FERNAND BRAUDEL AND GLOBAL HISTORY[1]

The Life and the Man

Fernand Braudel (1902-1985) was one of the great historians of the twentieth century. He published his great work on *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World of Philip II in 1949*. His other major later work, the three volumes of *Civilization and Capitalism*, was published in 1979. Throughout his later life he exerted a great influence not only through his writing but also as Director and Editor of *Annales*, the journal founded by Bloch and Lucien Febvre. He was also president of the sixth section of the Ecole Des Hautes Etudes and founder and administrator of the Maison Des Sciences de L'Homme and a Professor at the College de France.

Braudel was clearly a man of immense creative energy, his five volumes on the Mediterranean and Capitalism, comprised nearly three thousand pages, but were only two thirds of his printed output. He was also a considerable linguist, reading in original languages in the archives in Spanish, French, Italian and other languages.

. By the age of 36, Braudel had deep experience of three different civilizations, his own French attachment to Lorraine, the Islamic/North African experience of teaching in Algeria for about ten years, and the Portuguese/South American experience of teaching in Sao Paolo for three years. This had an opening effect which may explain his realization of long-distance links and interest in world history. It also gave him a sense of curiosity about his own world. He emphasized in his work that it was important to feel 'surprise and distance - those important aids to comprehension are both equally necessary for an understanding of that which surrounds you - surrounds you so evidently that you can no longer see it clearly.' [2]

Like some latter-day shaman, he underwent a conversion experience accompanied with a long period of seclusion. When he reacted against diplomatic and short-term political history in the late 1930's, and had gathered most of the data, he then found himself in a German concentration camp at Lubeck for five years. It is tempting to speculate that this allowed him to fuse his thought and send it in a different direction. His shame, helplessness and remorse at the defeat of his beloved France seems to have set in his blood his most famous contribution to historical method, the distinction between the three levels of time.

> All these occurrences which poured in upon us from the radio and the newspapers of our enemies, or even the news from London which our clandestine receivers gave us - I had to outdistance, reject, deny them. Down with occurrences, especially the vexing ones! I have to believe that history, destiny, was written at a much more profound level.[3]

He explained that

> In the course of a gloomy captivity I fought hard to escape from the chronicle of those difficult years. To reject the events and the time of events was to put one's self beyond them, in a shelter, to look at them from a little distance, to

[1] This is an expanded version of a talk given on 1st February 1996 at the Institute of Historical Research at a seminar on global history organized by Patrick O'Brien. I have not altered the contents except minimally to improve style and grammar and to expand the notes into a full text.

[2] In ed. Burke, *Economic*,24.

[3] In Mayne preface, *History of Civilizations*, xv.

judge them better and **not too much to believe in them.** From **temps court** to pass to **temps** less **court** and **temps** very long...'[4]

The outcome of his work is indeed impressive. Lucien Febvre described Braudel's 'Mediterranean' volumes as 'this perfect historical work...more than a professional masterpiece. A revolution in the way of conceiving of history...'[5] The usually acerbic J.H.Hexter, despite small criticisms described it as 'a miracle of historical scholarship that shames both my narrow vision and my narrow learning'. The English chronicler of the Annales School, Peter Burke, 'has a good claim to be regarded as the most important work of history of the century'.[6] As for his influence, we are all heirs of Braudel, whether we like it or not. He is part of the air we breathe. Again quoting Burke, '...his contribution to the renewal of historical studies in our time was greater than that of either Marc Bloch or Lucien Febvre, and possibly greater than that of the two scholars together.'[7]

What Braudel created; a tour round the Braudelian museums.

Throughout Braudel's work there are metaphors and they particularly cluster around the idea of levels. In his famous divisions of subject and time into

He made a famous division of subject and time into the following:

structure - longue duree (thousands of years; geological time; geography, culture etc.; for example long-term climatic changes)

conjoncture - moyenne duree (decades or hundreds of years - economic and social time; for example the industrial revolution)

evenement - courte duree (days, weeks, a year; political and diplomatic time – for example the Battle of Lepanto)

Three metaphors appear to represent the 'levels'. The first is of the ocean; the deep, unmoving water; the second is slow movement of the tides; the third is the froth of the waves. Thus, in a famous image he described events as mere 'crests of foam that the tides of history carry on their strong backs'. [8] A second metaphor is geological: the deep rocks, the middle soils, the surface stones and flora and fauna. A third metaphor is architectural, a building with floors or levels. For instance, he writes that the great fairs of the sixteenth century 'can be viewed as a sort of penthouse to the structure, a superstructure and therefore as ballooning out of this superstructure...'[9]

In this sense of implying levels of structure, Braudel is part of that wider structural movement that dominated all of the social sciences in the middle of the twentieth century. Braudel explicitly acknowledges this. In the last lines of the **Mediterranean** he declares, 'By temperament I am a structuralist, little attracted by events and only partly by **conjoncture**, that grouping of events carrying the same sign."[10]

The third, architectural, metaphor gives us a way of approaching his two great works, for they may

---

4 Quoted in Hexter, *On Historians*, 104.

5 Hexter, *On historians*, 111.

6 Burke, *Sociology and History*, 26.

7 In *Dict. of Historians*, s.v. Braudel.

8 Quoted in Burke, *Dict. of Historians*, 50.

9 Braudel, *Afterthoughts*, 25.

10 Quoted in Hexter, 97.

be regarded as museums of the mind, each on three floors, and each holding a number of rooms (chapters) divided into sections. What did the two museums look like? By seeing their organization and content we will begin to approach his strengths and weaknesses.

