field. There could be no field, certainly in the human sciences but maybe in the natural sciences too, where gender was not an issue.

This was a radical idea, and in some ways scary. There were people at UCSC who didn't want history of consciousness to go that way. A major rift between Hayden and John Schar—they were friends—was over that issue. But Hayden was pragmatic, and I think he also understood that feminism in our part of the university was an emerging force, that some really brilliant work was being done and we could be the place for it.

So our first hiring was Donna Haraway, which was a great decision, it turned out.¹¹ Donna was relatively unknown at the time. But she beat out some much better-known feminist scholars. She was just so brilliant that she blew everyone (or almost everyone) away.

And then a couple years later there was Teresa de Lauretis.¹² Her own work has evolved since then, but at that time she was a very prominent feminist theorist coming out of literary studies. She had just written a book called *Alice Doesn't*, which is a really important work in—one might call it semiotic feminism for short. Teresa was the second hire, and so suddenly we had two senior people in feminist theory. That was a real cluster, so graduate students who wanted to

¹¹ Dr. Haraway was hired in 1980.

¹² Dr. de Lauretis was hired in 1985.

do feminist work in a theoretical climate came to us. We attracted some wonderful, pioneering students.

Those were the first two hires. Donna and Teresa both have turned out to be extremely prominent and influential thinkers and writers in their fields. Very different styles personally and intellectually, but both very powerful intellects and excellent advisors of grad students. Both of them are very skilled, inspiring and hands-on dissertation advisors.

That was good, because we all had to stretch since we had students doing projects in things we didn't know much about. We had to be quick studies, and we had to be able to grasp the form underneath the content and be good at seeing the shape a thesis was trying to take, even if we didn't understand the substance. Actually, in some ways it was an advantage not to know the content too well, because you could see the form better. But of course, we also needed to have people on our thesis committees who did know the content, who were strong scholars in the field of study. So we involved scholars from other departments and also from off campus. We've always sustained an openness to committee members from other campuses at UC and also from beyond. We've flown people in from Texas, from the east coast. But you needed a core faculty in the program, folks who were always there, who were committed to the program, who were not sharing their time with some other department and being pulled in other directions. We needed a core of faculty who were really committed to history of consciousness to make the thing work.

Vanderscoff: So Hayden early on abandoned the notion of trying to even get joint appointments like he did with [John Schaar and Peter Euben]?

Clifford: He gave up after that because it was not in the cards. We had no joint appointments in the entire humanities and social sciences, I don't think, until very recently. Other UC campuses do them all the time, but we don't.

Vanderscoff: What are the particular anxieties around that here, institutionally, beyond history of consciousness?

Clifford: You know, I don't really know because I don't understand it myself. I think it may have to do with the fact that we are small and all our departments are small. They're too small. Comparative studies were recently been done—controlled for overall size of campus, student population and so forth—showing that the UCSC departments were all at least thirty percent smaller than their equivalent departments in other UC campuses. And this was before the current disastrous shrinking of humanities departments—I would be inclined to say the withering of humanities departments. We're in the deepest of the bust cycles I've lived through at UCSC. And the damage done will not, I think, ever be repaired.

Vanderscoff: Yeah, I think we'll come to cover that in one of our later interviews.

Clifford: Even before the current crisis everybody felt too small, and overworked. No program wanted to give up, or share, positions. There is a certain disciplinary logic that wants to have our people inside our tent on our own terms. History of consciousness, as it developed its own core faculty, eventually reaching a total of nine FTE, actually began to think more and more like a department in that territorial sense. Eventually there developed resistance within history of consciousness to joint appointments, at least from some of the faculty. Some of us

were open to it and others were against it, seeing history of consciousness as an avant-garde elite place.

History of consciousness grew as a board and then a department to nine FTE. That's pretty big for an interdisciplinary, all-Ph.D. program. For a couple of decades we maintained a steady state of fifty-five or sixty Ph.D. students in residence all the time. I guess, in the humanities division, the literature department was a bit larger, but otherwise we were a big fish—in a small pond.

As I said, the hiring was opportunistic. The whole move towards feminism turned out to be a very fruitful and actually important move that put us in a leadership position with respect to something emerging in the intellectual world at the time. And there were other opportunistic hires: Gary Lease, who had been in religious studies, trained in German philosophy and religion. His department had been disestablished and he was a man without a home. Hayden scooped him up. He said, "Oh, okay, come on in."

Vanderscoff: This was early eighties, or slightly before?

Clifford: Early, mid-eighties.¹³ A bit later, Barbara Epstein joined: a social historian disaffected in the history department. We arranged her transfer to histcon.¹⁴ Lease and Epstein are both, by the way, people who in no way fit the mold of a dominant post-structuralism, which at least suggests that we weren't being exclusivist in our hiring, even if there were dominant, and constantly shifting, intellectual winds.

¹³ Dr. Lease's transfer took place in 1980.

¹⁴ Dr. Epstein formally moved her appointment in 1987.

Then came other people. Two passed through: Stephen Heath, a very prominent British poststructuralist film theorist/psychoanalytic theorist, was a complement to Teresa de Lauretis for a while.¹⁵ And then when he returned to Cambridge, Victor Burgin, filled that slot. He's a British visual artist and a conceptual artist—also a cultural theorist of a psychoanalytic bent. Victor was with us for a half-dozen years. He had been unhappy in art history and we arranged a transfer.¹⁶ So we were sort of poaching, if you like, on other departments. Or finding a place for people who needed a home, people who could do the kind of advanced graduate teaching we needed.

Angela Davis was hired soon after. That was really about the arrival of diversity politics in the department: race, ethnicity and gender, class, and sexuality.¹⁷ She brought a unique mix. Angela is, of course, a Marxist and a feminist—she ran for vice president on the Communist ticket a number of times. Her work on race and feminism was fundamental, very early and profound. She was brought to history of consciousness in part as a response to the structural racism of the program. There were lots of students of color in the program. We made a big effort to recruit students of color and we were, for many years, the most diverse—by the institution's criteria of diversity—the most diverse graduate program in the entire UC system. We got awards for it. We were proud of that. Okay, we had lots of students of color; we had lots of anti-racist content

¹⁵ Dr. Heath was affiliated from 1991-1994.

¹⁶ Dr. Burgin transferred in 1995, and left in 2001.

¹⁷ Dr. Davis entered the program in 1991.

in our teaching and in our writing. But looking around one day we saw—or were made to see—that everyone in the room was white.

Vanderscoff: As far as the faculty went.

Clifford: The faculty. That was seriously embarrassing. Something needed to be done. Angela was the beginning of a response, and so was hiring Neferti Tadiar and David Marriott a bit later on.¹⁸ But what I would underline about all these people is what I was suggesting about Angela's Marxist dimension. Hiring them was always about more than race. Neferti is also a Marxist and an internationalist and a postcolonial theorist of a deep sort. She is a Filipina and brought to the program a whole perspective on the world from there. David is a black British cultural theorist, which gives him quite a different angle on race than black American theorists have. He's also a poet and a philosopher of a very talented sort.

So all the faculty who came into history of consciousness—and this was one of our criteria, to the extent that we had criteria—had to be able to do more than one thing. They had to be broad and they had to be adaptable and versatile. That was also true of the students. When we admitted students, we never encouraged them to specialize, to work with just one mentor. We didn't want discipleship. And the kind of students, on the whole, that we admitted wouldn't accept discipleship anyway. They were always zooming off and taking classes with other people, both in the department and in other programs. We encouraged that.

¹⁸ Dr. Tadiar was hired in 1997; in 2003 Dr. Marriott filled the FTE left vacant by Victor Burgin.

Thoughts on the Role of Students in History of Consciousness

Vanderscoff: So I would imagine that bringing in these new faculty hugely increased the scope of the students who you could admit to the program, and that constituency probably went through some changes.

Clifford: Yes, for a while there we were admitting big classes. What constrained the size of our classes was funding, student support. That's always been an enormous problem. UCSC is a poor campus in the UC system, and the humanities is a poor division of the poor campus. So the amount of money for grad students is always very constrained. We were competing with places like Stanford or MIT or Harvard, and often we would lose out because our best fellowship would be one year of support for the first year, and then a quarter or two later with a lot of TAs thrown in. The other places could offer six full years of support with summer salary. And yet, such was our cachet, that every year there were students who gave up those big fellowships to come to us to slave in the TA salt mines.

Vanderscoff: (laughs)

Clifford: But I'm always accused of being an optimist or seeing the glass as half full. The half full part was that by doing all those TAships our students became virtuoso teachers. By graduation, they would often have TA'd in six or seven departments. They became quick studies, so that when they went on the job market and people wanted versatility, they could do it. They had documented experience. They weren't, "I teach nineteenth century American history; that's what I do." It was more like, "Oh, can you teach postwar Latin American film?"

Well, hum a few bars.” “Yeah sure, I can work it up.” They had a track record of that kind of versatility. It’s more and more necessary as the old disciplines with their neat areas of specialization—*je suis dix-huitièmiste*—are passé now. Everyone has to be more versatile and more interdisciplinary—both within and between the departments.

Vanderscoff: How do you think that versatility in terms of the range of students and faculty influenced history of consciousness’s stature at UCSC and in the broader academic community as the eighties rolled on and beyond?

Clifford: Well, we did develop a certain kind of notoriety or fame. The fact that we were a full-on interdisciplinary Ph.D. program was part of that. And we had a record of producing students who were doing really innovative work that was also marketable. They got jobs. I hasten to add there were always students in the program who were not interested in academic positions and who really wanted to be doing political work or performance or something like that. It had always been that way from the beginning. But less and less so.

As we became more and more successful academically, I think we tended to attract more students who wanted ultimately to become professors. But they wanted to become professors with a difference. That’s what we were good at encouraging: professors with a difference. Now you might say that there I’ve just confessed to what we were initially accused of, which is that we were a professionalizing force. And what I’ve just described is a kind of professionalization. We were less and less a refuge for people who would get a Ph.D. but without any desire for a job in the academy, who were rough-hewn intellectuals or self-defining intellectuals. That part of history of consciousness

we suppressed, I suppose—though never entirely! We turned it more into a recognizable academic program. A lot of students who entered the program feeling that they just wanted intellectual freedom and didn't care about being legible to disciplines would, six years later begin to think: "I'd kind of like to be paid for doing this." And if they haven't had some good advice about packaging themselves, or making themselves recognizable in the wider university, they'll be unemployable.

For better or worse, most of us have felt that it was irresponsible to accept students if we couldn't at least offer the advising that would make them into employable academics. They might resist, but we felt that it was necessary to impose a bit of—let's be kind about it—guidance. (laughs) And for better or worse, that's what we did.

