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THE PAST AND THE PRESENT IN THE PRESENT*

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This lecture starts by considering the old problem of how to account for social change theoretically and criticises some of the models used because, either they see the social process in terms used by the actors and so are unable to explain how it is that actors can change those terms, or they see the mechanisms of change as occurring in terms totally alien to the actors and so are unable to explain how these mechanisms can be transformed into meaningful action. The source of this problem is traced to Durkheim's notion that cognition is socially determined. By contrast it is argued that those concepts which are moulded to social structure are not typical of knowledge but only found in ritual discourse, while the concepts using non-ritual discourse are constrained by such factors as the requirements of human action on nature. This means that there are terms available to actors by which the social order can be criticised since not all terms are moulded by it. Finally it is suggested that such notions as social structure only refer to ritualized folk statements about society, statements expressed in ritual discourse precisely with those concepts which are given as demonstrations of the theory of the cultural relativity of cognition. The Durkheimian correlation between society and cognition is merely a correlation of only *certain* ethical statements and *certain* aspects of cognition. This type of discourse is present in different types of society in varying amounts according to the degree of instituted hierarchy that these societies manifest. Anthropological theories about the conceptualisation of time are given as an example of the general argument.

I

In this lecture I want to follow Malinowski in two ways. First in his style of argument which, as I see it, is based on the belief that one might as well hang for a sheep as for a lamb, and second by using Malinowski's highly realistic view of the anthropologist's subject matter as a tool for criticising other theories. For Malinowski what was to be studied was a long conversation[1] taking place among the people with whom we live during field-work and in which we inevitably join. A long conversation where not only words are exchanged but from time to time also things, animals, people, gestures and blows, but where nonetheless language plays a most prominent part. For him everything was to be found there, in that conversation. His view of the theoretical importance of the past followed naturally from this. On the one hand, since the past cannot be *seen* in this on-going conversation, it has no explanatory value, and on the other hand, when it does appear in discourse as a subject matter it has to be explained in terms of the present.

The first of these conclusions: that the past has no explanatory value, is clearly wrong. The long conversation which the anthropologist observes has begun long before he came and indeed it has begun long before any of the people the anthro-

pologist meets have been born. As in all discourse these observed statements and acts must be related both *semantically* and in terms of shared communicative conventions such as words, syntax, etc. to those that have preceded them and so, if only for this, the present cannot be understood apart from the past in that it answers it. However a semantic relation to past utterances is not the *only* requirement of meaning, and Malinowski was right in stressing something other anthropologists often forget, that what is said must also be adapted to the tasks in hand. So even if we reject Malinowski's general view about the past we can nonetheless ask with him what explains the appearance of the past as a subject matter in the present?

First, however, I want to look once again at Radcliffe-Brown's theory of social structure. A denunciation of this has become an essential part of all public lectures in anthropology but what concerns me here is that the very frequency of these denunciations itself raises interesting problems. Why if Radcliffe-Brown's theories were so wrong, were they so evidently fruitful? Or, to put the matter more specifically, if what he was talking about was not, as I think is now clear, a science of society and culture, what was it and why cannot he be dealt with once and for all? I want to answer this last question first, leaving the earlier and more fundamental one until later.

Radcliffe-Brown inherited two key propositions from Durkheim and these are what concerns us here: 1) that society is a homogeneous, organised and self-reproducing entity; 2) that the categories of understanding and systems of classification are social in origin, that is, that constructive influence on them comes from such things as the form of social groups and the linkage which exists between them, and not from constraints from the extra-social world. Now, although this second proposition concerning the social determination of cognition is the more adventurous it has hardly been theoretically challenged by anthropologists. The first, on the other hand, that society is an organic, harmonious, rule-governed static system, has come in for continual criticism. Actually most of the critics of the organic view of society have accepted the Durkheimian point about cognition, but I want to show that the organic view of society is implied by the notion that society determines cognition and, that it is because of the acceptance of this latter point that the criticisms of the static nature of social structure fail.

The reasons why the theory of the social origin of cognitive systems has gone unchallenged are not at all clear, but it is in part because this theory is linked to a belief adhered to by most anthropologists; that different cultures or societies have fundamentally different systems of thought. Durkheim himself used as part of evidence against the view that cognitive systems were primarily constrained by nature, data which showed that different peoples had different ideas of such things as time, space, animal species, causation and so on (Durkheim 1912). Since we had different systems of thought, he argued, but all lived in the same world, the differences must come from society. Similarly American cultural anthropology has inherited, via Boas, the theories of German romantics like Herder: that every people have their own proper view of the world (Lowie 1937). Equally, from the left, the Durkheimian theory of the origin of cognitive system has gone largely unchallenged. This is because many versions of Marxism, forgetting Marx's own distinction between ideology and knowledge[2], also rely on the Hegelian notion of

the relativity of cognition. This is especially true of some of the recently influential
Althusserian versions. Given such broad agreement it is not surprising that the
view that cognitive systems are socially determined has again been recently power-
fully put by such varied but influential writers as Lévi-Strauss (1962), Douglas
(1966; 1970; 1975), Geertz (1973) and Godelier (1973), to mention only anthro-
pologists.