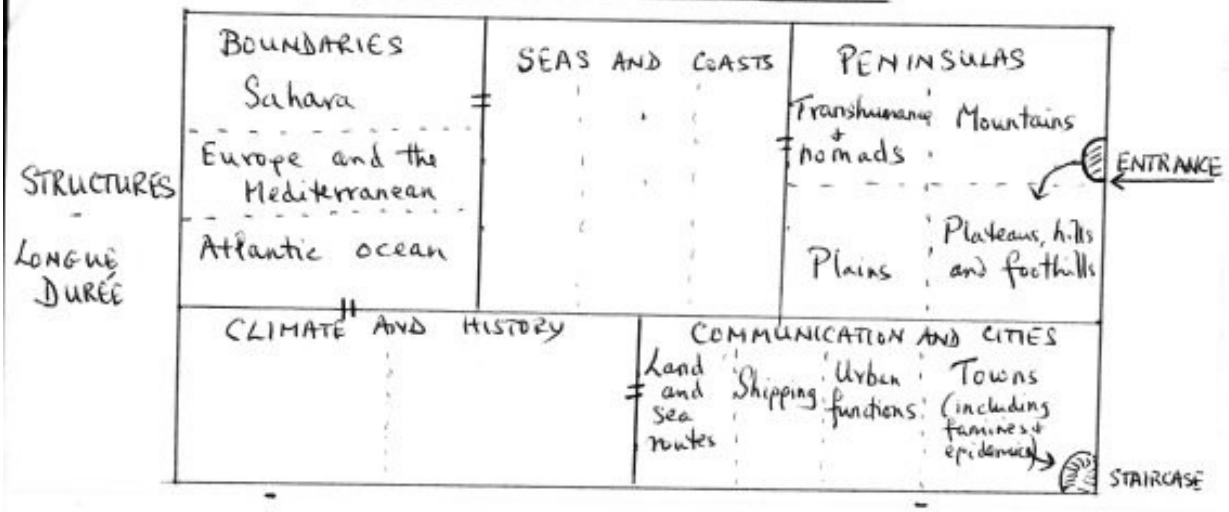
The Museum of the Mediterranean World

This was a museum for which Braudel collected objects over the period 1925 to 1939 and which he laid out in paper during his incarceration between 1940-5.

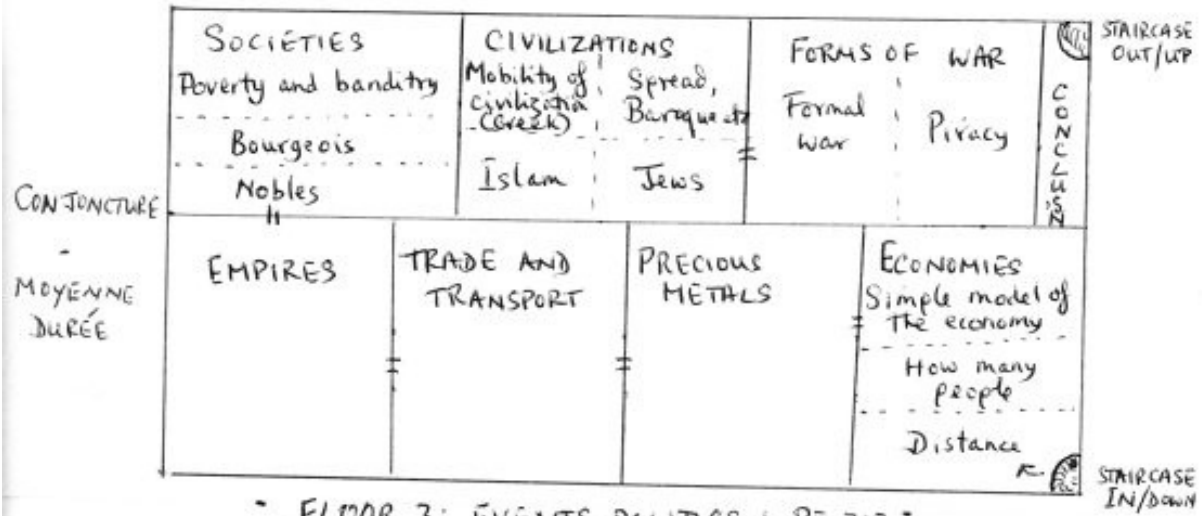
[Below is a rough representation of how the mental museum looked]