For a while, 85, 90 percent of our graduates were getting tenure-track jobs or postdocs—and no other program was even close to that. It's partly that the students were so versatile. The good news was they could apply to several disciplines. And the "studies" programs were proliferating: gender studies, ethnic studies, film studies, communication, visual studies, etc. I don't know about the current moment of restructuring. But I know we're not going back to the old disciplines, the old English departments. That's a thing of the past. They're not sustainable economically. We are moving to something probably more mobile, more flexible, I suppose, and no doubt with fewer "good," stable jobs. But what the university is going to look like I'm not sure.

In any event, we were always operating in a changing academic world. We were both a part of it, an avant-garde element, and a critic, but part of it. I suppose that defines the new history of consciousness that Hayden and I were

charged with—and accused of—beginning, But I do hope that the spirit of the old histcon, *Finnegan's Wake* and all that stuff, is not gone from the program.

Even as we faculty get older and inevitably more conservative—or I don't know, set in our ways—the students we've gotten have always pushed us into new areas. One thing I would like to be sure I say, when thinking about assessing the success and reputation of the program, at least from my perspective, is that there have always been cohorts of students that have profoundly influenced me in my thinking. I think that's true of all of my colleagues. It's the value of teaching interdisciplinary Ph.D. students whose work is outside your specialty, where you don't enjoy automatic authority and you have to bend. You have to learn and you have to adapt and figure out how to help them.

Two cohorts of students come to mind right away that were really important to me. One was a South Asian cluster, back in the eighties, from India. That was before the University of California got rid of its financial support for foreign students, so we could accept a critical mass of non-citizens. The withdrawal of support for foreign students has been a tragedy for our part of the university. But before that there was a group of South Asian students who were incredibly influential on my thinking. We were developing what would later come to be called postcolonial theory. We called it colonial discourse theory at that moment. And we were a leader in that area. I was tagging along, really, as the faculty sponsor, trying to make it happen. But it was really driven by these students, some of whom have since gone back to India and made distinguished careers there. Others are working in the U.S.

The other group came a bit later, a network of island Pacific scholars and indigenous scholars who sort of surrounded me and recruited me to their project.

So it seems in retrospect. It wasn't exactly that I was teaching them. It was that we were working out what an island Pacific cultural studies, or a non-exclusivist indigenous cultural studies might look like. These intellectuals were in our program because they didn't want to be pigeonholed in an ethnic studies program. Say you're a Native Hawaiian, but you don't want a Ph.D. in a Hawaiian studies program. You want to do stuff on colonial history of Hawaii. You want work as a Hawaiian scholar but not in a program that defines you. So you come to a program like history of consciousness, where you can do more comparative and theoretical work and not be asked to give up your political agenda or your ethnically or culturally defined perspectives. That stimulus and freedom is what they found here, I think.

A number of these scholars have gone on to become leaders in the emerging field of indigenous studies, which didn't exist until quite recently. Some of them are now officers of the field's new academic organizations. I'm really proud of that, not because I was a leader, but because I was a facilitator. I made myself available and was interpolated by these students into the larger project. That was remarkable. And there are many reasons why these students came to us. I wasn't the only one they worked with, although maybe I was the most central. They worked with Angela, they worked with Donna, they worked with Barbara, with a wide number of people. And that was the kind of thing I could never have planned. These students saw an opportunity to do something in history of consciousness they couldn't do somewhere else. We helped them, and we were altered by the process ourselves. That's the best part.

Of course, I'm forgetting all of the hard parts. There were lots of struggles and not everyone was successful. We did in fact have to push some students out

who just weren't going to make it. But rarely. And we made a lot of effort to help people of different backgrounds. We had a big commitment towards diversity, and so when affirmative action was banned—

Vanderscoff: SP [Special Policy] One and Two.

Clifford: Yes, when that was eliminated we kept on our website as long as we could a statement which said, "Affirmative action is now banned technically, but we're still doing it." We pretty much said that, in so many words. We asked the campus lawyers whether we could get away with it on our website. And they said, "Well, maybe." So we did it, at least for a while.

That commitment changed our pedagogy in many ways, and it produced some really wonderful scholarship and people who have been leaders in their fields. One of the best known, Chela Sandoval, goes right back to the beginning. She was here when Hayden and I arrived and she is now a major figure. She is a Chicana, and she theorized a sort of praxis of the oppressed and what she called 'differential consciousness.' Her thesis would become a widely cited, influential book, a source for thinking about non-essentialist forms of ethnic and diversity politics.¹⁹ And it all started with Hayden White's classes. Chela was on the scene before we arrived, and it took her a long time to finish. Hayden was an enormously supportive thesis director. We've often had to be patient: people work in different ways, and some of our best work has been done by students who took a very long time.

¹⁹ *Methodology of the Oppressed: Theory out of Bounds* (University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

We did resist, I like to think, the regular outbreaks of productionist thinking: “Everybody has to be done in five or six years.” We never took that attitude. We thought that some projects take a long time to mature, and if students can survive materially—which is always a big ‘if’—what’s the hurry? Things have to happen in their own time. In that sense, we were an old-fashioned program. We have been anyway. I don’t know whether history of consciousness can continue to be that way, because there’s a lot of pressure these days to be efficient, to get measurable results and so forth. Fortunately, our results were measurable, and they were good. In fact, excellent. Competitive admissions, good jobs. We were lucky that way. But the pressures now, as the university becomes more “corporate,” are more non-negotiable. We can talk about that later.

Vanderscoff: Yes, we’ll definitely talk about that in a future interview, the state of history of consciousness at this point.

Clifford: That’s ninety minutes.

Vanderscoff: Is this a good break-off point?

Clifford: Could be. I hope I’ve mentioned everybody I wanted to mention and talked about most of what I needed to say. I hope it’s coherent.

Vanderscoff: I think so.

Clifford: I slid around a little bit.

Vanderscoff: That's fine. Next time we can move to the Center for Cultural Studies.

The Center for Cultural Studies and the Greater Humanities

Vanderscoff: Today is Monday, August 13th, 2012. This is Cameron Vanderscoff for the Regional History Project and I'm here with James Clifford for his third interview. Today I'd like to start out by talking about a very particular aspect of UCSC: the Center for Cultural Studies. What led its genesis, and why were you tapped to be involved?

Clifford: The center was founded in 1988, and it was the result of a systemwide initiative from the president of the University of California to encourage and subsidize humanities research. That was actually, I think, an unprecedented occurrence. Someone got to him and pointed out that the University of California—which was in one of its flush periods, financially—that the University of California had given and was giving to the sciences and the social sciences all sorts of research support, and that they had never given anything to the humanities. The statistics were put in front of the president and they got his attention. He appointed a commission, and eventually the outcome was the Humanities Research Initiative, which is still in operation. It founded the UCHRI, the Humanities Research Institute in Irvine, which is the systemwide humanities center.²⁰ It also funded the Presidential Fellowships for individual faculty, and it

²⁰ For more detail on the decision to house the institute at UCI, see Irene Reti, Interviewer and Editor, *"It Became My Case Study": Professor Michael Cowan's Four Decades at UC Santa Cruz*

gave to each campus funding with the proviso that it do something appropriate for that campus to encourage research in the humanities.

Parenthetically, it's interesting to notice how difficult it has been and still is to get humanities research recognized on the radar screens of the institution and the funding agencies—to get our work recognized as research. Scientists do research. Humanists, what do they do? Oh, they write books and think about things. But research means laboratories, it means equipment, it means data, it means all that kind of thing. What humanists do doesn't look like that, and it isn't able to leverage funding. One of the struggles for a number of us over the years has been to try to describe the research that we *actually* do, both individually and collaboratively, in ways that can register with folks who only see laboratories or laboratory-like forms of knowledge production.

I've given a kind of caricature about guilt-tripping of the UC president to squeeze out some money for the humanities. Whatever the process, some funds came to UCSC and to all of the campuses. It was prorated by campus size, but it was a decent little chunk for us. I think it was about seventy thousand dollars or so, and this was hard money every year that came from the president's office with a modest campus match: maybe twenty or thirty thousand dollars. The allocation, and especially the campus match declined rather quickly as time went on. (laughs) So, UCSC started out with maybe a hundred thousand dollars, a hundred and ten thousand dollars. What should be done with it? You could simply take that money and give it to existing groups of faculty to help them do

(Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 2013). Available in full text at <http://www.escholarship.org/uc/item/3j5438d7>

what? Bring in guests? Have a residency program? Fund individual faculty to go off and do the research that they were going to do anyway? Or what we did, which was to found a research center.

This was a time when centers were beginning to be developed on a number of campuses. The one nearest to us, and the best known, was the Stanford Humanities Center. It was already a successful operation. The institutionalization of interdisciplinary humanities work was taking place on many campuses. And we decided—the “we” in question was primarily the dean at the time, Michael Cowan. Michael was a very collaborative and consultative dean. He talked to a lot of people. He talked to Hayden. He talked to me. He talked to whomever he could talk to. The proviso from the president was, “Do something for interdisciplinary research in the humanities.” So we decided to create a center. We were we were one of, I think, only three campuses at that time that used the money this way.

I was tapped to be the director. Why that happened, I’m not quite sure, except that I was an up-and-coming younger senior person whose work had been successful. I had a little bit of prominence. I was at the right career stage, had the energy, and was interested in doing it. We decided on the name Center for Cultural Studies rather than Center for the Humanities. In my mind, at least, that was a very important strategic choice.

Vanderscoff: Why did you regard it as an important strategic choice?

Clifford: Well, at Santa Cruz we were proud of our interdisciplinary approach. We, of course, thought we were more interdisciplinary than the folks over the hill at Stanford. (laughs) Cultural studies at that time—this decision was being

made in 1987, I guess—cultural studies, which was about to have a boom in the American academy, was just on the rise. We were about six months or a year ahead of the zeitgeist at this point. Cultural studies for me, and I think for many of the folks involved in the founding of the center, meant that this would not be one of those generalized humanities centers where if it's Tuesday, it's Milton; if it's Wednesday, it's South Africa; and next week, it's art history. You know, that kind of thing. We wanted a center that had more of a profile, more of an agenda. And cultural studies had that sense of agenda.

One thing that was very important to me was that it was not only interdisciplinary within the humanities; it was interdivisional. That meant that this would be a center that, while it would be open to humanists doing crossover work, would also be open to social scientists and also to people in the arts and the historical and the theoretical arts. In the social sciences, anthropology of course, but also qualitative sociology and political theory would be the most immediately accessible elements. These had to be not visitors, but integral to the mix.

We felt that cultural studies could break down the divisional borders that were hardening in Santa Cruz after reorganization, in the wake of the demotion of the colleges. The departments, the disciplines were coming back, but so were divisional distinctions. Funding at UCSC was increasingly being channeled by division. Each dean controlled large areas of funding and they basically kept it to themselves, for use by their division and only for their division. This led to narrow, empire-building turf battles and hardening of differences.