If the view of the social determination of cognition and classification is every-
where, so have for quite a time been criticisms of the notion of social structure.
These all focus on the point that although social structure is claimed to be a theory
of society, it only concentrates on very limited aspects of the natural phenomena,
and that with its emphasis on the reproduction of the system it fails to account for
change and conflict.

Thus criticisms of Radcliffe-Brown's position have focused on two points: the
first is, that it is not true that societies stay the same, and that therefore some room
has to be made in the theory for change, and the second, that rules of behaviour,
since they are not necessarily followed, are not 'all the story'. In most cases these
two points are linked, and the solution offered to these failings in Radcliffe-Brown's
notion of social structure is the construction of a two-level model of society which
incorporates in a variety of ways the Marxist-inspired distinction between super-
structure and infra-structure. The clearest of these theories is perhaps Firth's dis-
tinction between the level of social organisation and the level of social structure
(Firth 1964). For Firth social structure is much what Radcliffe-Brown meant by the
phrase, while social organisation is the pattern produced by people following or not
following the rules of social structure. Systematic disobedience of these rules leads
to social change at the level of organisation and Firth suggests that somehow
things can reach such a point that changes become necessary in the social structure.
Such a formulation seems at first sight to do what was intended, that is to modify
the original theory of social structure so that it can account for change, but that is
an illusion. The reason lies in the fact that the level of organisation, the presumed
source of change in the social structure, is contained *within* the level: social structure.
The level of organisation can only be apprehended in terms of the social theory of
the actors; *their* system of social classification and rules, which is what is referred to
by the phrase 'social structure'. Organisation is a matter of following or not
following rules; rules which apply to roles recognised by the people studied. This
means that within such a theoretical framework, although deviance is accounted
for, it is not possible to understand how the rules and the social categories which
give deviance meaning can, themselves, be changed, since they are given in the very
language within which social organisation is discussed. This kind of difficulty also
exists in the many similar theoretical formulas associated with such writers as
Gluckman and his many followers. This is the problem which Leach's formulation
in *Political systems of highland Burma* tries to overcome, though in the end he too
comes up against the same problem. In order that the rules will not contain the
range of possible actions, he suggests that we should have three levels not two:
1) a level of shared meanings common throughout the area he studies; 2) a level of
rules which are not necessarily consistent one with another and which are chosen
ad hoc by the actors in terms of a third level, a level of enlightened self-interest very
similar to Firth's 'social organisation'. In this way Leach is able to account for

changes in rules. While, for Firth, choices are decisions about whether to obey or disobey rules, for Leach choices are concerned with which rule to obey. Leach, however, has to face the problem that the actors must be able to communicate among themselves. Clearly they cannot choose any system because then their actions would stop being meaningful one for another, and so Leach shows that all these varying rules embody the same meaningful categories, understanding of which is shared in the whole geographical area. This does avoid the difficulty concerning communication but it brings us back in a different way to the earlier problem which we saw in Firth's theory. Instead of actions being bounded by the meanings given to them by rules they are bounded by the meaning given to them by the shared concepts. Thus, for the same reason that Firth's theory cannot account for the creation of new rules, Leach's theory cannot account for the creation of new concepts.

This seems at first sight a strange problem because it is difficult to see why some of the actors at a certain point in the social process cannot say: this social system is no good at all, let us take a fresh look at the situation and build up a new system. The reason why they cannot, within the theoretical framework discussed, lies in the unanalysed notion of the social determination of thought. Simply if all concepts and categories are determined by the social system a fresh look is impossible since all cognition is already moulded to fit what is to be criticised.