MEDITERRANEAN WORLD OF PHILIP II MUSEUM

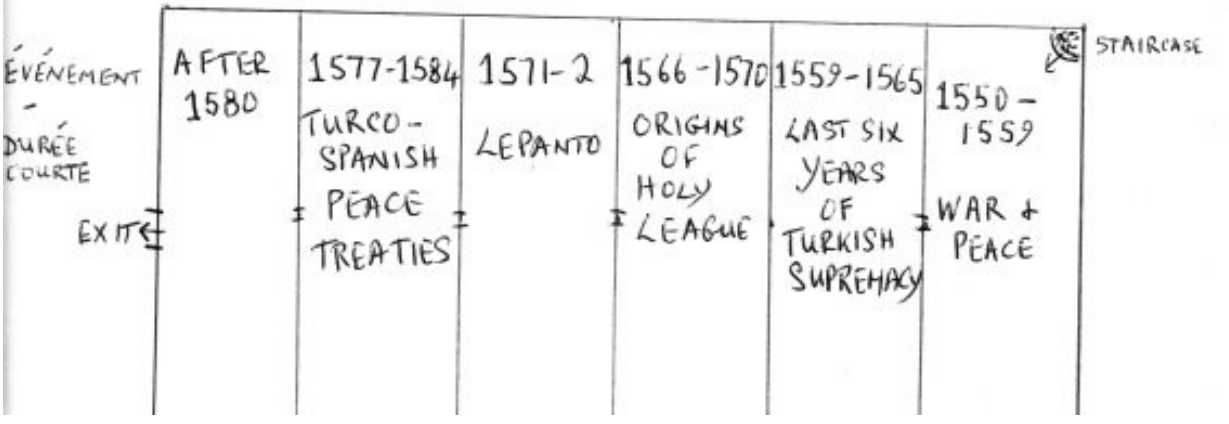
FLOOR 1: ROLE OF THE ENVIRONMENT



FLOOR 2: COLLECTIVE DESTINIES + GENERAL TRENDS



FLOOR 3: EVENTS, POLITICS + PEOPLE



He peopled the rooms with amazing materials. Reading his two volumes takes us on a fascinating and enormously rich journey where we see, feel, hear and sense the great Mediterranean world through the century through Braudel's personalization of natural forces, society and ecology. It is dazzling and enchanting, like a great tapestry or painting, like a majestic work by Breughel or Bosch. Hexter describes Braudel with his 'inexhaustible delight in piling up concrete details - details for detail's sake', Braudel 'is a picaresque, a wanderer with the whole Mediterranean world in the age of Philip II to roam in...'[11] He is a writer in the tradition of Rabelais, with a gargantuan appetite for 'facts'. He has collected a vast number of 'exhibits' for us and arranged them well. We are delighted and overwhelmed. On the whole, the Museum of the Mind works very well and gives a superb picture of an age.

The Museum of Capitalism and Civilization

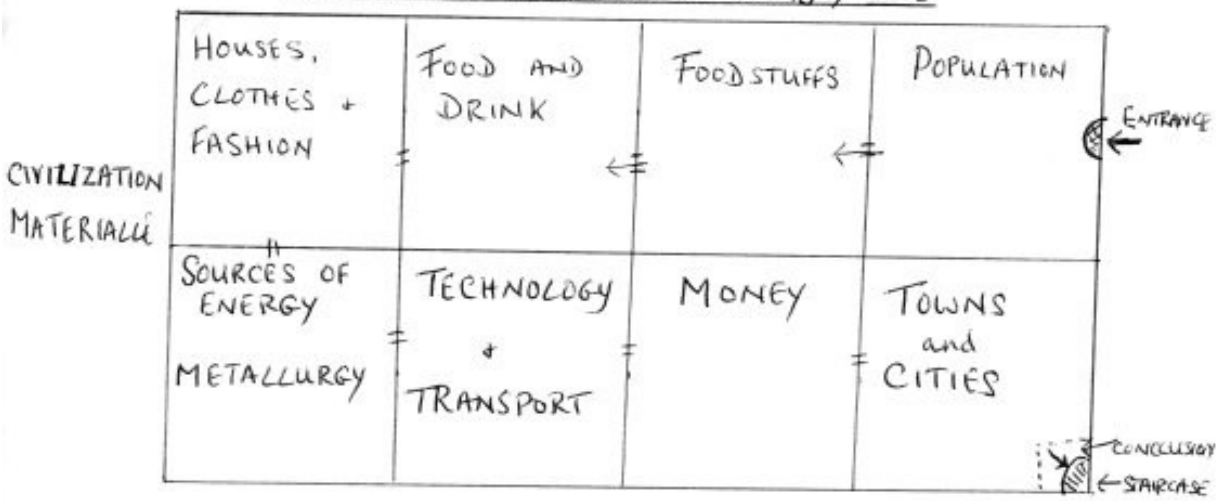
The first Museum was opened to the public in 1949 with the publication of the first edition of *Mediterranean*. Braudel almost immediately started on the second in 1950, which was originally envisaged as one volume, to complement volumes by Lucien Febvre and others, but ended up, twenty-five years later, as a massive work of 1750 pages in 3 volumes.

[Below is a rough representation of how the second museum looked.]