The whole college background and the interdisciplinary traditions of UCSC had been to transgress the border between the way a sociologist and a

historically minded scholar might think about society. If there were differences, they were differences that were the sites of conversation, the sites of mutual stimulation. They were not separate territories around which borders needed to be sustained. So I think that our decision was in the spirit of the early campus with its radical lack of interest in both disciplinary and divisional borders.

Vanderscoff: So you envisioned the center as a space where divisional lines could be transcended and there could be a real sort of cooperation?

Clifford: Yeah. On the first advisory board there were humanists. There were social scientists. There were art historians. That was important. That had always been and remains fundamental to the center. As we speak, the new incoming director is from social science, the politics department, Vinita Seth.

But what is humanities, anyway? Humanities is something much bigger than an academic division. I have developed an idea of what I call the greater humanities.²¹ This is an attempt to resist the tendency to belittle the humanities—an ever-decreasing and less relevant sector under the corporate logic of the contemporary university. In the new context, if you don't bring in money and you don't produce outputs that can be shown to directly benefit the economy of the state of California, you hardly exist. You're kept on at sufferance. The humanities are undergoing a process of relentless belittlement, turned into a kind of décor, or a garnish for the real meal at the university. You know, "Everyone needs a bit of Shakespeare. Everyone really should take an art history or a philosophy course, but let's not encourage students to major in these fields. They

²¹ The concept is developed in the on-line journal, *Occasion* (No. 6, June 2013).

don't lead to careers, do they?" And so on and so forth. We know the relentless logic. The greater humanities, as I define it, is not small. It cannot be marginalized. It is a broad potential alliance and common perspective that includes segments of the social sciences, the qualitative social sciences and the historical social sciences, as well as the arts and a whole range of historical subjects. By the way, in some universities, of course, history is in the social science division.

Vanderscoff: Right.

Clifford: Why is that line even there? The divisional distinction makes no sense at all in thinking about what the humanities really is as a kind of broad intellectual praxis. I think now that what we were doing under the sign of cultural studies was trying to operationalize a vision of the greater humanities on our campus.

And when I say the greater humanities, I don't mean that this is an expansive imperialism of the humanities division. Far from it. I mean the humanities as an approach to knowledge that is fundamentally interpretative and historical and political, in the sense that all knowledge is interested and is enmeshed in relations of power. It's an approach to knowledge which also critiques and bypasses, transcends in some degree, all of those hierarchies of high culture and low culture, a vision of knowledge which is simultaneously bottom up and top down, if you like, but also sideways—which subverts the hierarchies and the certainties of an older humanities or even an older hierarchically arranged university.

Cultural studies has always had the reputation of being a leveling discipline, of undermining the prestige of so-called high culture. Classically, in a cultural studies course there's got to be rock 'n' roll. There's music. There's got to be advertisements. The crappiest popular culture is a source of great interest to cultural studies. The whole category of the popular becomes something that one really takes seriously, in the same way that one might take seriously a Shakespeare play or a poem by Auden. That's cultural studies. It has its problems, but it also had at that time and still does have an enormous excitement and radical potential.

Another element that I think was characteristic of the center as I imagined it, and as the colleagues I was working with also saw things, was that we were part of a process by which Europe and the West—and the USA as an extension of Europe and the West—was being displaced. That doesn't mean it was being made to disappear or had become powerless. But it could no longer claim to be the center of the world. Our center was open to Asia; to the Pacific; to Africa. Cultural studies, to us, signaled that sense of openness, a level playing field of different forms of culture and styles of culture. All of that was tied up in the name.

Creating an Image and Program for the Center for Cultural Studies

Vanderscoff: So, of course, an important part of creating a center like this is how it's branded. How did you go about creating an image for the Center for Cultural Studies, and what significance did it have to your mission?

Clifford: One of the first things I did was start a newsletter. Because even if you're busy organizing events, which we did right from the start—study groups, conferences, research clusters and things like that, visits from lecturers of all sorts—it's important that there be some site where you can manifest the fact that you've actually done all these things. Because people forget, or they don't go to things. Maybe they remember the poster. So if you have a newsletter, then at least you can gather together a record of everything that you've done.

But I wanted something more than that. It was not going to be one that was about what we had done, but it was going to be a newsletter about what we were going to do. And that means you have to be organized. (laughs) You have to actually have firm dates and venues and titles for all of your events. Our newsletter came out at the beginning, in the first week of every quarter. It took a lot of work to do that—and our staff was pretty minimal—but folks could build us into their plans.

I also got visiting speakers not just to give us titles, but, if possible, to write little essays. Or I would excerpt something published, or preferably something unpublished or in press. I and other colleagues wrote short pieces, and the newsletter had a little substance to it, more than just an announcement of coming events. It was a way of putting the center on the map, making it something that people looked for at the beginning of every quarter. We sustained this rather substantial newsletter. I was director for seven years. Then my successors as director—Gail Hershatter and Chris Connery—kept it going.

Well, I thought there needed to be an image, a kind of logo, on top of the newsletter, and I had a favorite. I'll try to describe it. It was a poster from an exhibition by a Tanzanian artist named E.S. Tingatinga—a housepainter who

became a wildly successful tourist art producer in Dar es Salaam. So there you have already the bottom-up vision of culture, and the outside-the-West coming in this case from popular Dar es Salaam. I love this image. It's a very strong graphic of a mongoose who is holding two ends of a big snake and looking kind of puzzled: "What do I do now?" It seemed to be a predicament, a problem for which there's no solution. So I thought that would be a good image for the center we were trying to create. This was clearly a case in which something that had once been whole—Uroboros, the snake eating its tail—had been disconnected. Now what? (laughs) In some ways the whole logo says, "And now what?" Anyway, for better or worse that was our center and that was its image.

E.S. Tingatinga had died young, and I went so far as to try to track down his heirs in Dar es Salaam through a person at the national museum who claimed that he could get money to them. I eventually paid them a thousand dollars for using the image. At first his children wanted me to build a whole art center for the school of Tingatinga tourist art makers in Dar es Salaam. But I explained to them what our budget was and offered them a thousand dollars—which was a lot of money for them, actually—and said, "Take it or leave it." They were quick to take it. I hope the money got to them.

So that gives some feeling for how I conceived the center.

Vanderscoff: Yes. So what was the nature and scope of the programs it offered?

Clifford: Well, the programs were quite diverse and I really can't, of course, do them justice. Every year we did a bunch of conferences, which were almost always international in scope. We brought scholars from abroad and from Europe, and from Australia especially, and from all over the country. These

conferences had names like “Displacements: Migration, Diaspora, Interculture.” I organized that one with José David Saldívar of the literature department. This was the moment when diaspora theory and theories of the borderlands—*fronteras*—were coming into prominence. That conference was one where we brought together diaspora theorists from the United Kingdom, people like Paul Gilroy, with *frontera* theorists from the Mexico-American borderlands: Renato Rosaldo, from Stanford, and Nestor Garcia Canclini, who had just written a book called *Culturas Híbridas* about Tijuana. There was also, among others, Angela Davis and “Dr. Loco’s Rockin’ Jalapeño Band.” It was a really exciting conference.

At another conference we had Edward Kamau Brathwaite, the great Caribbean poet and cultural theorist. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe came through. I’m not going to keep on dropping names. Stuart Hall came and blessed us. We had taken the name cultural studies without a whole lot of thought about the Birmingham tradition, which is, after all, the kind of taproot of cultural studies. But as soon as the word got out that there was a Center for Cultural Studies in Santa Cruz—and there weren’t very many centers of cultural studies anywhere—folks in England decided that we must be a branch of Birmingham. So they started coming to visit, which was great. I decided I better read up on Birmingham and the work of Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy and Hazel Carby and Kobena Mercer and Iain Chambers and a whole lot of others. Before I knew it, all those people were visiting, and we had a very rich dialogue going on.

So we did conferences and lecture series. We didn’t have a lot of money, but we could bring people from the UC system and from all over the country. After a few years, we applied to the Rockefeller Foundation to be a residency program. They were giving out significant money to campuses for four years

allowing you to subsidize long-term visitors. We were actually twice successful with Rockefeller residency grants over the course of our history. So, of course, there was the work of looking for grant money. But in the humanities you can't get outside funding for operations. You propose specific multi-year projects to the Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, and places like that. We were pretty successful getting this kind of support. But we didn't know how to attract an endowment, and the UC and campus support for basic operations was always shrinking.

The core of the center's work was to organize and support the informal, collaborative contexts of humanities research that are fundamental to what we do but that don't register as "fundable research" in the larger institutional context of the university. What that meant is we funded research clusters: groups of graduate students working with a faculty member or several faculty, who wanted to form a group a year, two, maybe three years. Usually the clusters weren't sustained for very long because the core problems would morph and new topics would emerge. We would give small amounts of money to these groups, who could then bring in experts, or maybe fund a small conference once they had been talking for a while and had refined their questions and their research issues. Then the cluster could share what they'd learned with the rest of the community. So we had a dozen or so research clusters going every year. We'd provide a thousand dollars, two thousand dollars, that sort of thing. Not very much. But you can do a lot. The humanities is a cheap date.

Vanderscoff: (laughs)

Clifford: You can do a lot with a little bit of money if you're not throwing big banquets for visiting scholars. I'm just looking at the list of Center for Cultural Studies research clusters in the year after I left it as director, 1996. The co-directors at that time were Wendy Brown and Gail Hershatter. This is just for the record. These were the clusters that were in existence in that year. They shifted. Every year several would go out, several new ones would come in. 'Chicano cultural studies' is one. 'Women of color in conflict and collaboration:' that was one that we sustained for quite a long time, including a big film festival every year. 'Anthropology and history' is another. 'New Western history:' that was faculty from history and American studies. There's 'labor management and political culture:' people from community studies, economics, American studies, women's studies, anthropology, political science and sociology. You can see that was heavily in the social sciences. 'Pre and early modern studies:' Largely literature, art history and history. 'Living poetry:' that was performances and visits by poets and discussions of contemporary poetry. 'World environmental history workshop,' and 'queer theory' were the last of the groups. That gives you a sense of the range of things that were being supported.

On the Center and Interdivisional Cooperation

Vanderscoff: So in the light of that breadth of groups, do you think the center succeeded in promoting the interdivisional cooperation that you talked about a little bit earlier?

Clifford: Well, we tried and I think *did* succeed to a significant degree. To some degree, we were the only game in town. That's not to say there weren't other

groups of faculty to discuss and to do various forms of collaborative research, but we were the only institutionalized center that was supporting this kind of activity. Since then, other centers that have been founded, now all under the umbrella of the Institute for Humanities Research (IHR), but then we were the only one. We had a lot of participation. But how to bring it together—always the problem on the UCSC campus, which is so dispersed?