Strangely the problem also exists in a theory which seems to do precisely what is needed since it offers to the actors a source of knowledge which can be used to challenge the social order. This is a theory expressed by a varied group of writers, mainly French, who have drawn their inspiration from Marx (Meillassoux 1972: Terray 1969: Godelier 1966; 1973). This position would criticise Leach and Firth in the way outlined above and as a solution propose that the infrastructure be constructed in a way that is totally external to either rules or concepts, in terms of the rationale of the processes of production and reproduction. History could then be seen as the interaction of two levels of different nature, neither one being reduced to the other, so that a continually progressive dialectic could exist between them. This kind of theory would therefore truly achieve the elusive goal of a dynamic system which takes into account the shared system of meanings of people without its movement being caught *within* it. The problem there, however, comes from the fact that the infrastructure is seen as external to the concepts of the actors. Now for it to be a source of criticism of the social order it means that people must apprehend it in terms available to them and which are different from and incompatible with those of the dominant social theory. This means terms not determined by it. Otherwise the infrastructure, however contradictory to the dominant social theory, is never transformed into action and just carries on in its own sweet way, totally irrelevant to the processes of history.

One can put the problem generally by saying that, if we believe in the social determination of concepts, as all the writers mentioned so far tacitly or explicitly do, this leaves the actors with no language to talk *about* their society and so change it, since they can only talk *within* it. This problem explains why anthropologists are continually producing pictures of society similar to those of the historians who so well explained the logic of the feudal system that they also explained why peasants' revolts could not occur. It also explains why anthropologists' work leaves us totally

unprepared for the dramatic and revolutionary changes which are occurring in the very areas they have studied.

So what evidence is there for the crucial and apparently testable proposition of the social determination of knowledge from recent studies of cognition? Well, anthropological studies of cognitive systems at present seem strangely contradictory. On the one hand we have the work of such writers as Lévi-Strauss, Geertz, Douglas, and Willis, which stress the variation in systems of classification of such things as animals, plants, colours, and which, in various ways, link these systems of cognition to social structure. On the other hand we also have completely different studies associated principally with the work of Kay (1975), Berlin (1972), Berlin & Kay (1969), Berlin et al. (1973) and Bulmer (1967; 1968; 1970) which come up with totally different findings. Basically, that colour, plant, animal and even human classifications are based on identical criteria and produce identical classes and sub-classes varying only in degree of elaboration. I believe the contradiction between these two types of studies can be explained, and it is to this that I now turn.

II

First let us look at what is probably the most fundamental claim, repeatedly made by cultural relativists—that concepts of time are closely bound to social organisation and therefore vary from society to society. This is not a topic that, as far as I know, has actually been examined by Berlin and Kay or their associates. But social scientists as varied as Durkheim (1912), Boas (1966), Lévi-Strauss (1962, 1966), and Evans-Pritchard[3] have loved to tell us that the notion of time, which we feel is self-evident, can be experienced in other cultures, in totally different ways, not as linear but perhaps as static or as cyclic. This is a really popular claim to make among anthropologists, if only for the reason that if *it*, and all it implied, were true, all academic subjects, especially the better funded ones such as physics, should really become simply a sub-trade of anthropology. This indeed was almost the position of Whorf (1956) but it is also rather carelessly implied by many others.

In one sense at least what they say is true, that is if the claim about the relativity of concepts of time is upheld, it is so fundamental, that it inevitably justifies the conclusion that *all* aspects of culture are relative. However, even before we look at this proposition critically, something ought to make us suspicious. In its full baroque form the relativists' argument will have us believe that we can produce a whole range of different concepts of time for different cultures. However, an examination of this 'range' reveals that it by and large boils down to only two notions of time. On the one hand we have concepts rather like our own folk everyday concept of linear durational time and on the other hand a concept of a static notion of time often referred to as cyclic, the two words referring to the same sort of evidence. Before proceeding, however, one point must be made. In reducing the evidence to two types I am, of course, talking about claims concerning the perception of duration not the ways in which time is divided up, or metaphorically represented. These are, of course, legion but are not relevant to our argument. The Malagasy used to, and still sometimes now, divide the day in terms of the parts of the house reached by the rays of the sun. This works because of the strict orientation of their houses, but it only tells us that they use different types of clocks from us. This is not