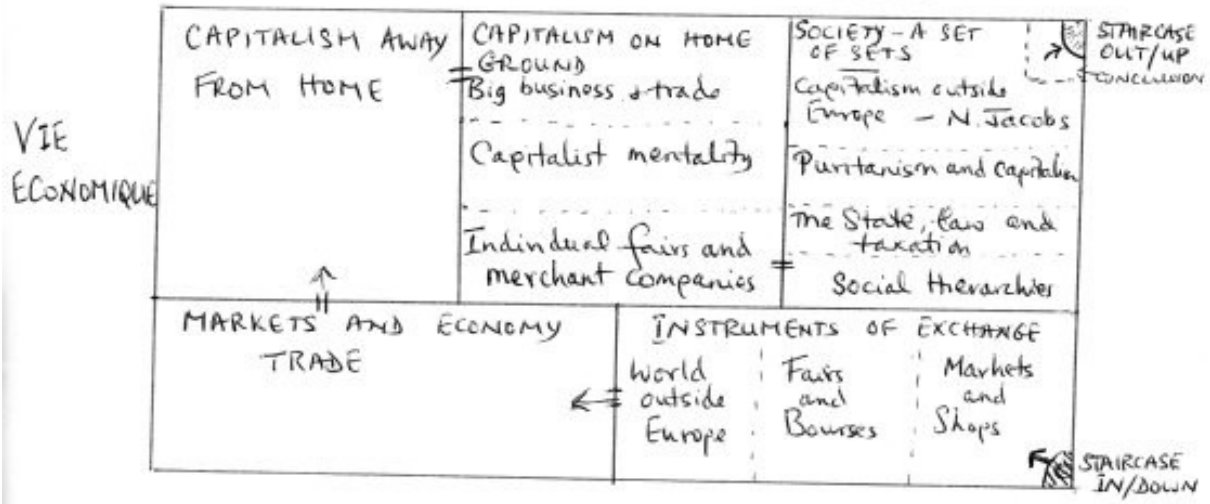
[11] Hexter, On Historians, 122, 127.

CIVILIZATION AND CAPITALISM MUSEUM

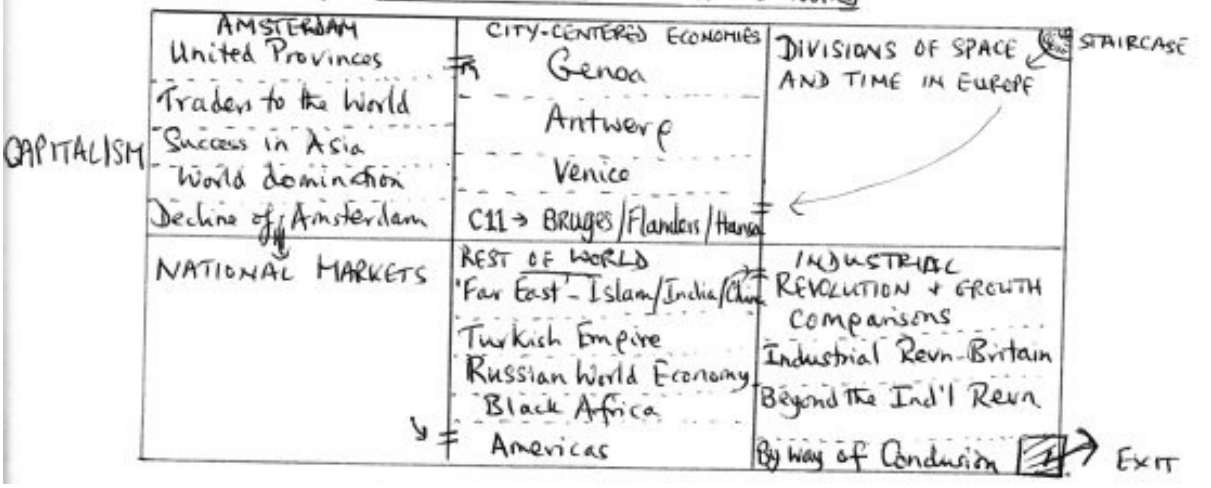
FLOOR 1: THE STRUCTURES OF EVERYDAY LIFE



FLOOR 2: THE WHEELS OF COMMERCE



FLOOR 3: PERSPECTIVES OF THE WORLD



Let us go round this Museum, which is also planned on a three-level principle, though the categories are now somewhat different. At the base is *'Civilization materialle'*, on floor 2 is *'vie economique'*, that is the universal world of markets and commerce, on the top floor is 'high capitalism'. This second effort is less satisfying. Again, many of the individual rooms are great fun, and a storehouse of treasures, but somehow it does not work as well as the *Mediterranean*.

There are some obvious personal reasons for this. The first museum was integrated within the personality of one man, fused in the Lubeck concentration camp. The second museum is constructed by a team of workers, supervised by Braudel, with all the all the inevitable compromises and discontinuities which teamwork tends to entail.

The first Museum was created in a period of slow growth in historical knowledge and helped to found a new discipline. The second construction occurred while the world of social and economic history was expanding exponentially.