Early on, we instituted a weekly colloquium series, held every Wednesday noon. At first we met in the Cowell Conference Room one Wednesday and then the next week across campus in Oakes College, where the center was located. People had to remember which side to go to every week. That got confusing after a while, and we ended up with the colloquium permanently in Oakes. It's now being held in Humanities I, the new humanities building. The Cultural Studies Colloquium been going on continuously, seven, eight Wednesdays per quarter, for more than twenty years by now. There's a dedicated core of regulars, and participants from at least a half dozen disciplines every week. Very lively and intellectually engaged. The room is often full. There are presentations of work in progress by UCSC faculty, and also visiting faculty from other universities. There's a real feeling of collegial interchange, across a wide swath of the university. The center's recent director, Carla Freccero, has kept it alive through hard budget years. And I think of the colloquium as a link with the campus founding vision.

I'm not saying that this center is somehow unique or special. It's the kind of thing that can be done with relatively small resources within this domain of what I'm calling the greater humanities, which spans the entire campus and

involves also natural scientists. We would have liked to develop better relations across that divisional border.

Vanderscoff: That seems to be the great divide, in some sense.

Clifford: Yes. C.P. Snow wrote a book in the fifties about the two cultures, which is about the humanities/science split. It was a controversial and scandalous book in its day. And there's lots of things that can be said about the value and reality of that particular sharp line. But I think increasingly in the actual university, in the institutional university today—and this has to do with questions of resources and funding and things like that—there really are two cultures. There really are two universities. The line is drawn, and it falls roughly onto divisional categories. Now, with the addition of engineering to natural sciences—and we can probably throw economics into the bag—that's a sharp line. Very little substantive research and thinking and collegiality of the sort of thing that was part of the dream of the colleges, very little of that crosses the boundary. Oh, there are small crossings, and a good deal of unfocused desire to make links. But the two cultures have hardened.

Vanderscoff: So what is the relevance of collaboration with the natural sciences in a project dedicated to what you term "the greater humanities?" What's the value in reaching across the aisle in that way?

Clifford: Well, the value would be to break down the distinctions that result in blindness like the inability to recognize humanities research as research—a whole set of assumptions that are in the air. I certainly don't want to pin these on individual scientists, especially not those at UCSC, many of whom have a very

broad notion of the relation of natural science, to other forms of knowledge production. But anything that could break down the structural, institutional, material forces that are, I think, hardening this boundary line now in all sorts of ways, that are absolutely inimical to what I used to think of as the arts and sciences university—where the “and” in arts and sciences was a genuine “and,” where there was no hierarchy built into that joining of two sides. The greater humanities—which I’m associating with the word “arts” in that phrase—the greater humanities were half the university. But now the humanities are at best a fifth of the university, when you start to break it down in the funding charts—actually less than a fifth in most places. I don’t mean to reduce everything to funding. But you can’t ignore it. There are intellectual consequences that I think are devastating the university.

But we can talk about the current situation later.

The Cultural Studies Turn

Vanderscoff: Yes, we’ll be visiting that a little later on today. Now you were, of course, as you were head of the center, wearing another hat in terms of your involvement with the history of consciousness program. What was the relationship, the dynamic between the center and history of consciousness?

Clifford: Of course, they were closely associated with each other. In many people’s minds, the center was a kind of research arm of history of consciousness, and because I was the first director that made it even easier to identify the center with history of consciousness. Because I wanted it to involve as broad a constituency as it could, I bent way over backwards to disassociate, to mark a

difference between history of consciousness and the center. Not an opposition, but I made sure to fill my advisory committees and so forth with people from other departments. I made very sure that funding did not flow disproportionately to history of consciousness faculty or history of consciousness grad students. I may have exaggerated to some degree in that regard.

The relation with history of consciousness is interesting and complicated, in retrospect now. I wanted to the center to have an independent existence and not be seen as an arm of the history of consciousness. And I think it eventually did achieve that, under the name cultural studies, as cultural studies came into prominence. We developed an international reputation as a go-to place.

Was it good for the history of consciousness department that the Center for Cultural Studies flourished? Yes and no. I think it did enrich the UCSC environment. Many history of consciousness grad students and faculty were involved in the center, its research clusters and conferences, and so that was all good.

I think there was a downside, though, for history of consciousness. In the eighties, history of consciousness was the place where a certain kind of avant-garde—trendy if you don't like it, innovative if you do—theoretical and cultural work was being done. By the mid-nineties, the Center for Cultural Studies was at least an equal partner in that mode. And it quickly took over the task of organizing public lectures, things like that, which history of consciousness had been very active in doing. I talked about this big sphinx that was the logo of the new history of consciousness after 1980—it appeared everywhere with names on it like Jacques Derrida and so forth. That gave history of consciousness a sense of centrality, at least on the campus. But that centrality was usurped—usurped is a

tendentious way to put it— taken over by the center. The center did many, many lectures, many, many conferences, lots and lots of things. Much more than a department (let alone a board of study) could ever do. They don't have the staff or anyone who has the time to put into organizing all that kind of stuff.

So cultural studies became the center, and history of consciousness became a department allied with the center. I think that development contributed, in some ways, to history of consciousness becoming more self-sufficient and inward looking, leaving the outreach, leaving the connecting across campus to someone else.

And I think by the time we got to 2005—when, as we'll discuss later a crisis of reproduction of the department came—history of consciousness didn't have the connectivity that it used to have. It didn't have the alliances. It didn't have a really robust, extended board of faculty who were really participating in the program. A lot of the synergy, the participation and collaboration was getting done through the center now. And I think, in that respect, there was a bit of a zero sum situation on campus, with respect to the two.

The center did flourish quite dramatically up until I would say about 2005, when various tensions and contradictions kicked in, along with the devastating decline of funding. These factors led ultimately to the Center for Cultural Studies being subsumed within what we had not wanted to form at the beginning: a humanities center, the IHR, the Institute for Humanities Research.

Vanderscoff: So you think as a result of it being bureaucratically subsumed its scope has diminished?

Clifford: Well, the center lost its budget. And basically everything now, all the money goes through the IHR. The whole research cluster system that we had set up and sustained is now an IHR operation. And the center lost its own staff. Now it has a faculty director and a graduate student assistant. It doesn't organize conferences anymore the way it used to. It has no visiting scholars program. All that really remains is its colloquium series, which remains for many people an important weekly event. As I've said, it represents a long tradition and a wonderful one in many ways. But that's all that's left of the Center for Cultural Studies.

There simply hasn't been enough money to fund a robust Center for Cultural Studies *and* a robust humanities center. There was a tension from the start built into our choice to call the new institution 'the Center for Cultural Studies'—to have it so open to other divisions. There were folks in the humanities who couldn't ally themselves with cultural studies—even very broadly defined. These included more traditional humanistic, literary scholars or philosophers or historians who didn't think of themselves as trendy cultural studies, theory-driven people. There were plenty of stereotypes of cultural studies around, some of them sort of true and some of them not at all.

And as time went on, we got into one of those situations where, as the money disappears, when people are scrambling for pennies, the envy and resentment becomes more and more extreme. In fact, the Center for Cultural Studies did a lot to spread its diminishing funds beyond cultural studies, narrowly defined. I know my successors Gail Hershatter and Chris Connery tried to spread the money as widely as possible. So did Carla Freccero. But people started thinking, "Well, why is our humanities funding going to

anthropologists, to political theorists, to art historians? If we have so little money, it should all be going to humanists.” So again, the logic of divisional thinking kicked in and that resentment eventually led to the founding of IHR.

It took a while for that to happen, because people recognized—deans recognized—that the Center for Cultural Studies was an important entity that had its own reputation and an international one, and they didn’t want to get rid of it just like that. But eventually it just became impossible to sustain two research operations. So the logic of bureaucratic rationalization and simplification kicked in: you don’t have two staffs when you can do it with one staff and so forth. It was clear that the center was not going to subsume the IHR, so the IHR had to subsume the center. I think it was inevitable and probably the right thing. But it has meant the end of the center and the distinct research profile and reputation it achieved.

Vanderscoff: I’m curious about how the center impacted you personally, intellectually, as a writer, as a thinker. How did that change the sort of questions that you were asking of your subject matter?

Clifford: Yeah, let me say a few words about that, although I won’t say a great deal. This interview has been purposely centered on UCSC and the scene here in history of consciousness, and more widely in the UCSC intellectual environment, not on my own books and writings and thinking.²² But I do think at least

²² For more involved and focused detail on Dr. Clifford’s thoughts on his work and the field of anthropology, see his book of compiled interviews *On the Edges of Anthropology: Interviews* (Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003).

retrospectively that the turn to cultural studies, which happened around 1990, was an important moment for me in my own thinking. I said that when we eventually decided to call our new institution the Center for Cultural Studies I wasn't thinking about Birmingham and the British cultural studies tradition. But before long I began to feel myself intellectually drawn that way, interpolated, we might say in theoretical terms; called into that tradition. That was, for me, an important development. It also returned me to some of the work that was important to me as a graduate student, because the founding fathers of that strand of cultural studies include Raymond Williams and Edward Thompson. These were authors that had been really important to me in graduate school, but who I had moved away from.

To be simplistic about it, at the end of the seventies and throughout the eighties, French theory—theory generally speaking coming out of France—had been the dominant influence in my own work, notions of textuality, a kind of expansive notion of literary theory which I learned from my times doing research in Paris, but also and especially from being a colleague to Hayden White and co-teaching with him. This was a very important and powerful orientation to my work. However, I have never really been a “theorist,” or at least there was always a kind of critical ballast which I associate with the category I call the ethnographic. It's that bottom-up, daily life participant-observation approach to things. It's where you find that your interpretative structure or theory starts to

See also “Interview with James Clifford—Adam Mickiewicz, University of Poznan” available on Youtube: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C9AKgRGuBM0>>

and an accompanying lecture: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HdWr56Bovjg>

fall apart or doesn't work to well when you start to get into the specifics of how people actually live and talk to teach other and eat and sleep. It's always more complicated than you thought. To me, that's an important lesson that shouldn't stop us from asking theoretical questions and following out large comparative, analytic hypotheses. But it should chasten us to some degree, or ground us in some way—a grounding not in “the facts” but in contingency. So that's a tension that I've always wanted to exploit in my work.

All this in retrospect. During the eighties, French theory, theories of textuality were prominent in my thinking. Paris was the headquarters. But in the nineties London took over; multi-racial, postcolonial London that is. And I became much more knowledgeable in what had happened to British cultural Marxism of the sort that I had learned in grad school from Raymond Williams; what had happened to it at the Center for Cultural Studies in Birmingham during the seventies, when I wasn't reading it. And what happened when the tradition branched out in London and the polytechnic universities. (It never took root in Oxbridge.) There was a good deal to catch up with.