what I am talking about. Let us return to the more fundamental claim that different people perceive time differently. First of all there are *a priori* arguments against this type of claim which have been formulated in varying ways by, amongst others, Gellner (1968) in answer to Winch, Max Black (1959) in answer to Whorf, and in philosophy by Ayer (1973) in answer to the New Hegelians. The most recurrent such point is contained in Wittgenstein's famous remark that 'if lions could speak we could not understand them'.[4] In other words, that communication with creatures with a fundamentally different system of ideas and life is not possible, and surely people with a different concept of time would in this respect be like lions, since everyone agrees about the particularly fundamental nature of this proposition. On the other hand, the existence of anthropology itself bears witness to the fact that it *is* possible, if with certain difficulty, to communicate with all other human beings, however different their culture. Wittgenstein's zoology brings to mind another remark by a supporter of cognitive relativity and shows its naivety, that is, the criticism made by Evans-Pritchard of anthropologists who tried to understand other cultures in terms which made sense to them. He ridiculed this type of reasoning by describing it as 'if I were a horse' arguments; the implication being that for the anthropologist to pretend to reconstruct the thought processes of other people is as ridiculous as trying to reconstruct the thought processes of horse.[5] But surely, there is no reason to believe that if horses could speak, we would understand them any better than lions, while Evans-Pritchard's whole work is a demonstration that, with help from the anthropologists, we can indeed understand the Azande or the Nuer. This is possibly because of a fact that Evans-Pritchard seems to have overlooked; that neither he, nor other anthropologists, study horses. In other words, if other people really had different concepts of time we could not do what we patently do, that is communicate with them. Evidence for such a conclusion also comes from a completely different source, and that is the mass of recent studies of syntax and semantics of different languages that have been carried out by American linguists. Disagreements and polemics in this field are many, but at least consensus seems to be emerging on one point, and that is that the fundamental logic employed in the syntax of all languages is, Whorf notwithstanding, the same. The implications of this for notions of time are clear. The logic of languages implies a notion of temporality and sequence and so if all syntax is based on the same logic, all speakers must at a fundamental level apprehend time in the same way, and indeed this seems confirmed by the total failure of psychological tests and attempts to substantiate the claims of Whorf and Sapir in this respect (Brown & Lenneberg 1954; Hoijer 1954).

Because of this kind of *a priori* objection the burden of proof for the claim that concepts of time are culturally variable must surely lie with the relativists. Clearly I cannot examine all such claims and so I have chosen one example because of its elegance and its influential nature. Geertz (1973) in a famous article, sets out to show how the Balinese have a different concept of time. (Actually the Balinese have a 'broad back' and have been used for this sort of thing before which makes their case particularly interesting.) He offers evidence from three main sources. The first is the calendars the Balinese use: a lunar calendar and more importantly another calendrical system consisting of a number of cycles of days of differing length which run independently of each other in the way that weeks and months run independently of each other in our own calendar. The surprising thing here is

the number of concurring cycles—ten in all—but Geertz tells us that normally the Balinese only emphasise three of them. Geertz in any case does not make the mistake of thinking that simply having different units of time implies a different concept of duration. More significant for him is the fact that what is stressed by the Balinese for such things as astrology, or fixing temple ceremonies, is the conjunction of stages in different cycles. The equivalent for us to the concurrence of Fridays, the 13th, and it is the stress on coincidence of different cycles and on recurrence which leads to Geertz's assertion that the Balinese have a non-durational notion of time. Then he looks at terms of address and greeting patterns and there he notes a depersonalisation of personhood linked to a detemporalising conception of time (1973: 391). The final main type of evidence produced by Geertz is the ritualisation of social relations and their formality together with a view of time as expressed in religious and state festivals which makes *events* irrelevant to the 'steady state'. His general conclusion is that because of the evidence presented Balinese social life 'takes place in a motionless present' (1973: 404).

Now Geertz admits that there are some aspects of Balinese life which do not fit, like the way Sukarno and nationalism is viewed, like the growth of revolutionary parties and their ideologies, like the existence of other systems of address which stress individuals and even, in a footnote, that they also have calendrical and durational notions similar to ourselves, but this, he tells us, is: 'unstressed and of distinctly secondary importance'. Well is it? It is difficult to see how the political parties and Sukarno could have been of so little importance for the Balinese in 1958 or indeed to see how this sort of politics was new: after all there had been the Dutch and the Japanese. Quite apart from this it is also clear that a linear view of time and stress on individuals also exists at the village politics level. Mark Hobart has described how the formality and lack of temporality of Balinese village councils are paralleled by highly personal and manipulative patron/client links (Hobart 1975) operating outside the formal arena. Equally important is the stress by Hobart in another article that agriculture is not organised by the complex multi-cyclic calendar referred to above.

> The views of the villagers were summed up succinctly by the priest of the local Pura Dalem. He pointed out that, in his official capacity, he used the above two calendars (those discussed by Geertz) to estimate ritual dates whereas to the majority of people, as they were farmers, the cycle of seasons was seen as the most immediately relevant. For other matters there was a chronology based on a series of well remembered events, including wars, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions, and more recently, the official (Gregorian) calendar (Hobart in press).

It seems therefore misleading to say that the Balinese have a non-durational notion of time. *Sometimes* and in *some* contexts they do, sometimes and in other contexts they do not, and those where they do not (agriculture, village and national politics, economics) cannot honestly be called unimportant.