Furthermore, Braudel himself was getting tired. In his 'Afterthoughts' to the project, Braudel writes:

'Yet, even though it is limited chiefly to economic history, **Civilisation materielle et capitalisme** has posed many problems for me. There has been a vast amount of documentation to absorb...And so the years have passed. I have despaired of ever reaching the harbour.' He feels the twenty-five years spent on it, is 'no doubt' 'much too long'.

For instance, he admits that there are too many exhibits, placed there just because they were collected. 'In the first chapters of vol. 2 … I may have taken too much pleasure in these details, and some readers may find me a bit long-winded.' He then tries to justify this with a piece of naive empiricism: 'But is it not a good thing for history to be first of all a description, a plain observation, a scrutiny, a classification without too many previously held ideas?' [12]

But the problems are deeper than tiredness and too much data, and they afflict the first Museum as much as a the second, although we overlooked them there. Let us now go over the exhibitions again with a critical eye of a museum designer.

Missing floors and missing rooms in the Museums.

It is well known that Braudel's project was to write 'total' history, that is history that encompassed everything that shapes humankind's destiny. *'Histoire globale, histoire total'*, that is total in coverage in space, and total in its subject matter. 'Faithful to the teaching of Lucien Febvre and Marcel Mauss, the historian will always want to seize the whole, the **totality** of the social.' [13]

But when we look at the two museums there are some important missing areas. In each one, in fact, two whole floors are missing. One is the world of thought and belief, in particular religion. As Hexter put it, 'Of the religious structures, Christianity and Islam … we see nothing from the inside. They are recurrent names, but what gave them life - their interlaced institutions, practices and beliefs is nowhere to be found.'[14] When he moves outside Europe, the same is even more true of the other world religions.

It is this missing floor which perhaps explains why Braudel is so cavalier with Max Weber, trivializing his ideas and never realizing how close he got to solving many of Braudel's questions. For instance, if he really believed, as he wrote that 'For Max Weber capitalism n the modern sense

12 Braudel, Afterthoughts, 20-1.

13 Quoted in Hexter, On Historians, 107.

14 Hexter, On Historians, 119.

of the word was no more and no less than a creation of Protestantism, or, to be even more accurate, of Puritanism',[15] it is not surprising that he should have overlooked Weber's power and subtlety.

Part of this floor could also have been devoted to the history of philosophy, science, literature and 'ideas' in general, compensating for the heavy bias towards the material and the economic.

The other missing floor is the whole world of the institutions of power. Though there is some attention to taxation and some branches of administration, the complexities of political structures are never fully addressed. Even more important is the omission of law and custom; as Hexter writes, 'Routines imbedded in custom and law receive less attention or none'.[16]

As well as two missing floors, there are rooms which are too small; for instance in the Mediterranean, as Hexter says, 'on agriculture and industry there are only a few pages', [17] though this is made up in the later Museum. And other sets of exhibits, for example the whole world of family life and marriage, or the whole world of art, aesthetics, morals and etiquette tends to be scattered rather thinly over the museums.

None of this would matter if the standard had not been raised so high.

The missing logic; or 'What is the Question?'

As a friend of Lucien Febvre and his insistence on avoiding 'un question mal posee', Braudel was aware that books, like Museums, need a good problematique. For instance, Braudel wrote that 'The region is not the framework of research. The framework of research is the problem, selected with full independence and responsibility of mind...'[18] But does he practice what he preaches? One sign that he does not do so is given by his admirers.

Thus Hexter writes, having searched for 'the problem' in vain in the preface to **Mediterranean**, 'Not really **histoire probleme** at all, **La Mediterranee**. Rather **histoire totale...**.[19] Another sign that the problematique or logic is shaky is in the advice given by Hexter, which is basically that the Mediterranean Museum is one which we can 'read'/'visit' in any order. He advises us, 'Do not earnestly (as I did) start at the beginning go to the end, then stop. Rather open at random, find the beginning of a sub-section, and start there. If what you read does not interest or please you, close and open at random again'.[20] A Museum which has no internal logic, leading from room to room, is a certain kind of museum, but it does not sound like one based on an over-arching problem.

In fact Hexter shows well that there was a tension between *Histoire probleme*, which 'marches under the standard of elegance' and *histoire total* under the 'standard of abundance'. Braudel with his 'torrent of words' belongs to the latter.[21]

There are numerous signs that Braudel himself realizes that he has become lost in the woods of delightful data. After writing the massive 'Civilization and Capitalism' he meditated on the work in his 'Afterthoughts'. The three volumes themselves had failed to come to any definite conclusions. In the first volume, two pages of conclusions were appended to the 561 pages of text. In the second volume, there were one and a half pages of conclusion after 599 pages of text. At the end of the third

---

15 Braudel, Afterthoughts, 65-6.

16 Hexter, On Historians, 118.

17 Hexter, On Historians, 133.

18 Quoted in Hexter, On Historians, 105.

19 Hexter, On Historians, 133.

20 Hexter, On Historians, 128.

21 Hexter, On Historians, 144.

volume there were 619 pages of text, with thirteen pages ‘By Way of Conclusion’. In all, 17 pages out of 1750 were conclusions, and most of the conclusions themselves are rather vacuous.

