# Theory in Anthropology since the Sixties

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Every year, around the time of the meetings of the American Anthropological Association, the *New York Times* asks a Big Name anthropologist to contribute an op-ed piece on the state of the field. These pieces tend to take a rather gloomy view. A few years ago, for example, Marvin Harris suggested that anthropology was being taken over by mystics, religious fanatics, and California cultists; that the meetings were dominated by panels on shamanism, witchcraft, and "abnormal phenomena"; and that "scientific papers based on empirical studies" had been willfully excluded from the program (Harris 1978). More recently, in a more sober tone, Eric Wolf suggested that the field of anthropology is coming apart. The sub-fields (and sub-sub-fields) are increasingly pursuing their specialized interests, losing contact with each other and with the whole. There is no longer a shared discourse, a shared set of terms to which all practitioners address themselves, a shared language we all, however idiosyncratically, speak (Wolf 1980).

The state of affairs does seem much as Wolf describes it. The field appears to be a thing of shreds and patches, of individuals and small coteries pursuing disjunctive investigations and talking mainly to themselves. We do not even hear stirring arguments any more. Although anthropology was never actually unified in the sense of adopting a single shared paradigm, there was at least a period when there were a few large categories of theoretical affiliation, a set of identifiable camps or schools, and a few simple epithets one could hurl at

This essay contains much of my own intellectual history. There will be no more appropriate context in which to thank my teachers, Frederica de Laguna, Clifford Geertz, and David Schneider for having turned me, for better or for worse, into an anthropologist. In addition, I wish to thank the following friends and colleagues for helpful contributions to the development of this essay: Nancy Chodorow, Salvatore Cucchiari, James Fernandez, Raymond Grew, Keith Hart, Raymond Kelly, David Kertzer, Robert Paul, Paul Rabinow, Joyce Riegelhaupt, Anton Weiler, and Harriet Whitehead. Parts of this work were presented at the Department of Anthropology, Princeton University; the Department of Social Anthropology, University of Stockholm; the Social Science History Seminar (founded and coordinated by Charles and Louise Tilly), University of Michigan; the Humanities Seminar, Stanford University; and the Seminar on Theory and Methods in Comparative Studies (coordinated by Neil Smelser) at the University of California, Berkeley. I received valuable comments and reactions in all of these contexts.

0010-4175/84/1709-0100 $2.50 

one's opponents. Now there appears to be an apathy of spirit even at this level. We no longer call each other names. We are no longer sure of how the sides are to be drawn up, and of where we would place ourselves if we could identify the sides.

Yet as anthropologists we can recognize in all of this the classic symptoms of liminality—confusion of categories, expressions of chaos and antistructure. And we know that such disorder may be the breeding ground for a new and perhaps better order. Indeed, if one scrutinizes the present more closely, one may even discern within it the shape of the new order to come. That is what I propose to do in this article. I will argue that a new key symbol of theoretical orientation is emerging, which may be labeled "practice" (or "action" or "praxis"). This is neither a theory nor a method in itself, but rather, as I said, a symbol, in the name of which a variety of theories and methods are being developed. In order to understand the significance of this trend, however, we must go back at least twenty years and see where we started from, and how we got to where we are now.

Before launching this enterprise, however, it is important to specify its nature. This essay will be primarily concerned with the *relations* between various theoretical schools or approaches, both within periods of time, and across time. No single approach will be exhaustively outlined or discussed in itself; rather, various themes or dimensions of each will be highlighted insofar as they relate to the larger trends of thought with which I am concerned. Every anthropologist will probably find his or her favorite school oversimplified, if not outright distorted, insofar as I have choosen to emphasize features that do not correspond to what are normally taken, among the practitioners, to be its most important theoretical features. Thus readers seeking more exhaustive discussions of particular approaches, and/or discussions pursued from a point of view more interior to the approaches, will have to seek elsewhere. The concern here, again, is with elucidating relations.

## THE SIXTIES: SYMBOL, NATURE, STRUCTURE

Although there is always some arbitrariness in choosing a starting point for any historical discussion, I have decided to begin in the early 1960s. For one thing, that is when *I* started in the field, and since I generally assume the importance of seeing any system, at least in part, from the actor's point of view, I might as well unite theory and practice from the outset. It is thus fully acknowledged that this discussion proceeds not from some hypothetical external point, but from the perspective of this particular actor moving through anthropology between 1960 and the present.

But actors always wish to claim universality for their particular experiences and interpretations. I would further suggest then that, in some relatively objective sense, there was in fact a major set of revolutions in anthropological theory, beginning in the early sixties. Indeed it appears that such revisionist

upheaval was characteristic of many other fields in that era. In literary criticism, for example,

> by the 1960's a volatile mixture of linguistics, psychoanalysis and semiotics, structuralism, Marxist theory and reception aesthetics had begun to replace the older moral humanism. The literary text tended to move towards the status of phenomenon: a socio-psycho-culturo-linguistic and ideological event, arising from the offered competencies of language, the available taxonomies of narrative order, the permutations of genre, the sociological options of structural formation, the ideological constraints of the infra-structure. . . . [There was a] broad and contentious revisionist perception (Bradbury 1981:137).

In anthropology at the close of the fifties, the theoretical *bricoleur's* kit consisted of three major, and somewhat exhausted, paradigms—British structural-functionalism (descended from A. R. Radcliffe-Brown and Bronislaw Malinowski), American cultural and psychocultural anthropology (descended from Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, *et al.*), and American evolutionist anthropology (centered around Leslie White and Julian Steward, and having strong affiliations with archaeology). Yet it was also during the fifties that certain actors and cohorts central to our story were trained in each of these areas. They emerged at the beginning of the sixties with aggressive ideas about how to strengthen the paradigms of their mentors and ancestors, as well as with, apparently, much more combative stances vis-à-vis the other schools. It was this combination of new ideas and intellectual aggressiveness that launched the three movements with which this account begins: symbolic anthropology, cultural ecology, and structuralism.