Now this is where we can see the usefulness of the Malinowskian naturalist perspective. Instead of seeing the social process as one or several systems superimposed on each other, it enables us to see that in the long conversation that is Balinese society, at some time, one notion of time is used, and at others another, and we can immediately notice that the evidence for static or cyclical time comes from that special type of communication, which we can label ritual in the broad sense of the term: greetings, and fixed politeness formula, formal behaviour and above all

rituals, whether social, religious or state. By contrast the contexts in which notions of durational time are used are practical activities, especially agriculture and un-institutionalised power.

This contrast between non-ritual communication and universal concepts, and ritual communication and strange other ways of thinking, explains the apparent contradiction in the findings of cognitive studies which I noted. When we look where Berlin and Kay get their information from, we find that it is from non-ritual practical communication. On the other hand, writers such as Douglas, Geertz, Turner, Willis, and Lévi-Strauss, concentrate almost exclusively on ritual communication and myth. Of course there is nothing wrong in doing that in itself, but there is, if it is suggested that what they find is *the* cognitive system of the people they studied. This is especially so since it has always been, and still is, a recurrent professional malpractice of anthropologists to exaggerate the exotic character of other cultures. Only concentrating on the picture of the world apparent in ritual communication may well be due to this tendency, and it obscures the fact of the universal nature of a part of the cognitive system available in all cultures.

In other words the Balinese evidence does not support the view that notions of time vary from culture to culture, it only shows that, in ritual contexts, the Balinese use a different notion of time from that in more mundane contexts and that in these mundane contexts categories and classification are, it may be assumed from Berlin and Kay's findings, based on cognitive universals.

Furthermore, the nature of the contexts where we find these cognitive universals itself suggests an explanation of their presence. Durkheim, like others after him, rejected the notion that cognition was constrained by nature, by pointing to the variability of concepts, especially of concepts of time; but if he is wrong in this, his objection cannot hold. What is more, since it is in contexts where man is in most direct contact with nature that we find universal concepts, the hypothesis that it is something in the world beyond society which constrains at least some of our cognitive categories is strengthened, though this need not be nature as an independent entity to man, but, as I believe is suggested by Berlin and Kay's data and fore-shadowed by Marx, nature as the subject of human activity (see also Rosch 1975).[7]

III

Now with this in mind let us turn to the *other* cognitive system: that evident in ritual communication and see, if there at least, the notion that it is society that is the source of cognition can be retained. To do this, however, it is necessary to look at this 'society' which it is claimed does the constraining. Well, Durkheim and Radcliffe-Brown are quite clear about it, it is the pattern of corporate groups and roles which reproduces itself through time. It is a system not of flesh and bone people at any particular moment but one which transcends people both in terms of their individuality and their temporality. This is the 'on the ground phenomenon' which moulds ideas 'up in the air'.

Now there are two things to note about this theory of society. The first is something that at first sight appears a coincidence, that is its extraordinary similarity with what Geertz tells us is the Balinese view of time and persons. To go back to our earlier quote: he says of the Balinese that they have a notion of depersonalisa-

tion of personhood linked to a detemporalising conception of time (1973: 391). This could be a highly elegant description of the theory of social structure. The second point, one which has often been made by Leach among others, is that, though the theory presents the pattern of roles and corporate groups as an empirical reality, by contrast with the ideas it produces, this is not so, and, as graduate students trained in this tradition have found to their cost, it is not all that easy to see or hear any bits of social structure in the stream of events and persons which the anthropologist witnesses. It is only when we look again at Radcliffe-Brown's key works in *Structure and function in primitive society* (1952) that we realise why this is. The kind of empirical phenomenon he is referring to is again not the whole of the long conversation, but only certain, relatively occasional parts of it, parts which are almost entirely in the ritual mode. When Radcliffe-Brown talks of roles, he immediately turns to roles as manifested during such events as sacrifices or *rites de passage*. When he talks of descent groups, he looks at ancestor worship or totemic rituals. When Radcliffe-Brown is not dealing with rituals we find that he is dealing with ritual behaviour in the wider sense. He is referring to such things as in-stitutionalised joking or avoidance. The only part of what people say to each other in ordinary encounters to be discussed at any length are such things as kinship terms, greetings and politeness formula. Now, once the bewildered fieldworker has realised that it is in this type of behaviour, and in this type of behaviour alone, that he needs to look for social structure, the problems disappear and the task is made strangely easy. For example, *rites de passage* are the rare occasions when it is possible actually to hear people giving lists of rights and duties, and even quite literally to see roles being put on individuals as is the case of ceremonial clothing or bodily mutilation. Similarly, descent groups gathered for ancestor worship pre-sided over by elders acting as priests, can actually be photographed, and what is more, it is extremely probable that at some time in the proceedings it will actually be said that they 'go on for ever' and are 'one body'.