In both Museums, the exhibits crowd out the rooms and there is no room for conclusions as we hurriedly move up the spiral staircases between floors. In 'Afterthoughts', a set of lectures in America, Braudel tries to draw together his ideas. Yet we are still left hanging in the air and at the end of it all Braudel sadly admits that 'Here I am, at the end of the puzzle. I am not sure that I have convinced any of my readers along the way.' Nor, in fact, has he convinced himself, admitting that 'The historian has less trouble seeing the hows than the whys...'[22]

The difficulty is that if you ask of each exhibition, ‘this is the answer, what is the question?’ you come away with only a partial reply. At least with *Mediterranean* it is roughly an answer to the question, 'Can one person provide a brilliant description of a part of the world', to which the answer is ‘yes’. With the second volume, it is impossible to formulate the question - though it seems to lie somewhere in the general region of the development of 'civilization', undefined, and 'capitalism', vaguely and often inaccurately defined, over a period of three or four centuries.

This takes us to one root of the problem in the later museum. Although the three volumes are all about 'capitalism', we never receive any firm guidance on what 'capitalism' is. Having rejected Marx and Weber, Braudel puts nothing in their place, except fairly vague remarks such as 'Capitalism and towns were basically the same thing in the West'.[23] He has tremendous problems at this level. He simultaneously argues that there was something dynamic and changing in his period, and that structurally nothing changed; for instance, attacking Weber and the argument of a northern capitalism, he writes 'They invented nothing, either in technology or in business management … a shift of the centre of gravity of the world economy for economic reasons that had nothing whatever to do with the basic or secret nature of capitalism.'[24]

Again, if capitalist instruments are very old and market economies universal for a thousand years or more, what is 'capitalism' at all? He is reduced to an unsatisfactory set of differences or levels, which informs the second museum, namely:

'economic activities that are carried on at the summit' - which is 'capitalism' and expanding.

'market economy' - which is universal

'material life' - which is universal

There are great problems with this. For instance it leads into a topsy-turvy and lop-sided view that 'in the end, it was at the very summit of society that capitalism unfolded first...' (for example the Fuggers) .[25]

One has sympathy for Braudel. Even if he knew what the question was in 1950, it would be unlikely to be the same one in 1960, 1970 or 1975. Questions change over time and many of the great intellectual syntheses over long periods, from Montesquieu’s *Spirit of the Laws*, through Frazer’s *Golden Bough* to Needham’s *Science and Civilization in China* suffer from the same feeling of exhaustion as the writers try to keep up with new information and changing world views over a long period.

---

22 Braudel, Afterthoughts, 111,80.

23 Braudel, Capitalism, 400.

24 Braudel, Afterthoughts, 66-7.

25 Braudel, Aftethoughts, 63.

The missing connections

At one level, as we have seen, Braudel was a structuralist, believing in different levels of structures. But there is another element of French structuralism which is missing, all the odder for the fact that it would have helped to create a better *'histoire sociale totale'*, this is the relational aspect of structuralism. In other words, that meaning does not lie in things in themselves, but in their relations and the 'relations of relations', as his colleagues such as Levi-Strauss or Louis Dumont must surely have been telling him, or he would have learnt from Marcel Mauss.

Let us look at this again in the Museums. They are laid out on three floors, with a narrow staircase attaching them, but not only are different rooms on the same floors not open to each other, but worse still, the three floors are hardly connected.

This defect, namely that there is very little articulation between *structure*, *conjuncture* and *evenement*, has been widely recognized from the first, even by his most enthusiastic critics.

Stuart Hughes wrote that 'In Braudel's work the three major sections...never quite came together.' Felix Gilbert commented that 'Braudel's emphasis on the importance of factors of **longue duree** has made the gap between structure and event almost unbridgeable...' Bernard Baylyn observed that 'The parts of his "world" are all there, but they lie inert, unrelated, discrete.'

Braudel himself recognized, after the end of his second effort, that 'Breaking down the problem in order to understand it more fully dividing it into three levels or stages, amounts to mutilating and manipulating a much more complex economic and social reality.' He is well aware that 'In truth we must grasp the whole in order to grasp at the same time the reasons for the change...'[26] Yet he is unable to do just that.

There are many reasons for this failure, among them his deep emotional dislike for the 'event', born out of a double rejection - the rejection of 'one damned thing after another' of the Rankean tradition of early C20 political and diplomatic history, against which he was reacting, and his personal experience of the terrible 'events' after 1939.

As a result, the possibility that he would be able to move easily from event to structure was ruled out. For instance, he wrote 'Can a phenomena of the *longue duree* be derived from little causes? I doubt it'.[27] In the days of chaos theory, we know that he was wrong, and the 'Cleopatra's nose' theory of history, while it can be overdone, cannot be dismissed so cavalierly, as many great historians, including Montesquieu, have recognized.

Another difficulty is that most phenomena operate at all three levels, and the easy equation, for instance, of politics with '*evenements*', is mistaken - monarchy is an institution at the middle level, some components of climate, such as hurricanes, are 'events' and so on.