*Symbolic Anthropology*

"Symbolic anthropology" as a label was never used by any of its main proponents in the formative period—say, 1963–66. Rather it was a shorthand tag (probably invented by the opposition), an umbrella for a number of rather diverse trends. Two of its major variants appear to have been independently invented, one by Clifford Geertz and his colleagues at the University of Chicago, and the other by Victor Turner at Cornell.[1] The important differences between the Geertzians and the Turnerians are probably not fully appreciated by those outside the symbolic anthropology scene. Whereas Geertz was primarily influenced by Max Weber (via Talcott Parsons), Turner was primarily influenced by Emile Durkheim. Further, Geertz clearly represents a transformation upon the earlier American anthropology concerned mainly with the operations of "culture," while Turner represents a transfor-

[1] For the discussion of the sixties and the seventies, I will for the most part invoke only the most representative figures and works. In an article of this length, many interesting developments must be by-passed. One important figure of this period who gets left by the wayside is Gregory Bateson (e.g., 1972), who, though himself clearly a powerful and original thinker, never really founded a major school in anthropology.

mation upon the earlier British anthropology concerned mainly with the operations of "society."

Geertz's most radical theoretical move (1973b) was to argue that culture is not something locked inside people's heads, but rather is embodied in public symbols, symbols through which the members of a society communicate their worldview, value-orientations, ethos, and all the rest to one another, to future generations—and to anthropologists. With this formulation, Geertz gave the hitherto elusive concept of culture a relatively fixed locus, and a degree of objectivity, that it did not have before. The focus on symbols was for Geertz and many others heuristically liberating: it told them where to find what they wanted to study. Yet the point about symbols was that they were ultimately vehicles for meanings; the study of symbols as such was never an end in itself. Thus, on the one hand, Geertzians[2] have never been particularly interested in distinguishing and cataloguing the varieties of symbolic types (signals, signs, icons, indexes, etcetera—see, in contrast, Singer 1980); nor, on the other hand (and in contrast with Turner to whom we will get in a moment), have they been particularly interested in the ways in which symbols perform certain practical operations in the social process—heal people through curing rites, turn boys and girls into men and women through initiation, kill people through sorcery—and so forth. Geertzians do not ignore these practical social effects, but such symbols have not been their primary focus of interest. Rather, the focus of Geertzian anthropology has consistently been the question of how symbols shape the ways social actors see, feel, and think about the world, or, in other words, how symbols operate as vehicles of "culture."

It is further worth noting, in anticipation of the discussion of structuralism, that Geertz's heart has always been more with the "ethos" side of culture than with the "worldview," more with the affective and stylistic dimensions than with the cognitive. While of course it is very difficult (not to say unproductive and ultimately wrong-headed) to separate the two too sharply, it is nonetheless possible to distinguish an emphasis on one or the other side. For Geertz, then (as for Benedict, especially, before him), even the most cognitive or intellectual of cultural systems—say, the Balinese calendars—are analyzed not (only) to lay bare a set of cognitive ordering principles, but (especially) to understand how the Balinese way of chopping up time stamps their sense of self, of social relations, and of conduct with a particular culturally distinctive flavor, an ethos (1973e).[3]

[2] E.g., Ortner 1975; M. Rosaldo 1980; Blu 1980; Meeker 1979; Rosen 1978.

[3] If culture itself had been an elusive phenomenon, one may say that Geertz has pursued the most elusive part of it, the ethos. It may also be suggested that this, among other things, accounts for his continuing and broad-based appeal. Perhaps the majority of students who go into anthropology, and almost certainly the majority of nonanthropologists who are fascinated by our field, are drawn to it because they have been struck at some point in their experience by the "otherness" of another culture, which we would call its ethos. Geertz's work provides one of the very few handles for grasping that otherness.

The other major contribution of the Geertzian framework was the insistence on studying culture "from the actor's point of view" (e.g., 1975). Again, this does not imply that we must get "into people's heads." What it means, very simply, is that culture is a product of acting social beings trying to make sense of the world in which they find themselves, and if *we* are to make sense of a culture, we must situate ourselves in the position from which it was constructed. Culture is not some abstractly ordered system, deriving its logic from hidden structural principles, or from special symbols that provide the "keys" to its coherence. Its logic—the principles of relations that obtain among its elements—derives rather from the logic or organization of action, from people operating within certain institutional orders, interpreting their situations in order to act coherently within them (1973d). It may be noted here, however, that while the actor-centered perspective is fundamental to Geertz's framework, it is not systematically elaborated: Geertz did not develop a theory of action or practice as such. He did, however, firmly plant the actor at the center of his model, and much of the later practice-centered work builds on a Geertzian (or Geertzo-Weberian) base, as we shall see.

The other major figure in the Chicago school of symbolic anthropology has been David Schneider. Schneider, like Geertz, was a product of Parsons, and he too concentrated primarily on refining the culture concept. But his efforts went toward understanding the *internal logic* of systems of symbols and meanings, by way of a notion of "core symbols," and also by way of ideas akin to Claude Lévi-Strauss's concept of structure (e.g., 1968, 1977). Indeed, although Geertz prominently used the phrase "cultural *system*" (emphasis added), he never paid much attention to the systemic aspects of culture, and it was Schneider who developed this side of the problem much more fully. Schneider in his own work cut culture off from social action much more radically than Geertz did. Yet, perhaps precisely because social action ("practice," "praxis") was so radically separated from "culture" in Schneider's work, he and some of his students were among the earliest of the symbolic anthropologists to see practice itself as a problem (Barnett 1977; Dolgin, Kemnitzer, and Schneider 1977).

Victor Turner, finally, comes out of quite a different intellectual background. He was trained in the Max Gluckman variant of British structural-functionalism, which was influenced by Marxism, and which stressed that the normal state of society is not one of solidarity and harmonious integration of parts, but rather one of conflict and contradiction. Thus, the analytic question was not, as for the straight line descendants of Durkheim, how solidarity is fine-tuned, reinforced, and intensified, but rather how it is constructed and maintained in the first place over and above the conflicts and contradictions that constitute the normal state of affairs. To the American reader, this may appear to be only a minor variant on the basic functionalist project, since for both schools the emphasis is on the maintenance of integration, and specifi-

cally on the maintenance of the integration of "society"—actors, groups, the social whole—as opposed to "culture." But Gluckman and his students (including Turner) believed their differences from the mainstream to be quite deep. Moreover, they always constituted a minority within the British establishment. This background may account in part for Turner's originality vis-à-vis his compatriots, leading ultimately to his independently inventing his own brand of an explicitly symbolic anthropology.