The work of Stuart Hall became central. I consider Stuart, along with Hayden, perhaps to be the biggest influence of a living older generation scholar-theorist in my intellectual life. And younger students of Hall: people like Paul Gilroy, who's a friend and has been very influential for me; Iain Chambers, who's a product of Birmingham; with Lidia Curti, making Naples an outpost of Birmingham; Ien Ang in Western Sydney.

There's a whole universe of thinkers and writers who became important to me. I suppose it reactivated my roots as a historian with an interest in grappling with questions of historical determination and the way that cultural

forms and economic forms and popular forms—bottom-up kind of perspectives—actually work together, in complex tension. And I rediscovered a politics that is nurtured by Marxism; not orthodox Marxism, but a kind of supple form of a Gramscian cultural analysis. That's what Hall and company were deriving in those years at Birmingham and brought into London, where gender and race and the whole idea of the diaspora, which was the internationalizing of British cultural studies, would emerge.

My own work had gotten very concerned with questions of travel and displacement and diaspora, border crossings: all those kinds of things. My second big book was called *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late 20th Century*. And that book, which was published toward the end of the nineties, was very much nurtured by my turn to cultural studies. The first book, *The Predicament of Culture*, which came out in the late eighties, was very much a product of that expanded, ethnographically troubled, literary studies approach. I've always been someone who is willing to mix in almost anything, so I'm always a little uncomfortable characterizing these books in the overall ways that I've just done. But I do think there was a hinge: the turn toward cultural studies. In a sense, it brought me back into conversation with Marxism and a kind of supple, historical, ethnographic, theoretically inclined form of realism.

And that turn has continued in my most recent big book. I think of it as the third volume in a trilogy, with the *Predicament of Culture* volume one, and that's the eighties. Then *Routes*, volume two, which is the nineties. Now this next decade, whatever we call it, is represented by the book I'm finishing, called

*Returns: Becoming Indigenous in the 21st Century.*²³ The essays gathered there complement my interest in displacement and routes, with a turn toward practices of dwelling, of staying, of being indigenous or actually becoming indigenous. Indigenousness isn't something that you just have. It's something that's made of relations with others and is processual. It has to be made and remade in new circumstances. I won't go into that book, but it has to do with the emergence of indigenous cultural politics since the nineties, which is something that in the early seventies we didn't think about at all in the academy. Of course, that doesn't mean that there weren't tribal people, or that native societies didn't exist. No. Of course they existed, and they were struggling against often overwhelming odds simply to exist. They survived, they changed, and they emerged into new kinds of public space. That happened in the 1990s, an unexpected emergence (a surprise for folks like me). How that happened—at different social scales and in relation to post-sixties, neoliberal identity politics—is what I've been wondering and writing about.

Those were my three decades, you see. The cultural studies turn was a very important turn in the midst of that. And I'll tell this one little story of interpolation, if you don't mind, since this is an open-ended oral history interview. I always think of my moment of being called to cultural studies as follows: you may recall this idea of interpolation that Louis Althusser brought into social and cultural theory. This is how power constructs people, calls people into existence as subjects. He has a little anecdote in it which is made to stand for a whole lot of things, of a policeman who calls you and says, "Hey you." And

²³ Harvard University Press, Fall 2013.

you turn, because you better turn, you turn to the policeman, and you become then a subject of the law in that moment. And that is an image of interpolation, which of course takes place in Althusser through a whole lot of other situations, like staying in your seat and being a good student. Okay, that's interpolation. But my interpolation to cultural studies was much more benign, we might say, and wonderful.

Vanderscoff: (laughs)

Clifford: Around 1990, a big conference was held at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, and a giant volume came out of it called *Cultural Studies*. It was heavy and instantly canonical. We called it the doorstep book. The event was organized by Larry Grossberg, who was the chief apostle of Birmingham in the United States. He and some colleagues at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana organized this giant conference and they brought over a lot of famous British cultural studies folks, like Hall and Gilroy and a whole lot of others, including Homi Bhabha, et cetera. But they also asked some Americans, who weren't necessarily associated with the tradition, and to our surprise and pleasure Donna Haraway and I were invited. We thought, "Oh, they must think we're one of them." So I showed up. I had never met Stuart Hall before. That was where I met Paul Gilroy for the first time. I was a stranger to this crowd. And there seemed to be an 'in' crowd. We were strangers.

Anyway, I got up and gave my talk and people asked probing but polite questions. I got through it. Paul was one of the people who asked a good question, along with Homi Bhabha and some others. They have all become friends. After the conference we're back in the hotel and the bar immediately fills

up—in the British style. If you’ve ever been in a British bar you know it’s a very noisy scene and with lots of people standing crushed together drinking and talking. I find myself standing at the doorway looking in and thinking, do I really dare go in here? I don’t know anybody. Desperately looking around to see a friendly face, and feeling very much the outsider. Suddenly across the room, through a whole bunch of people standing at the bar, I see Stuart Hall calling to me. “Jim! Come on in! Let me buy you a beer!” People who know him will recognize his generosity and sense of social connection, a great gift for including people. I don’t know how he saw me across that whole noisy mess. Anyway, that’s my little story of being called.

Vanderscoff: Of being hailed across the room.

Clifford: Of being hailed to cultural studies, my interpolation. Stuart Hall has been a friend and mentor every since.

Thoughts on Intellectual Work in Histcon

Vanderscoff: Now, how has UCSC as a host institution, and history of consciousness more particularly as your board and then department—how have these allowed you to function as a scholar, as a writer?

Clifford: Oh, “allowed” me to function? Well, they certainly allowed me—

Vanderscoff: Encouraged, perhaps. (laughs)

Clifford: Well, what I experienced was permission, permission to mix and match and write and think and teach pretty much what I wanted. Now, to say that is to

speaking somewhat abstractly. Of course, concretely I didn't have total freedom. If you give a seminar in history of consciousness, students don't have to take it. You have to give a seminar that they want to take, because we didn't admit students to be disciples who were then dependent on their mentor and were obliged to take whatever the teacher dished out. No. In histcon, you had to do something that would be of interest. So, you always had to figure out what was on people's minds. What were the hot topics? What were the topics that *weren't* getting talked about that people might feel they needed? And that would always orient your seminar. I never, in my entire career, gave a seminar on what I'm supposed to be an expert in; for example, literary approaches to anthropology. Never. We didn't have anthropologists in histcon. I always seemed to be making up new courses.

But it meant learning other things. The great thing about teaching graduate students in this way was I had to adapt what I knew to what was emerging. In every seminar, I assigned books that I hadn't read yet, which was the fun of it, and the challenge. And it forced you to really read the book carefully. Often they were books that students brought to me, or they made me aware of. History of consciousness was always busting me out of my bibliographic cocoon. We all have the books we love, the books we know, and we may be tempted to administer them, over and over again. I have colleagues who operate this way, and their classes are—masterful. But I could never be masterful because I enjoyed being invited to teach new stuff. Difficult at times, but great for me.

My colleagues and I did some co-teaching. I co-taught with Hayden. I co-taught with Donna Haraway. Both of those were mind-bending experiences. I

also co-taught a course with Angela Davis a bit later. We had a course on *Critical and Historical Studies of Race and Ethnicity* that rotated among the faculty and we always co-taught it, at least for a while. I learned an enormous amount from that as well. Barbara Epstein—I sometimes overlapped segments of my seminar with hers when she was teaching the same quarter. Our approaches to the same questions were different, but often complementary. I had a course that I taught—I might say reinvented—for a number of years called *Globalization and Cultural Process*. It began with theories of globalization and then explored how the global is processed locally. I used a lot of ethnographic materials for that second part. Barbara would often teach about globalization, or ‘late capitalism,’ or some other name, but essentially she was interested in how capitalism was negotiating its way in the world, and how local people were adapting or resisting or being rolled over by capital and the world market. Like me, she was interested in historical process, although from a different perspective. We sometimes were able to combine elements of our classes. Some students took them, and I would find out what she was thinking through them.

In fact, a lot of the ways I found out what my colleagues were thinking and doing was through students who took their courses and then came to my office hours or to my seminar and told me about it. It was as though we were playing a game of telephone with our colleagues through the students. I wasn’t always sure I was getting a non-garbled version, but it was interesting.

Vanderscoff: (laughs)

Clifford: An interesting miscommunication. This is how we connected.

Vanderscoff: Hearing each other in translation, as it were.

Clifford: Yeah. And, of course, we sat together on thesis committees. That was another way of interacting. Teresa de Lauretis and I had a number of advisees in common. I came away from that experience with enormous admiration for her as a thesis advisor. Very tough, very helpful; she knew when to be really demanding and also when to give. All of those timing questions about when to push this student, when not to, are really important elements in thesis advising that only experience can teach. Teresa had great skill, I thought, and from watching her I learned a lot.

So those are just some hints about the kind of ways that we operated in histcon. We were always kind of making it up as we went along. That pragmatic style that Hayden had modeled at the start stayed with us after he left in—what was it, '96?

Vanderscoff: '94, I believe.

Clifford: '94. That basic style stayed with us. I think we all felt very lucky to be in that kind of a program and not in a disciplinary program, where the rules of what was okay and what wasn't okay would have been a lot more rigid, and where the range of thinking and perspectives that we would've been exposed to would have been considerably less broad.

But as I say that, and as I say a number of things about what's unique and special about the history of consciousness, I start to hear a little voice in the back of my mind telling me to watch out for claims of histcon exceptionalism. (laughter) There's a certain self-congratulatory element that can slip into one's

discourse. Histcon has been special, there's no doubt about it, but it was never unique. Things that histcon was doing other people were doing in other programs and disciplines. It's one of the reasons why we were able to collaborate and bring people from other fields onto our committees. History of consciousness may have been a little bit ahead of the zeitgeist in a lot of ways, but the zeitgeist was never very far behind. A lot of ideas that we were having and things we were doing and that we thought we were pioneers in, other people were also experimenting with. In retrospect, I can see that. And I think we have to always bear it in mind, given our tendency to think of ourselves as some kind of avant-garde.

Vanderscoff: And yet through all of that, there was a sense for you that this was a space where you could do what you wanted as a writer, as a scholar, as a teacher?

Clifford: I never felt disciplined. Of course, when you write you write for a specific audience or audiences; you think in terms that need to be responsive and intelligible, within certain conventions—even as you bend them. I was no doubt influenced by my milieu in ways that I really can't sum up. But I know that the spirit of experimentation and of wanting to do something innovative was very much a part of the environment. I'm sure of that. I was allowed to push the form of academic writing in my books, either by mixing genres and styles within a volume, or playing with the shape of the whole. I've tried to do that in particularly the last two books. And doing that in a histcon environment was a lot easier than doing it in a disciplinary environment.