This means that, not only is it easy to build up social structures if one con-centrates only on ritual communication, but also, that we find in it, given to us in the very words of the people we study, the academic theory of social structure.[8] Now once we realise that social structure is only extracted from ritual communi-cation and that it is the folk social theory expressed in this type of communication, its similarity with the view of the world extracted by Geertz for the Balinese, also only looking at ritual communication, becomes immediately understandable. Radcliffe-Brown, like Geertz, not using a long conversation view of society, simply forgot all about the other parts of the discourse. Unlike Malinowski, when the magician had stopped incanting his spells, they did not stay to watch the canoe building.

Social structure, far from being society, turns out to be a system of classification of human beings linked to other ritual cognitive systems, such as the ritual notion of time. Like ritual time it has phenomenological expression only at certain mo-ments of the long conversation, and interestingly it too also seems to be different from the cognitive social system of other moments of discourse. For example, we continually find that such grouping as agricultural cooperative groups, local groups, such as Nuer villages and cattle camps (Evans-Pritchard 1940), social relations, such as those of patron and client as described by Hobart, landlord and share-cropper in

India (Mayer 1960), have no place in the classification system expressed in ritual; yet obviously, their existence too must require concepts and a cognitive system about people. In other words, cognition of society, like that of time, is double. On the one hand there is a system used in normal communication based on universal notions of time and cognition, and in which people are visualised in ways which seem to differ little from culture to culture, a system which is used for the organisation of practical activities, especially productive activities, and on the other hand there is another totally different system, referred to by Radcliffe-Brown as social structure, based on a stranger and much more culturally specific system of classification.[9] (see also n. 6)

The presence of the past in the present is therefore one of the components of that *other system* of cognition which is characteristic of ritual communication, another world which unlike that manifested in the cognitive system of everyday communication does not directly link up with empirical experiences. It is therefore a world peopled by invisible entities. On the one hand roles and corporate groups (invisible halos as Nadel (1957) put it) and on the other gods and ancestors, both types of manifestations fusing into each other as is shown so subtly by Fortes' study of the representation of Tallensi descent groups (Fortes 1949).[10] Another world whose two main characteristics, the dissolution of time and the depersonalisation of individuals, can be linked, as I have argued elsewhere, with the mechanics of the semantic system of formalised, ritual communication.

Now, recognising the presence of two cognitive systems, which organise two kinds of communication, occurring at different moments in the long conversation, solves the theoretical difficulties which we raised concerning those social theories which make use of notions of superstructure and infrastructure. The problem was that either the infrastructure was not truly independent, since it could only be apprehended in the terms of the superstructure, or that it was irrelevant because it was formulated in a way that actors could not apprehend. If, on the other hand, we realise that what was meant by social structure was not a system, but only certain moments in a long conversation, characterised by a specific cognitive system, and that infrastructure refers to the other moments in the conversation, when a different nature-constrained cognitive system is used, the difficulty disappears. The infrastructure has then its own cognitive system for the actors and its realisation can be, and is, used occasionally to challenge that other consciousness, of an invisible system created by ritual: social structure. The timeless static past in the present is then challenged by the present. This challenge cannot be achieved easily because there are barriers which usually stop the putting side by side within an argument, ideas and concepts coming from the two types of communication, but these barriers can in the end be overcome (Bloch 1975). In other words, people may be extensively mystified by the static and organic imaginary models of their society which gain a shadowy phenomenological reality in ritual communication; but they also have available to them another source of concepts, the use of which can lead to the realisation of exploitation and its challenge.