Despite the relative novelty of Turner's move to symbols, however, there is in his work a deep continuity with British social anthropological concerns, and, as a result, profound differences between Turnerian and Geertzian symbolic anthropology. For Turner, symbols are of interest not as vehicles of, and analytic windows onto, "culture"—the integrated ethos and worldview of a society—but as what might be called *operators* in the social process, things that, when put together in certain arrangements in certain contexts (especially rituals), produce essentially *social* transformations. Thus, symbols in Ndembu curing or initiation or hunting rituals are investigated for the ways in which they move actors from one status to another, resolve social contradictions, and wed actors to the categories and norms of their society (1967). Along the way toward these rather traditional structural-functional goals, however, Turner identified or elaborated upon certain ritual mechanisms, and some of the concepts he developed have become indispensable parts of the vocabulary of ritual analysis—liminality, marginality, antistructure, communitas, and so forth (1967, 1969).[4]

Turner and the Chicago symbolic anthropologists did not so much conflict with one another as simply, for the most part, talk past one another. Yet the Turnerians[5] added an important, and characteristically British, dimension to the field of symbolic anthropology as a whole, a sense of the *pragmatics* of symbols. They investigated in much more detail than Geertz, Schneider, *et al.*, the "effectiveness of symbols," the question of how symbols actually do what all symbolic anthropologists claim they do: operate as active forces in the social process (see also Lévi-Strauss 1963; Tambiah 1968; Lewis 1977; Fernandez 1974).

In retrospect, one may say that symbolic anthropology had a number of significant limitations. I refer not to the charges that it was unscientific, mystical, literary, soft-headed, and the like leveled at it by practitioners of cultural ecology (see below). Rather, one may point to symbolic anthropol-

[4] Another point of contrast between Turner and Geertz is that Turner's concept of meaning, at least in those early works that launched his approach, is largely referential. Meanings are things that symbols point to or refer to, like "matriliny" or "blood." Geertz, on the other hand, is primarily concerned with what might be called Meaning, with a capital M—the purpose, or point, or larger significance of things. Thus he quotes Northrop Frye: "You wouldn't go to *Macbeth* to learn about the history of Scotland—you go to it to learn what a man feels like after he's gained a kingdom and lost his soul" (Geertz 1973f:450).

[5] E.g., Munn 1969; Myerhoff 1974; Moore and Myerhoff 1975; Babcock 1978.

ogy's lack, especially in its American form, of a systematic sociology; its underdeveloped sense of the politics of culture; and its lack of curiosity concerning the production and maintenance of symbolic systems. These points will be discussed more fully in the course of this article.

*Cultural Ecology*[6]

Cultural ecology represented a new synthesis of, and a further development upon, the materialist evolutionism of Leslie White (1943, 1949), Julian Steward (1953, 1955), and V. Gordon Childe (1942). Its roots go back to Lewis Henry Morgan and E. B. Tylor in the nineteenth century, and ultimately back to Marx and Engels, although many of the 1950s evolutionists, for understandable political reasons, were not encouraged to emphasize the Marxist connection.[7]

White had been investigating what came to be labeled "general evolution," or the evolution of culture-in-general, in terms of stages of social complexity and technological advancement. These stages were subsequently refined by Elman Service (1958), and by Marshall Sahlins and Elman Service (1960), into the famous bands-tribes-chiefdoms-states scheme. The evolutionary mechanisms in White's framework derived from more or less fortuitous events: technological inventions that allowed for the greater "capture of energy," and population growth (and perhaps warfare and conquest) that stimulated the development of more complex forms of social/political organization and coordination. Steward (1953) attacked both the focus on the evolution of culture-in-general (as opposed to specific cultures), and the lack of a more systematically operative evolutionary mechanism. Instead, he emphasized that specific cultures evolve their specific forms in the process of adapting to specific environmental conditions, and that the apparent uniformity of evolutionary stages is actually a matter of similar adaptations to similar natural conditions in different parts of the world.

If the idea that culture was embodied in public, observable symbols was the key to the liberation of symbolic anthropology from earlier American cultural anthropology, the concept that played a similar role in cultural ecology was "adaptation." (See Alland 1975 for a summary.) Just as Geertz had trumpeted that the study of culture as embodied in symbols removed the problem of getting inside people's heads, so Sahlins proclaimed the focus on adaptation to environmental factors as the way around such amorphous factors as cultural *gestalten* and historical dialectics (1964). There was a large-scale rejection of the study of the inner workings of both culture in the American sense and society in the British sense. Internal dynamics were seen as hard to

[6] This section is partly based on readings, partly on semiformal interviews with Conrad P. Kottak and Roy A. Rappaport, and partly on general discussions with Raymond C. Kelly. Absolution is extended to all of the informants.

[7] White and Childe were fairly explicit about the Marxist influence on their work.

measure, and even harder to choose among for purposes of assigning causal primacy, whereas external factors of natural and social environment were amenable to treatment as fixed, measurable, "independent variables:"

> For decades, centuries now, intellectual battle has been given over which sector of culture is the decisive one for change. Many have entered the lists under banners diverse. Curiously, few seem to fall. Leslie White champions technological growth as the sector most responsible for cultural evolution; Julian Huxley, with many others, sees "man's view of destiny" as the deciding force; the mode of production and the class struggle are still very much in contention. Different as they are, these positions agree in one respect, that the impulse to development is generated from within. . . . The case for internal causes of development may be bolstered by pointing to a mechanism, such as the Hegelian dialectic, or it may rest more insecurely on an argument from logic. . . . In any event, an unreal and vulnerable assumption is always there, that cultures are closed systems. . . . It is precisely on this point that cultural ecology offers a new perspective. . . . [I]t shifts attention to the relation between inside and outside; it envisions as the mainspring of the evolutionary movement the interchange between culture and environment. Now which view shall prevail is not to be decided on a sheet of paper. . . . But if adaptation wins over inner dynamism, it will be for certain intrinsic and obvious strengths. Adaptation is real, naturalistic, anchored to those historic contexts of cultures that inner dynamism ignores (Sahlins 1964:135–36).[8]