Vanderscoff: At this point I'd like to pause to say we're at about an hour and a quarter.²⁴ Would you like to hold off here and do another session another time? Because I think we have more than twenty, thirty minutes. How would you like to do it?

Clifford: I'm inclined to just push through and finish it. Let's see what we have to do that's important, that's actually important.

Vanderscoff: I'll put this on hold for a moment.

[Recorder turned off. Record resumes several minutes later, after an assessment of the list of topics and questions.]

History of Consciousness: Trajectories from the Nineties to the Present

Vanderscoff: I'd like to talk about histcon in the more recent past and approaching the present. How has the department evolved since Hayden's departure in 1994?

Clifford: Well, thinking about that date, 1994, brought me up short a bit. 1994 is about sixteen years after Hayden and I arrived in '78. And it's about eighteen years or so from the present. So Hayden is present for only about half of the story of histcon I'm telling, though he has continued to loom large.

There are, of course, many accounts of the decline of history of consciousness, just as ever since I arrived at UCSC they have been lamenting for

²⁴ Our prior sessions having run eighty and ninety-six minutes, respectively, which are typical times for a Regional History Project interview.

the decline of UCSC. UCSC has always been losing its soul, over and over again, whether it was the decline of the colleges or the abolition of narrative evaluations, or the destruction of Elfland, or whatever. Almost right from the beginning. The same was true for histcon. Histcon was always losing its soul or being taken over by some new trendy group. First it was “theory.” Then, with Donna and Teresa’s hiring, it was going over to the feminists. Next it was lesbians and gays, then diversity and race theorists. Then it was taken over by cultural studies. Now Marxists. These stories are kind of endemic. One recurring narrative hinges on Hayden’s departure. These are people who don’t like—or feel at least seriously ambivalent about trends in the nineties, trends that were important in histcon and also much more widely. Sometimes these trends get summed up under the name identity politics, or diversity politics. A way of thinking, a way of doing intellectual work prior to these developments, is thought of as somehow free of politics, more rigorous, and intellectually unconstrained.

Now suddenly everyone is either hunkered down behind their sandbags criticizing everybody else, or folks are constantly looking over their shoulder, trying to cover their ass with respect to various symptomatic and political critiques coming from any number of positions identified with identity formations. Whether these formations are centered around gender, or around sexuality, or around race, or ethnicity, or diversity, or whiteness—all of these categories invaded the life of the intellect. It was a new phenomenon in the university, certainly in the American university—more broadly than that, but particularly here. And it definitely had negative as well as positive effects.

Yet there was no going back to the old way of working. There’s no way that I, at least, can feel good about returning to a time when there were no people

of color in the university and very few women, and where sexuality was not something that anyone could talk about. Think about Cowell College around 1970. This is not a criticism. It's simply a comment on historical conditions. It wasn't just Cowell College that was overwhelmingly white, with a male faculty. The university has changed: new bodies in the room, new agendas, new sensitivities, new aggressions, new uncertainties make the place, for some, more uncomfortable. It also makes the place more exciting. In retrospect, I wouldn't have it any other way, but that's not to say I enjoyed every minute of it—all the self-positioning, the “gotcha” critiques.

All these changes sometimes get associated with Hayden's departure. And that's a sort of periodizing story I would certainly like to complicate. Identity politics were certainly around before 1994. Exclusivist agendas were certainly latent in the very feminism that we allied ourselves with in those early years, and they rippled through all sorts of other kinds of diversity politics. Anti-racism and anti-colonialism, the cultural studies of the nineties all this was part of an ambivalent, but necessary mix. The changes brought in popular culture. They brought a much wider range of phenomena into the discussion, in the process displacing well-established academic forms, well-established canonical forms of literature, poetry, art, of historical writing. All of these traditions were under assault, in question. Battles over canons and canonicity became commonplace.

We quickly—probably too quickly—abandoned any attempt to impose a curriculum. That was already in the mid-eighties. Histcon's *Theory and Methods* course turned into *Approaches to History of Consciousness*—either one faculty member's thematic course or a dog-and-pony show introduction to various

faculty in the program. This trend would continue through the nineties and into the new millennium.

I can't be sure, but I do think that we're moving into a different phase now—a post-identity politics situation. To say that, of course, is not to claim that we've crossed some sharp line and all of that diversity stuff is over. And to say "post-identity politics" is not to say "anti-identity politics." Post-identity politics assumes and moves in some sense beyond all of the arguments about authority and positionality. The situatedness and inherently politicized categories of knowledge and power that are associated with the struggles around inclusion and exclusion are taken on board. I see signs everywhere of people not wanting to be frozen in position by those struggles. Identities need to be recognized but not as limitations; not as necessary sites of homecoming, sites of inescapable belonging or an exclusivist culture, but as necessary components in a composite, dynamic, relational kind of self. I'm perhaps being too optimistic, even prescriptive here in some respect. But I see signs of these movements all around me.

Beginning in the eighties and especially in the nineties, histcon was the most diverse graduate program in the entire UC system. It won a campus award for its diversity. Over half of the grad students that I directed to the Ph.D. were from underrepresented communities of color. We had a really volatile and remarkable mix of students.

And as I've already stressed, histcon has been a place of constant change. There's always something new coming along. Just as soon as anyone says that some approach or some perspective has become hegemonic, something else comes along to displace it. The whole emphasis on race and ethnicity, which was

a dominant—not the ‘the’ dominant, but ‘a’ dominant element in history during the nineties, has since then been supplanted by other perspectives. The emergence of science studies in some of its new forms, including interspecies research and “the ontological turn” is just one of the approaches to emerge in the new millennium. There will certainly be more that I can’t imagine.

In the late 1990s, up until about 2006, history of consciousness was an extremely successful Ph.D. program. In saying that, I’m invoking the standard institutional measures of success in a graduate program. The EKG, if I can put it this way, of a successful Ph.D. program would be: A) that it’s extremely competitive in its admissions. We were the most competitive or one of the most competitive grad programs in the university. B) The students move expeditiously to the degree. With such limited support, the Ph.D. took time. But we moved students through. History always graduated every year six, seven, eight Ph.D.s, even as we admitted seven, eight or nine, something like that. And C: outcomes. Do the students get good jobs or postdocs? There our statistics were really extraordinarily good, much better than any other department in the humanities except perhaps the younger program in linguistics, and probably better than almost any program in the university. I know this because I was chair for the last external review and I had to do the statistics for where, over last ten years, all the graduates had gone. More than ninety percent of them were in tenure-track positions or good postdocs. That’s astonishingly high. If you looked at any history department of that period you would find at best fifty percent in that category, probably less. Well, this sounds like bragging, but this is how it was.

Around 2000 and 2005 we had couple of external reviews, and each of them was very unambiguous about history of consciousness being an

extraordinarily successful program and a kind of beacon. They used language like that, hyperbolic language: a kind of beacon throughout the country and the rest of the world for innovative, interdisciplinary scholarship. Et cetera, et cetera.

Histcon was a famous program and a vibrant program and a big program. We had by then risen to nine full-time equivalent faculty positions in the department. We maintained a steady state of something like fifty-five or sixty Ph.D. students at any given time, which made us certainly one of the largest doctoral programs at UCSC. But what follows is a story of shrinkage and decline. What happened?

Apocalypse and/or Metamorphosis

Vanderscoff: Now, as all of these events occurred, how had histcon's dynamic with the humanities division evolved? What do you attribute histcon's substantially diminished current number of faculty to? What factors changed the next chapter in the story?

Clifford: Well, money. (laughs) Not to put too fine a point on it. It's not the only factor, but it's the predominant one. What happened was this—at least as I see it, and I hasten to say that there are others who have gone through this process who will have different accounts.

History of consciousness had a top-heavy faculty. Of the nine senior, all-tenured faculty, six were within a few years of each other in age. We had some very prominent faculty, and the good news was they all stayed. But that was also the bad news. It made it impossible to have a generationally balanced faculty. A balanced faculty involves having some junior people, some mid-level senior

professors, and some distinguished elderly senior people. Calling myself—and friends like Donna, Barbara, and Angela—elderly is a new discovery for me. But there it is. We were all going to retire within a few years of each other. This was a demographic perfect storm that everybody knew was coming. It was on the agenda for the external review committees before 2005. We raised it with them. They discussed it. They all said something must be done to prepare for it.

Vanderscoff: Was anything?

Clifford: Nothing was done. But what could have been done?

Vanderscoff: A haunting question.

Clifford: Here's where the money is determining. UCSC is a poor campus in the UC system, and humanities is a poor division within UCSC. The amount of money for FTEs that comes to the humanities division is cruelly limited and has been always limited, even before the terrible fiscal crisis of 2008. There have never been any extra positions around. If only UCSC were Stanford, or MIT—or possibly even Berkeley or UCLA, that have bigger endowments and just have a lot more money around than UCSC does, with an administration that believed, as they all said, that history of consciousness was a flagship department, a signature department that defines Santa Cruz and must be sustained (this was all in writing) that administration would hire one or two mid-level senior professors prior to the retirement of the senior people. So that when we all turned into pumpkins at midnight there would be a core of senior people to form and lead the next cohort. They would anchor a robust program that would not be eviscerated by the relatively quick disappearance of six senior people. But to do

that is expensive. History of consciousness is an all-Ph.D. program. It needs to hire at the senior level. You can't run a Ph.D. program with assistant professors. I was the only assistant professor, I think, who was ever hired in histcon.

Vanderscoff: Really?

Clifford: Well, no. There was also Neferti Tadiar, who was with us for quite a while and was lost in a spousal hire issue at just about the time I'm calling "the reproduction crisis," the years around 2005. Neferti, who had carved out an important space and brought critical perspectives from international feminism and cultural Marxism, left us at that time—a real loss. But even if she'd been around—a younger senior person—it would probably not have been enough to create that strong—

Vanderscoff: Critical mass.

Clifford: —that diverse, mid-level, senior critical mass. We had two other tenured scholars, David Marriott and Gopal Balakrishnan, who were at the younger end of the professorate. Relatively inexperienced. Neither had been chair, or showed much inclination to be chair of the department and do that kind of leadership work. Very brilliant scholars, each in his own right. As I've said, a wealthy place like Stanford would have hired in advance of the retirement storm, because they would have had some extra FTEs around to do it. Not UCSC humanities. It costs two or three, maybe four FTEs to hire at this level. It's an expensive program, histcon. And in times of poverty it became a luxury.

When enough FTEs had been accumulated from the retirements of Teresa de Lauretis and Angela Davis (also Neferti's separation and Gary Lease's tragic

death), enough to recruit at the senior level someone who was becoming prominent and could be in a position to recreate a history of consciousness vision for the future and push forward, taking advantage of the momentum of the program and its reputation of the program—it was too late.