IV

Now in this last sentence I have jumped ahead of myself and to explain what I

meant I want by way of conclusion to ask one last question, which is inevitably raised by what I have said so far. Why two cognitive systems, when it could be assumed that one would do? An answer to this question can be glimpsed from anthropological data which have been felt for a long time to be much more disturbing to the repose of the theory of social structure than the overt criticisms made against it. I am referring to the realisation that the *amount* of social structure seems to vary from case to case. On the one hand we have people like the Balinese and the Indians who have so much social structure that it is a positive embarrassment. They seem to have far more groups, sub-groups and specialist roles than are needed for the working of any natural system, and on the other hand there seem to be examples, especially from African hunters and gatherers such as the Hadza, of people who hardly have any (Woodburn 1968a; 1968b; 1972; 1976; forthcoming). The realisation of this constitutes a fundamental criticism of nearly all accepted theories which either see social structure, or something like it, as everything, or as an analytical level. If social structure equals society, or an essential part of it, it seems nonsense to say that one society has more or less. The fundamental nature of the challenge brought by such data explains the extraordinary reactions of disbelief when Woodburn first presented his Hadza data in the early 1960s in seminars in Cambridge and London, some of the heartlands of the theory of social structure. Disbelief which has now been made impossible by the independent confirmation from the work of, among others, Turnbull (1966) and Lee (1972). He showed that the Hazda had practically no concepts of permanent roles categorically binding people or sets of people together and gave little attention to supernatural beings. If, however, we use the Malinowskian perspective I have outlined above, it is not so surprising that ritual communication can have a varying role in different societies. It is not that societies like the Hazda have less society, as was half feared, but that they have less of their social theory expressed in the language of ritual, while people like the Balinese have more. This difference is reflected in their respective concepts of time. While the Balinese in their ritual communication live in a timeless present, that is in a phenomenological representation of time where the present and the past are so fused that the present is a mere manifestation of the past, these hunters and gatherers are characterised by what was noted by Woodburn, Turnbull and Lee, and called by Meillassoux (1967) their 'present orientation', that is the total absence of the past as a subject matter in their discourse. There is lack of concern with the past in the present, correlated with minimal ritual communication in their long conversation. They have relatively few rituals of social relations, rites of passage, birth ceremonies, funerals, ancestor worship, except interestingly enough for one major ritual which is primarily concerned with the relationship of men and women. Now this last fact, taken together with the more general contrast between, on the one hand the Balinese and the Indians, and on the other the Hadza, gives a pointer to what it is that we are dealing with, when we are considering the differential amount of social structure. We are also helped in this task by an interesting mistake made by Meillassoux (1967). He attributed the 'present orientation' of hunters and gatherers to the techniques by which they obtain a living from nature. The trouble with this explanation, however, is that though it seems supported by the African hunter and gatherer data it does not fit such other hunters and gatherers as the Australian aborigines or the native Americans on the North

West coast. Their life, by contrast with such people as the Hazda, is full of ritual and the presence of the past in the present. This contrast is explained by Woodburn in a forthcoming publication, where he points out that though there is no funda-mental difference in the way African hunters and gatherers obtain their food from the way some Australian Aborigines obtain theirs, there is a fundamental difference in the way they treat women. Woodburn says: 'all over Australia, irrespective of the local ecology, men consider themselves to be concerned in the long-term pro-ductive enterprise in which they assert control over and bring up their daughters, negotiating over their marriages deciding who the husband will be' (1976: 17). Now, we know that the point of these dealings over women is not only to obtain the maximum number of wives but, through the promise of daughters to others, to obtain control over other men, thereby establishing and maintaining complex age based ranking. In other words, the difference between the Australian aborigines and the Hadza lies in a degree of instituted hierarchy. This explains why the Australian Aborigines, in spite of their techniques of production, are in this respect similar to the Balinese. I would therefore suggest, from the inevitably insufficient evidence that can be presented here, that the amount of 'social structure' type com-munication varies with the amount of hierarchy. The Hadza have very little instituted hierarchy except between men and women and mothers-in-law and sons-in-law and they have little ritual communication except in respect of these relationships. Their concepts of time are almost entirely present oriented. The Australian aborigines, and the Balinese even more, have a lot of ritual communica-tion or social structure; this occupies a surprisingly large part of their discourse. Their highly hierarchical societies and their view of time is, for that part of their discourse, dominated by the past in the present.

   Equally significant in this respect is what emerges from studies of greeting for-mulas. These are especially relevant in the extreme ritualisation of their com-municative form, in that they show well the connexion between ritual communica-tion and the creation of these invisible halos called roles and corporate groups. It has sometimes been argued that greetings are essential for any communication to take place between people but the evidence shows that this is not so, that many en-counters are not accompanied by greetings at all and that the length of time in the conversation given over to these role creating procedures varies. Again, it varies, as has been shown by E. Goody (1972) and Irvine (1974) for west Africa, with the degree of hierarchy in the society concerned.