The Sahlins and Service version of cultural ecology, which was also adhered to by the mainstream of the archaeology wing of anthropology, was still fundamentally evolutionist. The primary use of the adaptation concept was in explaining the development, maintenance, and transformation of social forms. But there was another variant of cultural ecology, which developed slightly later, and which came to dominate the materialist wing in the sixties. Its position, expressed most forcefully by Marvin Harris (e.g., 1966) and perhaps most elegantly by Roy Rappaport (1967), drew heavily on systems theory. It shifted the analytic focus away from evolution, and toward explaining the existence of particular bits of particular cultures in terms of the adaptive or system-maintaining functions of those bits. Thus, the Maring *kaiko* ritual prevented the degradation of the natural environment (Rappaport 1967), the Kwakiutl potlatch maintained a balance of food distribution over tribal segments (Piddocke 1969), and the sacredness of the cow in India protected a vital link in the agricultural food chain (Harris 1966). In these studies, the interest has shifted from how the environment stimulates (or prevents) the development of social and cultural forms to the question of the ways in which social and cultural forms function to maintain an existing relationship with the environment. It was these latter sorts of studies that came to represent cultural ecology as a whole in the sixties.

One would have had to be particularly out of touch with anthropological

[8] This was the programmatic position. In practice, Sahlins did pay a good deal of attention to internal social dynamics.

theory at the time not to have been aware of the acrimonious debate between the cultural ecologists and the symbolic anthropologists. Whereas the cultural ecologists considered the symbolic anthropologists to be fuzzy-headed mentalists, involved in unscientific and unverifiable flights of subjective interpretation, the symbolic anthropologists considered cultural ecology to be involved with mindless and sterile scientism, counting calories and measuring rainfall, and willfully ignoring the one truth that anthropology had presumably established by that time: that culture mediates all human behavior. The Manichean struggle between "materialism" and "idealism," "hard" and "soft" approaches, interpretive "emics" and explanatory "etics," dominated the field for a good part of the decade of the sixties, and in some quarters well into the seventies.

That most of us thought and wrote in terms of such oppositions may be partly rooted in more pervasive schemes of Western thought: subjective/objective, nature/culture, mind/body, and so on. The practice of fieldwork itself may further contribute to such thinking, based as it is on the paradoxical injunction to participate and observe at one and the same time. It may be then that this sort of polarized construction of the intellectual landscape in anthropology is too deeply motivated, by both cultural categories and the forms of practice of the trade, to be completely eliminated. But the emic/etic struggle of the sixties had a number of unfortunate effects, not the least of which was the prevention of adequate self-criticism on both sides of the fence. Both schools could luxuriate in the faults of the other, and not inspect their own houses for serious weaknesses. In fact, both sides were weak not only in being unable to handle what the other side did (the symbolic anthropologists in renouncing all claims to "explanation," the cultural ecologists in losing sight of the frames of meaning within which human action takes place); both were also weak in what neither of them did, which was much of any systematic sociology.[9]

Indeed, from the point of view of British social anthropology, the whole American struggle was quite meaningless, since it seemed to leave out the necessary central term of all proper anthropological discussion: society. Where were the social groups, social relationships, social structures, social institutions, that mediate *both* the ways in which people think ("culture") *and* the ways in which people experience and act upon their environment? But this set of questions could not be answered (had anybody bothered to ask them) in terms of British social anthropological categories, because the British were having their own intellectual upheavals, to which we will return in due course.

[9] The early Turner is a partial exception to this point, but most of his successors are not.

*Structuralism*

Structuralism, the more-or-less single-handed invention of Claude Lévi-Strauss, was the only genuinely new paradigm to be developed in the sixties. One might even say that it is the only genuinely original social science paradigm (and humanities too, for that matter) to be developed in the twentieth century. Drawing on linguistics and communication theory, and considering himself influenced by both Marx and Freud, Lévi-Strauss argued that the seemingly bewildering variety of social and cultural phenomena could be rendered intelligible by demonstrating the shared relationships of those phenomena to a few simple underlying principles. He sought to establish the universal grammar of culture, the ways in which units of cultural discourse are created (by the principle of binary opposition), and the rules according to which the units (pairs of opposed terms) are arranged and combined to produce the actual cultural productions (myths, marriage rules, totemic clan arrangements, and the like) that anthropologists record. Cultures are primarily systems of classification, as well as the sets of institutional and intellectual productions built upon those systems of classification and performing further operations upon them. One of the most important secondary operations of culture in relation to its own taxonomies is precisely to mediate or reconcile the oppositions which are the bases of those taxonomies in the first place.

In practice, structural analysis consists of sifting out the basic sets of oppositions that underlie some complex cultural phenomenon—a myth, a ritual, a marriage system—and of showing the ways in which the phenomenon in question is both an expression of those contrasts and a reworking of them, thereby producing a culturally meaningful statement of, or reflection upon, order. Even without the full analysis of a myth or ritual, however, the sheer enumeration of the important sets of oppositions in a culture is taken to be a useful enterprise because it reveals the axes of thought, and the limits of the thinkable, within that and related cultures (e.g., Needham 1973b). But the fullest demonstration of the power of structural analysis is seen in Lévi-Strauss's four-volume study, *Mythologiques* (1964–71). Here the method allows the ordering of data both on a vast scale (including most of indigenous South America, and parts of native North America as well), and also in terms of explicating myriad tiny details—why the jaguar covers his mouth when laughing or why honey metaphors describe the escape of game animals. The combination of wide scope and minute detail is what lends the work its great power.

Much has been made of the point that Lévi-Strauss ultimately grounds the structures he discerns beneath society and culture in the structure of the mind. Both the point itself, and the criticism of it, are perhaps somewhat irrelevant for anthropologists. It seems incontrovertible that all humans, and all cultures, classify. This suggests in turn an innate mental propensity of some sort,

but it does not mean that any particular scheme of classification is inevitable, no more than the fact that all humans eat motivates some universal system of food categories.