So, this is what happened. We finally got to the point where we could recruit a prominent person who would play a leadership role. We found that person in a very long and extensive search. And in early summer 2009, we were on the point of making an offer to that person.

Then a second perfect storm hit—one that was not predicted—fiscal crisis of the state of California, whose deficit at that point was probably thirty-five billion dollars. The result was a series of draconian cuts to the University of California, permanent cuts which had to be distributed across the university. The UCSC humanities division took its share, and in that division there was virtually nothing to cut that is permanent money except faculty salaries. So for a time, if someone retired that position went right back to the center and was lost to the division.

The division has shrunk, withered. Looked at as a whole, it's catastrophic and frightening. Humanities at Santa Cruz has gone from about one hundred and ten ongoing FTE to maybe eighty-five or ninety—this for seven departments with five Ph.D. programs, with no plans for restoration. It's becoming a miniature division, with small departments on the edge of dysfunction. I suppose humanities may rebound eventually. But in the meantime, deep damage has been inflicted.

So the dean pulled the funding from our search and closed it down, with no prospect of another. History of consciousness went from nine FTEs to just

three. And of those three, Barbara Epstein was of the same age as all of us other elders. (laughs) So she's about to retire herself. So histcon had gone from nine FTE to two ongoing FTE, in the space of five years. A disaster.

I served as chair before 2007, and Donna Haraway after that. As support fell away, and consensus within the program proved elusive, we struggled to find a way forward. I kept being reminded of Norman O. Brown's late collection of essays. Its title fit perfectly: *Apocalypse and/or Metamorphosis*.

There had always been arguments that histcon should be closed down; that it was really a creature of its time; history of consciousness was really just an extraordinary group of individuals who had come together and once they were gone there was really nothing left. Or it was said that history of consciousness's uniqueness intellectually had now been mainstreamed and that everyone was doing that kind of stuff. There's some truth to this, of course. Part of our success, I suppose, and also a reminder that we were part of a historical conjuncture and not a Promethean avant-garde. Again, the anti-exceptionalist voice rears itself in the background.

People said history of consciousness had lost its edge, was mainstreamed and was past its prime. But we argued—I did, Donna, others—argued strongly that histcon was always the people who were involved in it. And a new mix would produce something new. We had no desire to replicate ourselves. We just needed to find some people who had the right spirit and the right creativity and dynamism, and breadth. The program's tradition offered a structure, a way of doing graduate work. And there was solid evidence that there was still a demand. There were many applications, from excellent students. People coming out of history of consciousness were still getting interdisciplinary jobs, or jobs in

the disciplines. There was thus no reason to think the program couldn't be reinvented, should the right people be brought in. It was a failure of imagination to say that histcon could not be rebuilt.

So we fought against the idea of closure. But when the money was pulled, when the second perfect storm hit, and when it was clear there would be no further hirings and that we were essentially down to two people, I at least felt—I'll speak for myself—that it would be better to arrange a dignified death.

Still, colleagues who I respect, like Barbara Epstein, didn't agree. She worked as chair to keep it alive. And the deans weren't willing to close histcon, because histcon is the signature, the brand. All over the world, it equals UCSC humanities. So the program is being kept alive now, with the two permanent faculty, and with several faculty on what are, in effect, joint appointments from other departments. Their FTE are still located in those departments, but they are committed to working in histcon and are voting members of the department. They're admitting students—something I feel very ambivalent about. I think, probably, the name will be preserved and the program will be kept alive. It may again flourish, but it will never be the robust program with fifty-five, sixty Ph.D. students. That's over.

It may be that something new will emerge. And if it is new, it must be something that I can't imagine. So at this point I should simply fall silent. I really can't say anything more. I make no predictions about its future. I am very leery of taking the position, which I was skirting a moment ago, of "the glory days of histcon are over." Yes, there are glory days that are over. And for some, perhaps, they weren't so glorious. And then, there are other days. The department can still attract remarkable students. Perhaps they will harken back to the program's

original crop: risk-taking anti-professionals, diamonds in the rough, people that really can't fit in a conventional program. Perhaps we can still find them a good committee of faculty from the still-remarkable UCSC scene. Maybe history of consciousness will synergistically combine with other interdisciplinary programs in the division. The feminist studies department is just starting its own Ph.D. program. There are other Ph.D. programs with which a smaller, but more interactive, histcon could work catalytically. So we'll see.

Vanderscoff: I have one last question about all this. You've cited histcon's relative isolation under a series of factors, including the Center for Cultural Studies. There's also the fact it doesn't have an undergraduate major and there's this chronic shortage of TAs as a result and so on. To what extent do you think this isolation was a factor, in addition to the budget cuts? And to what extent do you think changes in that isolation could potentially be a way out?

Clifford: Those are all excellent questions. And they bring up some very important structural things. The whole question of TAs and histcon's role in the division, and actually more widely in the university is very important. One of the reasons histcon existed even through the early periods where people were skeptical about it and thought that it was anarchic and falling apart was that it provided TAs for all sorts of programs that needed them. Today there are many more graduate programs in the university, which means there are fewer TAs for histcon students. That, in itself, I think, was going to force a decline in size of the program. The program would've had to shrink, because TAs are the meat and drink of its graduate student support. We can't compete with the rich

universities in student support. We give very meager fellowships and we oblige our students to do a lot of teaching.

That said, I don't think that the TAship market, if we can call it that, was about to dry up completely. And I don't expect it will. The university has grown in absolute numbers and the new grad programs are small. So I think that there will be TA support for histcon students. Some shrinkage of the size, as I said, was inevitable. But again, I don't think it's going to disappear. Of course, a lot depends on the number of TAs that come to the division through the formulas that are decreed by the system. There's been, as with so much else, a constant and relentless shrinkage in this area. Just as endlessly, endlessly, we've been told to do more with less.

When does one reach the breaking point? We've already reached the point where the cuts are deep into bone. In other words, even if significant funding were miraculously to return to UCSC humanities, I think the damage could not be repaired. Every department is needy. Some, like literature, badly damaged. Programs like American Studies are gone. Histcon could possibly be strengthened, but it's a Ph.D. operation and relatively costly. It's going to stay small.

The question of histcon's isolation is, I think, a real one. Histcon, partly as a result of its success, began to think of itself more as a department, and less as an interdivisional catalyst. I already suggested that the Center for Cultural Studies took away some of that wider role. And that may be part of the story. But I think that the department itself bears some responsibility for a kind of inwardness, perhaps a certain sense of entitlement that it developed. Which meant, too, that when the going got tough there wasn't an active group of allies

in other departments ready to step in and fight for histcon. That's not to say that there was hostility. There may have been a little *Schadenfreude* from some people. But no, I think there was genuine good will.

I think most everyone wanted, and still wants, history of consciousness to survive. From many in the division I remember hearing really heartfelt expressions of concern and even anguish that such a program might be allowed to disappear. They felt that it was cutting the heart out of something very special. I don't think such feelings were insincere. But history of consciousness didn't have a robust network of allied faculty. We weren't involved in collaborative relations with other programs to the extent that we might have been, and I think that would have strengthened our position.

Now, it may be that necessity will require more synergy—to use the administrative buzz word. I think this has to happen if the program is going to survive—and I still think it's an 'if'—if it's going to survive histcon has to be more collaborative. It has to depend more, structurally, on people from other departments. Not just as members on thesis committees, but as more than that. Teaching, co-teaching, perhaps admitting students into hyphenated programs, or multiyear projects. Histcon becomes less a city on a hill, less a unique, elite program and something much more interconnected. That could be good, I think. That could be a positive outcome from the good and bad times we've gone through. As I said, time will tell.

In Search of Renewal: the UCSC Campus as a Generative Site

Vanderscoff: Well, moving forward and coming towards our conclusion on UCSC more broadly. You've spent your entire professional career here, and this

has, I imagine, provided you with a certain niche—academia viewed through a screen of redwoods.

Clifford: (laughs)

Vanderscoff: What has UCSC done for you personally as an institutional context?

Clifford: Well, that's a hard question for me to think about, really. I feel a bit sheepish when you say I've spent my entire professional career at UCSC, because that could certainly turn one into a provincial, some sort of a peasant tied to a particular world. (laughs) There's something no doubt unreal and isolated in UCSC, and in particular the UCSC that I know and love: the UCSC that does have roots in the original vision of interdisciplinarity, even if that strand doesn't pass through the colleges anymore. There is still something distinctive about the part of UCSC I've been involved in, where collaborative work can cross borders that in other universities would be very difficult to cross. People don't bat an eye if I do anthropology in histcon. If somebody in anthropology writes a historical book, people in history don't get angry and feel like their turf has been invaded.

That's special, and I realize that when I go to other places, as I have—I may be a provincial, but I've taught at Yale and University College London, the École des Hautes Études in Paris, and in Berlin. When I go to other universities, I see that they don't operate this way. People are more boxed in. The freedom and the permission that I've enjoyed and that I still feel in the air at UCSC just isn't there. So there's a kind of style that I think I've acquired at UCSC that I miss

when I go elsewhere. I think people see it in me. Things that they say suggest that there's something about UCSC, an aura or a style or a way of doing intellectual business: open and flexible—serious, but also casual. I don't know really how to describe it, because of course I can't see myself the way others do. But that I think there's something real there.

Vanderscoff: You've mentioned to me, speaking of UCSC more particularly in terms of its physical aspect, that you're a part of a group that focuses on UCSC as a campus in context with the landscape, the architecture, so on.²⁵ What is the nature of the inquiry of that group? What has been the dynamic that you've explored about the campus itself, physically?

Clifford: This is something that in retirement I've wandered into. Over the last ten years or so I've become a serious amateur photographer—or rather a collector of images rather than a photographer—liberated by digital photography.²⁶ Point and shoot, a kind of perceptual prosthetic. One of the things that photography did for me was it made me see the campus with fresh eyes. I found myself going all over the campus, taking pictures in different, seasons, different lights, trying to make nonstandard images. For example, there's a certain set of pictures that you see in all the campus publicity, certain views. But the sun is always shining, have you noticed?

Vanderscoff: (laughs).

²⁵ "Mentioned" in our pre-interview meeting.

²⁶ See Jim Clifford's photographs of UCSC at <http://frodo.ucsc.edu/~jcliff/UCSC/>

Clifford: There's no rainy reason in any of these pictures. Whereas if you take pictures you'll know that many if not almost all of your best pictures originate in the rainy season, because that's when the colors really come out. That's when the campus is literally saturated. Inside the redwood forest, the rainy season is the time to take pictures. Fog is wonderful. Sunlight—ho hum. Fog—great.