   Here too the amount of social structure, of the past in the present, of ritual communication is correlated, with the amount of *institutionalised* hierarchy and *that is what it is about*. Please note, however, that I am not proposing a simple connexion with the degree of inequality. Some inequality is often manifested as unadorned oppression, but, as Weber pointed out, it is then highly unstable, and only becomes stable when its origins are hidden and when it transforms itself into hierarchy: a legitimate order of inequality in an imaginary world which we call social structure. This is done by the creation of a mystified 'nature' and consisting of concepts and categories of time and persons divorced from everyday ex-perience, and where inequality takes on the appearance of an inevitable part of an ordered system.[11] For example, Marilyn Strathern, in her study of ideas concerning women in the New Guinea Highlands (1972) shows how women are sometimes

seen, for what they are, producers of food and children, while at other times as polluting creatures spoiling the creative activities of men. It is not surprising that in order to maintain two such theories simultaneously two cognitive systems are needed. Unfortunately many anthropologists, fascinated as usual by the exotic, have only paid attention to the world as seen in ritual, forgetting the other conceptualisation of the world which their informants also hold, and which is denied by ritual communication. They have presented as cultural variation what are in fact differences between the ritual communication view of the world of the people they study and *our* everyday practical one. In doing this, and unlike Malinowski, they have confounded the systems by which we know the world with the systems by which we hide it.

NOTES

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[1] This type of view of the subject matter of social study is one which has run through the work of many writers in opposition to various 'structuralist' theories. It is present in linguistic philosophy and phenomenology and has through this channel influenced recent social scientists including Geertz who is referred to below. Malinowski seems to have adopted this point of view independently (see Robins 1971).

[2] Marx makes it quite clear in Part I of *The German ideology* that he does not equate ideology and knowledge or consciousness but in this work alone he is inconsistent especially as to the source of non-ideological knowledge in feudal and capitalist societies, a type of knowledge essential for revolution. In other places he talks of the consciousness of the working-class, a concept not without problems as the early Althusser was at pains to point out. This lecture, however, is an attempt to make a contribution to the theory of the consciousness of the working-class and seeing it as based on the real processes of production but not attributing this consciousness as Marx does in *The German ideology* almost exclusively to communist society. A discussion of the distinction between Ideology and Knowledge in Marx is found in Lefebre (1966: chap. 3)—I do not however completely adopt Lefebre's position here.

[3] Leach, who has written scintillatingly on time does not in the end make his position on this point clear. In his writing on time (1961) (1976: chap. 7), he distinguishes between 'ritual', 'abnormal', 'sacred' time and other notions of time in a way that seems similar to that proposed here. He goes on to stress the arbitrariness of the division of time and the abnormal notion of sacred time but he says nothing of the other type of time he implies; the non-sacred, non-ritual, normal. This means that though he may not be arguing that concepts of time are relative he leaves us with the impression that he does.

[4] That remark was drawn to my attention by Professor S. Ehrington.

[5] Professor M. Fortes has drawn my attention to the fact that this aphorism was often used by Radcliffe-Brown and was common currency at the time.

[6] I have discussed what I mean by ritual communication in 'Symbol, song and dance: is religion an extreme form of traditional authority?' (Bloch 1974). There I argued for a continuum in communication from repetitive (formalised) communication to generative (everyday) communication. Ritual communication lies at the repetitive (formalised) end of the continuum. Since the type of communication I am considering here: 'rituals' in the narrow sense, greetings, formalised joking and avoidance, politeness, lie quite clearly far to the repetitive end of the continuum the difficult question of where to draw the line between the two types of communication does not arise. In any case it does not seem to me that there are many types of communication which fall at the middle of the continuum for reasons which have to do with the very different nature of the semantics used at either end. Unlike Leach (1954) who sees ritual as an aspect of all activity, I would argue that the ritual message is carried in nearly all cases by clearly distinct moments of the conversation as is argued by Malinowski in his famous discussion of magic (Malinowski 1922). In the same paper I also explained how it is the very semantic mechanics used by ritual which create a static or cyclic view of time.

[7] I am not making the empiricist mistake of thinking that concepts as concepts are given in nature, I am only talking of the *constraints* of nature on thought given the human condition. In this I am following Piaget (1968). It would be nonsense to say that our everyday concepts are

true concepts of time. The notions of time held by physicists are not remotely like folk notions of time. On the other hand my position is totally opposed to that of Lévi-Strauss who argues that nature in this respect is an unordered phenomenon only ordered by culture in whatever way the logic of thought takes it.

⁸ This point is already made by Leach (1954: 14).

⁹ One of the few domains which tries to merge the two systems of cognition is kinship since it partakes both of practical productive and reproductive concerns and of the irrigation of authority through society. This merging is inevitably unsuccessful and it seems to me to lie at the back of the distinction which Fortes has made in various places and in various ways between the domestic domain and the politico-jural domain (Fortes 1969). This merging could also account for the recurrent inconclusive controversies in anthropology whether kinship has a biological base or not. We would expect natural constraints to be evident in domestic kinship and negated in the politico-jural domain.

¹⁰ This point is particularly powerfully put by I. Kopytoff (1971).

¹¹ This is discussed in a more extended fashion in M. Bloch (1975).

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