The enduring contribution of Lévi-Straussian structuralism lies in the perception that luxuriant variety, even apparent randomness, may have a deeper unity and systematicity, derived from the operation of a small number of underlying principles. It is in this sense that Lévi-Strauss claims affinity with Marx and Freud, who similarly argue that beneath the surface proliferation of forms, a few relatively simple and relatively uniform mechanisms are operating (DeGeorge and DeGeorge 1972). Such a perception, in turn, allows us to distinguish much more clearly between simple transformations, which operate *within* a given structure, and real change, revolution if you will, in which the structure itself is transformed. Thus, despite the naturalistic or biologistic base of structuralism, and despite Lévi-Strauss's personal predilection for considering that *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose,* the theory has always had important implications for a much more historical and/or evolutionary anthropology than that practiced by the master. The work of Louis Dumont in particular has developed some of these evolutionary implications in analyzing the structure of the Indian caste system, and in articulating some of the profound structural changes involved in the transition from caste to class (1965, 1970; see also Goldman 1970, Barnett 1977, Sahlins 1981).[10]

Structuralism was never all that popular among American anthropologists. Although it was seen at first (mostly by the cultural ecologists) as a variant of symbolic anthropology, its central assumptions were in fact rather distant from those of the symbolic anthropologists (with the partial exception of the Schneiderians). There were a number of reasons for this, which can be only very briefly sketched: (1) the very pure cognitive emphasis of Lévi-Strauss's notion of meaning, as against the Americans' interest in ethos and values; (2) Lévi-Strauss's rather austere emphasis on arbitrariness of meaning (all meaning is established by contrasts, nothing carries any meaning in itself), as against the Americans' interest in relations between the *forms* of symbolic constructs and the *contents* for which they are vehicles;[11] and (3) the explicitly abstract locus of structures, divorced in every way from the actions and intentions of actors, as against the symbolic anthropologists' fairly consistent, if variably defined, actor-centrism (again, Schneider is a partial exception to this point). For all these reasons, and probably more, structuralism was not as much embraced by American symbolic anthropologists as might

[10] Dumont is another of those figures who deserve more space than can be afforded here.

[11] This is not to imply that American symbolic anthropologists deny the doctrine of arbitrariness of symbols. But they do insist that the choice of a particular symbolic form among several possible, equally arbitrary, symbols for the same conception, is not only not arbitrary, but has important implications that must be investigated.

have appeared likely at first glance.[12] It was granted what might be called fictive kinship status, largely because of its tendency to focus on some of the same domains that symbolic anthropologists took as their own—myth, ritual, etiquette, and so forth.

The main impact of structuralism outside of France was in England, among some of the more adventurous British social anthropologists (see especially Leach 1966). Lévi-Strauss and the British were in fact more truly kin to one another, born of two lines of descent from Durkheim. In any event, structuralism in the British context underwent a number of important transformations. Avoiding the question of mind, and of universal structures, British anthropologists primarily applied structural analysis to particular societies and particular cosmologies (e.g., Leach 1966, 1969; Needham 1973a; Yalman 1969; the point also applies to Dumont (1970) in France). They also focused in more detail on the process of mediation of oppositions, and produced a number of quite original ruminations upon anomaly and antistructure, especially Mary Douglas's *Purity and Danger* (see also Turner 1967, 1969; Leach 1964; Tambiah 1969).

However, there was also an important way in which many of the British purged structuralism of one of its more radical features—the eradication of the Durkheimian distinction between the social "base" and the cultural "reflection" of it. Lévi-Strauss had claimed that if mythic structures paralleled social structures, it was not because myth reflected society, but because both myth and social organization shared a common underlying structure. Many of the British structuralists (Rodney Needham is the major exception), on the other hand, went back to a position more in the tradition of Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, and considered myth and ritual as reflecting and resolving "at the symbolic level" oppositions taken to be fundamentally social.[13] As long as British structuralism was confined to the study of myth and ritual, then, it was possible for it to fit nicely into British anthropology without having a very profound effect upon it. It became their version of cultural or symbolic anthropology, their theory of superstructure. It was only later, when a structural (i.e., structural-Marxist) eye was turned on the British concept of social structure itself, that the sparks began to fly.

In a number of fields—linguistics, philosophy, history—there was a strong reaction against structuralism by the early seventies. Two interrelated features—the denial of the relevance of an intentional subject in the social and

[12] James Boon (e.g., 1972) has devoted a fair amount of effort to reconciling Lévi-Strauss and/or Schneider on the one side, with Geertz on the other. The outcome is generally heavily in favor of structuralism. (See also Boon and Schneider 1974.)

[13] Lévi-Strauss himself moved *from* a Durkheim/Mauss position in "La Geste d'Asdiwal" (1967) *to* the more radical structuralist position in *Mythologiques*. It is no accident that Leach, or whoever made the decision, chose to present "La Geste d'Asdiwal" as the lead essay in the British collection, *The Structural Study of Myth and Totemism* (1967).

cultural process, and the denial of any significant impact of history or "event" upon structure—were felt to be particularly problematic, not to say unacceptable. Scholars began to elaborate alternative models, in which both agents and events played a more active role. These models did not, however, get much play in anthropology until the late seventies, and they will be discussed in the final section of the essay. In anthropology during most of that decade, structuralism itself, with all its flaws (and virtues), became the basis of one of the dominant schools of theory, structural Marxism. We move now to that decade.

## THE SEVENTIES: MARX

The anthropology of the 1970s was much more obviously and transparently tied to real-world events than that of the preceding period. Starting in the late 1960s, in both the United States and France (less so in England), radical social movements emerged on a vast scale. First came the counterculture, then the antiwar movement, and then, just a bit later, the women's movement: these movements not only affected the academic world, they originated in good part within it. *Everything* that was part of the existing order was questioned and criticized. In anthropology, the earliest critiques took the form of denouncing the historical links between anthropology on the one hand, and colonialism and imperialism on the other (e.g., Asad 1973, Hymes 1974). But this merely scratched the surface. The issue quickly moved to the deeper question of the nature of our theoretical frameworks, and especially the degree to which they embody and carry forward the assumptions of bourgeois Western culture.

The rallying symbol of the new criticism, and of the theoretical alternatives offered to replace the old models, was Marx. Of all the great nineteenth-century antecedents of modern social science, Marx had been conspicuously absent from the mainstream theoretical repertoire. Parsons's *Structure of Social Action,* one of the sacred texts of the Harvard-trained symbolic anthropologists, surveyed the thought of Durkheim and Weber, and of two economic theorists, Alfred Marshall and Vilfredo Pareto, whose main significance in that context seemed to be that they were Not Marx. The British, including both the symbolic anthropologists and the structuralists, were still firmly embedded in Durkheim. Lévi-Strauss claimed to have been influenced by Marx, but it took a while for anyone to figure out what he meant by that. Even the cultural ecologists, the only self-proclaimed materialists of the sixties, hardly invoked Marx at all; indeed Marvin Harris specifically repudiated him (1968). One does not need to be an especially subtle analyst of the ideological aspects of intellectual history to realize that the absence of a significant Marxist influence before the seventies was just as much a reflex of real-world politics as was the emergence of a strong Marxist influence in the seventies.