That said, photography made me see and think about the campus as a special place. We all say, "Oh it's so beautiful." But to really get behind the clichéd language and see what it is that is special about the site and its structures—I started to do that through taking pictures. For example, I got interested in how the buildings sometimes seem to be actually invaded by the trees, and the relation of the built environment to the natural environment, and trying to capture that photographically.

At one point I got into a conversation with Frank Zwart.²⁷ Frank was, for a very long time, campus architect. Therefore he's been involved in the thinking and planning for many, many of the buildings that were added. And he was conversant with earlier campus architects and knows the whole tradition of campus architecture, which is a remarkable tradition. We have slipped, if I can put it this way, or introduced a university of now seventeen thousand students into a redwood forest, among rugged knolls and deep ravines, on the edge of a great meadow, overlooking a fantastic bay. And we haven't screwed it up. Of

²⁷ Frank Zwart has done an oral history with the Regional History Project. See Irene Reti, Interviewer and Editor, *Growth and Stewardship: Frank Zwart's Four Decades at UCSC* (Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 2011). Available in full text at <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/ucsc/growth-and-stewardship-frank-zwarts-four-decades-at-uc-santa-cruz>

course, if you build a university you're going to disturb nature. It was never pure nature anyway. The redwoods are all second growth, and Cowell Ranch was a site of industrial production.

Vanderscoff: All the limestone works.

Clifford: Yes, lime works of a major scale. But that said, we haven't screwed it up. Of course, we've knocked down a few trees. There are certain buildings that some people don't like. And other people don't like others. There're always one or two things that irritate you. But for me, there's nothing really horrible on this campus. The sense of beauty, the sense of magic, the sense of a special place has come through. There's been some real restraint. We went from a few thousand students to seventeen thousand students without adding a single new road of any size. Now that's amazing. There's one basic loop: that's it. Earlier plans had that loop turning into a four-lane road. That has been resisted. The founding commitment to not build in the Great Meadow has been respected. Amazing.

Anyway, I was talking with Frank Zwart about campus architecture. And, of course, when you say 'architecture,' it's not just about putting up buildings. It's about how they interact with the environment and how they dialogue with trees, with the ravines, with the extremely variegated terrain onto which this campus had to be put. Frank was fascinated about this and provided a lot of details. We said, "You know, we should do something with this."

So we've formed a small study group. Michael Cowan has joined us, and Virginia Jansen, retired from art history, who had actually taught a course on campus architecture with Reyner Banham, the great polymathic historian of architecture and technology and virtually everything else, who taught for a while

at UCSC. We're just an informal group thinking about all this. We'll probably try to pull something together about the history of the built environment here for the fiftieth anniversary sessions coming up in a couple years, and it's just something that we're all interested in from our different angles.

Vanderscoff: What sort of unified effort is this group dedicating itself towards? What do you hope to crystallize or achieve or distill about this campus and how do you hope to present that?

Clifford: We all have our different takes and our different agendas, and it's quite possible we'll come out of this collaboration not with a unified book, website, exhibition—whatever it may be. We may just produce separate projects of some form.

That said, what I see as the value of the project is this: I think I've talked about the narratives of decline that are endemic at UC Santa Cruz. The place is being ruined almost from the beginning. Those stories have gone into high gear recently, with the devastating budget cuts we've been going through. We all have a story about how something essential that was lost, whether it was the colleges or the narrative evaluations or Elfland or histcon or God knows what.

Vanderscoff: Right, sure.

Clifford: There's truth in all of these stories. I'm certainly not one of those who thinks the campus should just get with the twenty-first century program: onward and upward with making an R1 research campus that looks like every other corporately organized campus around the country. I do think that the specialness,

the radical difference of UCSC, is in danger of being lost. Much of it has been destroyed. We need to defend what's left. And if there's one thing that's left that's special, that in some way secretes the spirit—the founding spirit, maybe—if there's one thing that really is left and that we haven't yet ruined, it's the campus itself. You can't come here and not feel you're in a special place. I've brought people to UCSC and they all just say, "Wow!" You take them across those bridges and you go through that wonderful dreamlike alternation between being deep down in the forest and then suddenly the curtain parts and you're high up on a hill looking out over a vast expanse of water. I mean, this is a place unlike anywhere else. Or you go wandering down into a ravine, losing sight of the university in the great trees and underbrush, and then suddenly above you—a big building. Maybe the library. It's astonishing.

Vanderscoff: Yes, absolutely.

Clifford: An experience. So I think that there's a way the campus itself secretes a utopic potential. Or sometimes I take the word from the work of Michel Foucault: a "heterotopic" potential. Utopia is usually thought of, you know, as something in the future—some distant, unreal place. Heterotopias, for Foucault, are places on the side, or places that aren't in the mainstream but hold some sense of specialness. Parks can sometimes play a role like that. He talks about how in the old European cities, packed cemeteries in the middle of the city had that sense of a going into a place that wasn't really in the same time. There are various other dimensions that he brings up in his analysis.

But whether we use Foucault's term or not, UCSC to me remains a place apart, and a place that holds somehow inside it the seeds of something: the seeds

of something different, something new, something radical. It's a kind of spatial reminder of a vision and of a project. It's still something to live up to. That's how I feel about it. Maybe I'm just whistling in the neoliberal wind, but I think there's something essential, and something that could be reborn and made new in a place like this.

So I want to help deepen a consciousness of the campus. Not in an aesthetic or nostalgic way, you know, "This beautiful thing that we have," but seeing it as something generative. That would be the trick. How to think about it as something where—well, the whole discourse of beauty seems to me not the place to go. Everyone says, "Oh, it's so beautiful. How majestic the redwoods are." If we could figure out language that didn't fall into cliché but could talk about the alternation of spaces that you find on this campus: the many paths through it and the affect, the emotional responses it can evoke. But first you have to notice it. Of course, if you work here, you're busy getting from place A to place B in your rat race and you don't even see the place.

Yet we've all had the experience of driving home, and maybe it's six p.m. with the sun is going down shedding its oblique light across the Great Meadow, revealing all its textures and contours, and you can see all the way out to Moss Landing and beyond to the mountains of Big Sur. And you think, "Wait a minute." You stop your car, pull over and you say to yourself, "This is not wallpaper. This is real." I sometimes feel that way on the bridges that go across the ravines, or really throughout the campus. That's something that we need to have language for and to think about. So this is just a partly formulated rumination in the utopic/heterotopic mode about the UCSC campus.

In our group, we've been studying the early campus. Who were the early architects and landscape planners who understood how the campus should be built. It's a lot more than those stories of Dean McHenry forbidding the cutting down of redwood trees without his permission. That story is true, it seems. But there were some very important visionaries, especially the great landscape architect Thomas Church, who need to be recognized. Church's plan and spatial philosophy was formative and it has been sustained over the years.²⁸ I'm thinking of the key decision not to put the whole thing out in the meadow, but to occupy the transition zone, using big trees and uneven land as, in effect, architectural partners. Don't try to compete with the redwoods; they'll always win. That was Church's perspective. A certain modesty and lightness of touch in architecture's relations with the land and its creatures.

Vanderscoff: So you sense a thread of continuity in the land and the architecture itself? You're investigating the nature of that spell and what that does for you as a thinker?

Clifford: Well, as you say, I'm grasping, struggling for a thread of continuity that isn't just a relation to the past but is a continuity with the ongoing site that is generative, that comes out of the past and through me and the present and into a future. A future which isn't one of conformity—not a matter of building yet another 'great university' that is basically out of a cookie cutter. No.

²⁸ Thomas Church's "charter" for the campus is a memo embedded in an oral history conducted with UCSC's first Campus Architect, Jack Wagstaff. "Thomas B. Church Oral History Project," Regional Oral History Project. The Bancroft Library, 1978.

So, a resistance to conformity—something of that spirit that I absorbed during my career here. The permission that this place gives to wander, to get lost, to innovate, to cross boundaries, to transgress: I think that's something we need to be able to name and carry forward in new ways. It's a sense that even in a corporate university there can be local niches where unique forms of life can persist. Mutant forms, perhaps, seeds. Things like histcon, those kind of ad hoc improvised forms of research collaboration that I think the greater humanities have been good at doing and must continue to be good at doing. We need to find ways to name and recognize them, to support them in modest but real ways.

You know, the Center for Cultural Studies was an example of something really quite good and robust. It was done with very limited resources. Compare its budget to the Stanford Humanities Center, for example. Our budget was never much more than a hundred thousand a year, and it became considerably less than that. The Stanford Humanities Center's annual budget is in the millions, and in the years when the Center for Cultural Studies was strong, our program was as robust and exciting as theirs. So you can do a lot with the right spirit and the right commitment and flexibility. I think that's something we can bring forward from the early spirit of the campus. That spirit was, in many ways pretty crazy. Weird enough to found a program called history of consciousness! We need to find ways of talking about how to make that new.

Vanderscoff: New modes of articulation.

Clifford: Yes, entirely new forms. And that means it's going to be working with contemporary technology in unexpected ways. "The pursuit of truth in the company of friends." Something of that spirit will come forward, and it will take

new shapes. Maybe it'll be online. I don't know—something like a wiki, or all the other emerging forms that people like me find so confusing. I see this as UCSC's legacy, a kind of open politics of the possible. It's a legacy of the sixties, as Fredric Jameson put it, "without apology" and without nostalgia. Something fundamentally rebellious, perverse, romantic, critical—for times we can't imagine.

How's that? A little utopian boilerplate for you. (laughter)

Vanderscoff: Thank you very much, that was wonderful. We'll close with that.

About the Interviewer

Cameron Vanderscoff is a contract oral historian based out of Santa Cruz, California. His published oral histories include *Hayden White: Frontiers of Consciousness at UCSC, 1978-1994*, *John Dizikes: A Life of Learning and Teaching at UC Santa Cruz*, and *John C. Daly: A Life of Public Service in a Changing Santa Cruz, 1953-2013*. He currently is at work on several more oral histories under the auspices of the Regional History Project and Cowell College. For him, oral history work is a means of accessing the past that is based on individual narrative—it values the personal, and centers on story. In its scholarly dimensions oral history can be very theoretically concerned and complex, but at the same time it is wonderfully straightforward, a celebration of curiosity, interchange and experience. Cameron finds it a privilege to engage with narrators and listen to their explanations of their lives; their openness in sharing their insights and intentions has provided an ongoing education for him, one that has profoundly impacted his own perspectives and practices.

Cameron graduated magna cum laude from UCSC in June of 2011, with honors in both history and intensive literature (creative writing focus). In his time as a student he was affiliated with Cowell College, where he delivered the commencement address and worked concurrently as college library lead and resident assistant. He is a recipient of the Dizikes Writing Prize for academic essays. Beyond oral history work, he uses his time to write fiction, practice blues/slide and jazz guitar and travel with a notebook when the opportunity reveals itself.