Of course, it would be unfair and untrue to argue that he sees no links. But the tendency of his method is to keep the levels apart. This is a pity for there are hints in his later work, and particularly in **Afterthoughts**, that he was aware that the solution to the central problem of the emergence of modernity does not lie in any particular room or floor, but in their interrelations.

In an interesting passage he admitted that the secret of the growing dominance of 'capitalism' lay not in itself, but in its relations to other things. It partly lay in its relations to politics; 'capitalism only triumphs when it becomes identified with the state, when it is the state'.[28] It partly lies in its relations

[26] Braudel, Afterthoughts, 116.

[27] Braudel, On History, 149.

[28] Braudel, Afterthoughts, 64.

to religion; religion is usually conservative and opposes capitalism, but sometimes it makes an accommodation.[29] It partly lies in its relation to the social structure, and particularly hierarchies, which are permeable, yet allow long-term continuities and the accumulation of wealth in instituted bodies such as families.[30].

Thus he realizes that 'the growth and success of capitalism requires certain social conditions. They require a certain tranquility in the social order and a certain neutrality, or weakness, or permissiveness by the state...'[31] He realized that this set of inter-relations was propitious in the West and in Japan, but not elsewhere.

If he had pursued this relational approach more thoroughly and earlier, following the hints of structuralist anthropology and Max Weber, De Tocqueville and others, he would have reached further, a fact which he implicitly recognizes in his long and 'curious' aside on Norman Jacobs at the end of **The Wheels of Commerce.** He recognized that by adopting a Weberian perspective, Jacobs, in a book of 220 pages published in 1958, had made more progress towards understanding the development of capitalism than Braudel in his more than 4000 pages.

Demographic history as a test case.

Many of the above remarks are sweeping and general. To end I will just take us into one part of the display in each exhibition, dealing with a particular facet of his problem. This will give us a concrete chance to look at his methods in practice and to show their strengths and weaknesses. The area is one which interested Braudel considerably namely the questions of population and the escape from the Malthusian trap.

In the 'Mediterranean' Museum, the subject of population is mainly dealt with in two places, under 'Towns' on the first floor, and under 'How Many People' on the second. Braudel is well aware of the importance of the ebb and flow of populations. 'The increase in population was a fundamental characteristic of the "long sixteenth century" both in Europe and the Mediterranean, the basis on which everything or almost everything else depended.'[32] He suggested tentatively that there was possibly a doubling of the population between 1500 and 1600. He described the background of epidemics, particularly plague and typhus, and he described the famines in towns and countryside. But there is no attempt to explain either why population rose in this period or what happened later. The nearest we come to a theory is in the patently false idea that 'Everywhere in the C16 man was on the increase, suggesting once against that Ernst Wagemann was right to insist than any large population must increase simultaneously throughout entire humanity.'[33]

Thus, in the **Mediterranean World** a problem - the increase in population - is hinted at, but not solved. Instead we have considerable material on the difficulties of life. The model of perennial high mortality and fertility is accepted: 'This was the world of precarious existences, and at birth life expectations was low'.[34]

In 'Civilization and Capitalism' the subject is dealt with in the very first chapter called 'Population'. This is partly a recognition by Braudel that population is of the utmost importance. His account of the subject does highlight what the problem reasonably.

---

29 Braudel, Afterthoughts, 65.

30 Braudel, Afterthoughts, 67.

31 Braudel, Afterthoughts, 74.

32 Braudel, Mediterranean, i, 326.

33 Braudel, Mediterranean, i, 402.

34 Braudel, Mediterranean, I, 413-4.

Firstly, he recognizes the importance of the growth of population. The demographic ebbs and flows are the central fact. 'These basic facts make almost everything else seem secondary. Clearly, our starting point must be the people of the world.'[35] World population, he thought, doubled between 1300 and 1800. 'This is indubitably the basic fact in world history from the C15 to C18 ... the most important and disturbing fact that we will record in this book'.[36] He recognizes that the battle with disease is one of **the** central events of history. 'Is this mighty struggle at some deep level the essential history of mankind?'[37]

Not merely does he recognize the problem in general, but he realizes that the central question is how humankind escaped from what he terms the 'biological ancien regime', but which I term the 'Malthusian trap'.[38] Building on his earlier accounts, he gives us a strong picture of this 'biological ancien regime', which consists of universal famines, epidemics and wars. It is a world where birth and death rates were characteristically high and balanced, with crude rates of about 40/1000. There seemed no escape from this. 'Until the eighteenth century, the population was enclosed within an almost intangible circle'. Or again, 'Not before the eighteenth century were the frontiers of the impossible crossed and the hitherto unsurpassable population ceiling exceeded.'[39] Only in certain restricted areas and from the eighteenth century, did parts of the world 'break free' of these pressures.[40]

His image of escape from a set of restrictions is well put as follows. 'What was shattered in both China and Europe with the C18 was a biological **ancien regime**, a set of restrictions, obstacles, structures, proportions and numerical relationships that had hitherto been the norm'.[41] Until that time, humans had been trapped in a cyclical demographic situation, the last phase of which had occurred in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. 'Man's increase itself became a burden and again brought about his poverty. From 1560 or 1580 onwards in France, Spain, Italy and probably the whole Western world population again became too dense. The monotonous story begins afresh...'[42]

This is indeed a problem - to explain the population rise that occurred within this regime, for instance in the sixteenth century, and then in the C18. And we should add that it is a problem that no-one has yet fully solved. But how far does Braudel get?