There were at least two distinct Marxist schools of anthropological theory: structural Marxism, developed mainly in France and England, and political economy, which emerged first in the United States, and later in England as well. There was also a movement that might be called cultural Marxism, worked out largely in historical and literary studies, but this was not picked up by anthropologists until recently, and will be addressed in the final section of the essay.

*Structural Marxism*

Structural Marxism was the only one of the schools developed entirely within the field of anthropology, and probably for that reason was also the earliest in its impact. Within it, Marx was used to attack and/or rethink, or at the very least to expand, virtually every theoretical scheme on the landscape—symbolic anthropology, cultural ecology, British social anthropology, and structuralism itself. Structural Marxism constituted a would-be total intellectual revolution, and if it did not succeed in establishing itself as the only alternative to everything else we had, it certainly succeeded in shaking up most of the received wisdom. This is not to say that it was necessarily the actual writings of the structural Marxists themselves (e.g., Althusser 1971; Godelier 1977; Terray 1972; Sahlins 1972; Friedman 1975) that had this effect; it was simply that structural Marxism was the original force within anthropology for promulgating and legitimating "Marx," "Marxism," and "critical inquiry" in the discourse of the field as a whole (see also Diamond 1979).

The specific advance of structural Marxism over its antecedent forms of materialist anthropology lay in its locating the determinative forces not in the natural environment and/or in technology, but specifically within certain structures of social relations. Ecological considerations were not excluded, but they were encompassed by and subordinated to the analysis of the social, and especially political, organization of production. Cultural ecology was thus attacked as "vulgar materialism," reinforcing rather than undoing the classical capitalist fetishization of "things," the domination of subjects by objects rather than by the social relations embodied in, and symbolized by, those objects (see especially Friedman 1974). The critical social relations in question, referred to as the mode(s) of production, are not to be confused with the surface organization of social relations traditionally studied by British social anthropologists—lineages, clans, moieties, and all the rest. These surface forms of what the British called "social structure" are seen as native *models* of social organization that have been bought by anthropologists as the real thing, but that actually mask, or at least only partially correspond to, the hidden asymmetrical relations of production that are driving the system. Here, then, was situated the critique of traditional British social anthropology (see especially Bloch 1971, 1974, 1977; Terray 1975).

In addition to critiquing and revising both cultural ecology and British

social anthropology, structural Marxists turned their attention to cultural phenomena. Unlike the cultural ecologists, the structural Marxists did not dismiss cultural beliefs and native categories as irrelevant to the real or objective operations of society, nor, alternatively, did they set about to show that apparently irrational cultural beliefs, such as the sacred cow, actually had practical adaptive functions. Just as the New Left in the real world took cultural issues (life style, consciousness) more seriously than the Old Left had done, so the structural Marxists allocated to cultural phenomena (beliefs, values, classifications) at least one central function in their model of the social process. Specifically, culture was converted to "ideology," and considered from the point of view of its role in social reproduction: legitimating the existing order, mediating contradictions in the base, and mystifying the sources of exploitation and inequality in the system (O'Laughlin 1974; Bloch 1977; Godelier 1977).

One of the virtues of structural Marxism, then, was that there was a place for everything in its scheme. Refusing to see inquiries into material relations and into "ideology" as opposed enterprises, its practitioners established a model in which the two "levels" were related to one another via a core of social/political/economic processes. In this sense, they offered an explicit mediation between the "materialist" and "idealist" camps of sixties anthropology. The mediation was rather mechanical, as we will discuss in a moment, but it was there.

More important, to my mind, the structural Marxists put a relatively powerful sociology back into the picture. They cross-fertilized British social anthropological categories with Marxist ones, and produced an expanded model of social organization ("mode of production") which they then proceeded to apply systematically to particular cases. Whereas other Marxisms emphasized relations of political/economic organization ("production") almost exclusively, the structural Marxists were, after all, anthropologists, trained to pay attention to kinship, descent, marriage, exchange, domestic organization, and the like. They thus included these elements within their considerations of political and economic relations (often giving them a more Marxist ring by calling them "relations of reproduction") and the total effect was to produce rich and complex pictures of the social process in specific cases. Given the relative paucity, mentioned earlier, of detailed sociological analysis in the various sixties schools, this was an important contribution.

All this having been said, one may nonetheless recognize that structural Marxism had a number of problems. For one thing, the narrowing of the culture concept to "ideology," which had the powerful effect of allowing analysts to connect cultural conceptions to specific structures of social relation, was too extreme, and posed the problem of relating ideology back to more general conceptions of culture. For another, the tendency to see culture/ideology largely in terms of mystification gave most of the cultural or

ideological studies in this school a decided functionalist flavor, since the upshot of these analyses was to show how myth, ritual, taboo, or whatever maintained the status quo. Finally, and most seriously, although structural Marxists offered a way of mediating the material and ideological "levels," they did not actually challenge the notion that such levels are analytically distinguishable in the first place. Thus despite criticizing the Durkheimian (and Parsonian) notion of "the social" as the "base" of the system, they merely offered a deeper and allegedly more real and objective "base." And despite attempting to discover more important functions for the "superstructure" (or despite claiming that what is base and what is superstructure varies culturally and/or historically, or even occasionally and rather vaguely that the superstructure is part of the base) they continued to reproduce the idea that it is useful to maintain such a set of analytic boxes.

In this sense, it may be seen that structural Marxism was still very much rooted in the sixties. While it injected a healthy dose of sociology into the earlier scheme of categories, and while this sociology was itself relatively originally conceived, the basic pigeonholes of sixties thought were not radically revised. Further, unlike the political economy school and other more recent approaches to be discussed shortly, structural Marxism was largely nonhistorical, a factor which, again, tied it to earlier forms of anthropology. Indeed one may guess that it was in part this comfortable mix of old categories and assumptions wrapped up in a new critical rhetoric that made structural Marxism so appealing in its day. It was in many ways the perfect vehicle for academics who had been trained in an earlier era, but who, in the seventies, were feeling the pull of critical thought and action that was exploding all around them.