He starts by considering the two major theories which existed in the middle of this century, namely that there were advances in medicine and the treatment of the environment, including sanitation and drinking water, which could account for the changes. He accepts that there may be some truth in both, but without examining either in any detail, more or less dismisses them on rather curious grounds. Drawing on Wagemann again, he points out that there was an equally great increase in population in China and Russia as there was in Europe. Since he believes that the medical and environmental changes could not also have happened there, he argues that they cannot be the root cause.[43] There are, of course, all sorts of logical errors here, even if his facts are right. The same effect can have different causes in different places.

---

35 Braudel, Structures, 31.

36 Structures, 41.

37 Structures, 88.

38

39 Braudel, Afterthoughts, 9.

40 Braudel, Structures, 91.

41 Braudel, Structures, 70.

42 Braudel, Structures, 33.

43 Braudel, Structures, 47.

If it was not medical change or environmental improvements, what was it? Here he reaches for two extraneous causes. He describes certain climatic changes in the thirteenth to eighteenth centuries which might have effected population, such as the little ice age. Yet he never worked out in detail how the two fitted causally. It is clear that Braudel himself is only half-convinced.[44] While it might be plausible to explain rising mortality in the seventeenth century in this way, it is difficult to see how it would account for the 'escape' in the eighteenth.

His second explanation is changes in epidemic disease due to changes in micro-organisms. He writes that 'Historians of medicine have suggested, rightly in my view, that every pathogenic agent has its own history...Here lies the cause of the complicated advances and retreats of disease, the surprise appearances...' He illustrates this with the case of influenza.[45] It is an idea worth developing. But in order to be convincing, one would need to examine the complicated history of each of the major diseases, water-borne, vector-borne and air-borne. He does not begin to do so. If he had, he would have found that this explanation only gets one a little way, with certain diseases. His failure to do so probably lies behind his admission that 'These comments only take us to the threshold of the basic problems of a history of population.'[46] It also means that he ends up with affirmations which disguise the ultimate futility of his attempt, for example that 'This difficult and miraculous long-term rise was the triumph of the force of numbers, on which so much depended.'[47]

What is sad is that, with his width of knowledge and desire to see things 'in the whole', he was better placed that almost anyone else to have made a real contribution to solving some very difficult problems in this area.

His failure stems from several weaknesses. Firstly he lumps all of the 'ancien regime' together - not recognizing the huge variations between regions. His picture of a high mortality and high fertility regime only fits parts of Europe at certain times. Secondly, his dependence on Wagemann and refusal even to discuss Malthus (because, as Braudel claims, he had been too much discussed) cuts him off from certain solutions. Thirdly, his failure to link the population room to all the other rooms - for instance to the next rooms on foodstuffs and food and drink, and houses and clothes and technology, leaves us with rather barren solutions.

Ultimately his failure reflects the fact that he is more interested in descriptions than in solutions. That is fine for a certain kind of Museum. Yet we need to recognize the limitation if we are to learn from him. Thus we can pillage his Museum for nice examples and figures, and even receive some marvelous overview insights. But the solutions to problems are not there.

What do we learn?

We learn from this project that there is a contradiction between 'histoire totale' and 'histoire problematique'. We are reminded that we should constantly be asking oneself what one's question is. We are reminded that the inter-actions between spheres and between levels are as important as the things themselves. We see that it is important to set up a simple model or 'normal' state, but always to remember that it is artificial, and almost all actual cases deviate from it.

Braudel's emphases remind us that there is more to life than material and economic factors; that the world of ideas, sentiments, beliefs is intermingled with them. In this respect, Weber is a better guide than Marx. We see, as with other great intellectual enterprises, both that the world is too complex for any single mind to encompass, but also that much of interest is generated from the attempt.

---

44 Braudel, Structures, 49.

45 Structures, 89.

46 Braudel, Structures, 61.

47 Braudel, *Structures*, 92.

We are reminded of a remark attributed to Rousseau that 'One needs to look near at hand if one wants to study men; but to study man one must learn to look from afar: one must first observe differences in order to discover attributes'. In this respect, Braudel was a great historian. He looked from both near and afar and despite his failings we are deeply in his debt.

Braudel's great achievement can be indicated if we apply what one might call the 'Das Kapital' test. 'When Karl Marx was living in London, he received this letter from his Leipzig publisher: "Dear Herr Doctor: You are already ten months behind time with the manuscript of **Das Kapital**, which you have agreed to write for us. If we do not receive the manuscript within six months, we shall be obliged to commission another author to do this work."'[48] No other author could have written the **Mediterranean World',** but I suspect that this is not true of **Civilization and Capitalism**.

[48] Quoted in Kenneth Atchity, *A Writer's Time* (1986), p.135.