*Political Economy*

The political economy school has taken its inspiration primarily from world-systems and underdevelopment theories in political sociology (Wallerstein 1976; Gunder Frank 1967). In contrast to structural Marxism, which focused largely, in the manner of conventional anthropological studies, on relatively discrete societies or cultures, the political economists have shifted the focus to large-scale regional political/economic systems (e.g., Hart 1982). Insofar as they have attempted to combine this focus with traditional fieldwork in specific communities or microregions, their research has generally taken the form of studying the effects of capitalist penetration upon those communities (e.g., *American Ethnologist* 1978; Schneider and Schneider 1976). The emphasis on the impact of external forces, and on the ways in which societies change or evolve largely in adaptation to such impact, ties the political economy school in certain ways to the cultural ecology of the sixties, and indeed many of its current practitioners were trained in that school (e.g., Ross 1980). But whereas for sixties cultural ecology, often studying relatively "primitive" so-

cieties, the important external forces were those of the natural environment, for the seventies political economists, generally studying "peasants," the important external forces are those of the state and the capitalist world system.

At the level of theory, the political economists differ from their cultural ecology forebears partly in showing a greater willingness to incorporate cultural or symbolic issues into their inquiries (e.g., Schneider 1978; Riegelhaupt 1978). Specifically, their work tends to focus on symbols involved in the development of class or group identity, in the context of political/economic struggles of one sort or another. The political economy school thus overlaps with the burgeoning "ethnicity" industry, although the literature in the latter field is too vast and too amorphous for me to do more than nod to here. In any event, the willingness of the political economists to pay attention, in however circumscribed fashion, to symbolic processes, is part of the general relaxation of the old materialism/idealism wars of the sixties.

The emphasis of this school upon larger regional processes is also salutary, at least up to a point. Anthropologists do have a tendency to treat societies, even villages, as if they were islands unto themselves, with little sense of the larger systems of relations in which these units are embedded. The occasional work (e.g., Edmund Leach's *Political Systems of Highland Burma*) that has viewed societies in larger regional context has been something of an unclassifiable (if admired) freak. To ignore the fact that peasants are part of states, and that even "primitive" societies and communities are invariably involved in wider systems of exchanges of all sorts, is to seriously distort the data, and it is the virtue of the political economists that they remind us of this.

Finally, the political economists must be given leading credit for stressing very strongly the importance of history for anthropological study. They are not the first to have done so, nor are they the only ones doing so now, and I will say more about anthropology's rapprochement with history in the conclusions of this essay. Nonetheless, it is certainly the members of this school who appear the most committed to a fully historical anthropology, and who are producing sustained and systematic work grounded in this commitment.

On the negative side of the ledger, we may complain first that the political economy model is too economic, too strictly materialist. One hears a lot about wages, the market, the cash nexus, economic exploitation, underdevelopment, and so forth, but not enough about the relations of power, domination, manipulation, control, and the like which those economic relations play into, and which for actors constitute much of the experienced pain of economic injustice. Political economy, in other words, is not political enough.

My main objection, however, is located deeper in the theoretical model of political economy. Specifically, I find the capitalism-centered view of the world questionable, to say the least, especially for anthropology. At the core of the model is the assumption that virtually everything we study has already been touched ("penetrated") by the capitalist world system, and that there-

fore much of what we see in our fieldwork and describe in our monographs must be understood as having been shaped in response to that system. Perhaps this is true for European peasants, but even here one would want at least to leave the question open. When we get even further from the "center," however, the assumption becomes very problematic indeed. A society, even a village, has its own structure and history, and this must be as much part of the analysis as its relations with the larger context within which it operates. (See Joel Kahn (1980) for a more balanced view.)

The problems derived from the capitalism-centered worldview also affect the political economists' view of history. History is often treated as something that arrives, like a ship, from outside the society in question. Thus we do not get the history *of* that society, but the impact of (our) history *on* that society. The accounts produced from such a perspective are often quite unsatisfactory in terms of traditional anthropological concerns: the actual organization and culture of the society in question. Traditional studies of course had their own problems with respect to history. They often presented us with a thin chapter on "historical background" at the beginning and an inadequate chapter on "social change" at the end. The political economy study inverts this relationship, but only to create the inverse problem.

The political economists, moreover, tend to situate themselves more on the ship of (capitalist) history than on the shore. They say in effect that we can never know what the other system, in its unique, "traditional," aspects, really looked like anyway. By realizing that much of what we see as tradition is in fact a response to Western impact, so the argument goes, we not only get a more accurate picture of what is going on, but we acknowledge at the same time the pernicious effects of our own system upon others. Such a view is also present, but in modes of anger and/or despair rather than pragmatism, in a number of recent works that question philosophically whether we can ever truly know the "other"—Edward Said's *Orientalism* is the prime example (see also Rabinow 1977; Crapanzano 1980; Riesman 1977).

To such a position we can only respond: try. The effort is as important as the results, in terms of both our theories and our practices. The attempt to view other systems from ground level is the basis, perhaps the only basis, of anthropology's distinctive contribution to the human sciences. It is our capacity, largely developed in fieldwork, to take the perspective of the folks on the shore, that allows us to learn anything at all—even in our own culture—beyond what we already know. (Indeed, as more and more anthropologists are doing fieldwork in Western cultures, including the United States, the importance of maintaining a capacity to see otherness, even next door, becomes more and more acute.) Further, it is our location "on the ground" that puts us in a position to see people not simply as passive reactors to and enactors of some "system," but as active agents and subjects in their own history.

In concluding this section, I must confess that my placement of the political

economy school in the seventies is something of an ideological move. In fact political economy is very much alive and well in the eighties, and it will probably thrive for some time. My periodization is thus, like that of all histories, only partly related to real time. I have included political economy and structural Marxism within this period/category because both schools continue to share a set of assumptions distinct from what I wish to emphasize for the anthropology of the eighties. Specifically, both assume, together with earlier anthropologies, that human action and historical process are almost entirely structurally or systemically determined. Whether it be the hidden hand of structure or the juggernaut of capitalism that is seen as the agent of society/history, it is certainly not in any central way real people doing real things. These are precisely the views from which at least some anthropologists, as well as practitioners in many other fields, appear to be struggling to break free as we move into the present decade.

## INTO THE EIGHTIES: PRACTICE

I began this article by noting the apparent accuracy of Wolf's remarks to the effect that the field of anthropology is disintegrating, even granting the low degree of integration it had in the past. I also suggested that one could find scattered over the landscape the elements of a new trend that seems to be gathering force and coherence. In this final section I call attention to this new trend, sketch it, and subject it to a preliminary critique.

For the past several years, there has been growing interest in analysis focused through one or another of a bundle of interrelated terms: practice, praxis, action, interaction, activity, experience, performance. A second, and closely related, bundle of terms focuses on the doer of all that doing: agent, actor, person, self, individual, subject.

In some fields, movement in this direction began relatively early in the seventies, some of it in direct reaction to structuralism. In linguistics, for example, there was an early rejection of structural linguistics and a strong move to view language as communication and performance (e.g., Bauman and Sherzer 1974; Cole and Morgan 1975). In anthropology too there were scattered calls for a more action based approach. In France, Pierre Bourdieu published his *Outline of a Theory of Practice* in 1972. In the United States, Geertz attacked both hypercoherent studies of symbolic systems (many of them inspired by his own programmatic papers) and what he saw as the sterile formalism of structuralism, calling instead for anthropologists to see "human behavior . . . as . . . symbolic action" (1973a:10; see also Dolgin, Kemnitzer, and Schneider 1977; Wagner 1975; T. Turner 1969). In England, there was a minority wing that criticized traditional views of "social structure" not from the point of view of structural Marxism, but from the perspective of individual choice and decision making (e.g., Kapferer 1976).[14]

[14] The transactionalist tradition in British anthropology may of course be traced back further,

For much of the seventies, however, the structural Marxists and, later, the political economists, remained dominant, at least within anthropology. For them, social and cultural phenomena were to be explained largely by being referred to systemic/structural mechanisms of one sort or another. It was only in the late seventies that the hegemony of structural Marxism, if not that of political economy, began to wane. An English translation of Bourdieu's book was published in 1978, and it was at about that time that the calls for a more practice-oriented approach became increasingly audible. Here is a sampler:

> The instruments of reasoning are changing and society is less and less represented as an elaborate machine or a quasi-organism than as a serious game, a sidewalk drama, or a behavioral text (Geertz 1980a:168).

> We need to watch these systems [of kinship] in action, to study tactics and strategy, not merely the rules of the game (Barnes 1980:301).

> . . . gender conceptions in any society are to be understood as functioning aspects of a cultural system through which actors manipulate, interpret, legitimize, and reproduce the patterns . . . that order their social world (Collier and Rosaldo 1981:311).[15]

> What do actors want and how can they get it? (Ortner 1981:366)

> If structural/semiotic analysis is to be extended to general anthropology on the model of its pertinence to "language," then what is lost is not merely history and change, but practice—human action in the world. Some might think that what is lost is what anthropology is all about (Sahlins 1981:6).

As was the case with the strong revisionist trend in the sixties, the present movement appears much broader than the field of anthropology alone. In linguistics, Alton Becker, in a much-cited article, has emphasized issues of text building over and against reification of The Text (1979). In sociology, symbolic interactionism and other forms of so-called microsociology appear to be attracting new attention,[16] and Anthony Giddens has dubbed the relationship between structure and "agency" one of the "central problems" of modern social theory (1979). In history, E. P. Thompson has railed against theorists (everything from Parsonians to Stalinists) who treat "history as a 'process without a subject' [and] concur in the eviction from history of human agency" (1978:79). In literary studies, Raymond Williams insists that literature must be treated as the product of particular practices, and accuses those who abstract literature from practice of performing "an extraordinary ideological feat" (1977:46). If we push further—and here we skirt dangerous

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to Barth and to Bailey in the sixties, to the earlier works of Leach (e.g., 1960), and ultimately to Raymond Firth (e.g., 1963 [1951]). See also Marriott (1976) in the United States.

[15] I would argue, if I had more space, that feminist anthropology is one of the primary contexts in which a practice approach has been developing. The Collier and Rosaldo (1981) article is a good example. See also Ortner (1981).

[16] Mayer Zald, personal communication, at the Social Science History Seminar (University of Michigan), 1982.

ground—we might even see the whole sociobiology movement as part of this general trend, insofar as it shifts the evolutionary mechanism from random mutation to intentional choice on the part of actors seeking to maximize reproductive success. (I should probably say, right here and not in a footnote, that I have a range of very strong objections to sociobiology. Nonetheless, I do not think it is too far-fetched to see its emergence as part of the broad movement to which I am drawing attention here.)

The practice approach is diverse, and I will not attempt to compare and contrast its many strands. Rather I will select for discussion a number of works that seem to share a common orientation within the larger set, an orientation that seems to me particularly promising. I do not wish to canonize any single one of these works, nor do I wish to provide a label for the subset and endow it with more reality than it has. What I do here is more like beginning to develop a photograph, to coax a latent form into something recognizable.

We may begin by contrasting, in a general way, this (subset of) newer practice-oriented work with certain more established approaches, especially with symbolic interactionism in sociology (Blumer 1962; Goffman 1959; see also Berreman 1962, and more recently Gregor 1977 in anthropology) and with what was called transactionalism in anthropology (Kapferer 1976, Marriott 1976, Goody 1978, Barth 1966, Bailey 1969). The first point to note is that these approaches were elaborated *in opposition to* the dominant, essentially Parsonian/Durkheimian, view of the world as ordered by rules and norms.[17] Recognizing that institutional organization and cultural patterning exist, the symbolic interactionists and transactionalists nonetheless sought to minimize or bracket the relevance of these phenomena for understanding social life:

> From the standpoint of symbolic interaction, social organization is a framework inside of which acting units develop their actions. Structural features, such as "culture," "social systems," "social stratification," or "social roles," set conditions for their action but do not determine their action (Blumer 1962:152).

The newer practice theorists, on the other hand, share a view that "the system" (in a variety of senses to be discussed below) does in fact have very powerful, even "determining," effect upon human action and the shape of events. Their interest in the study of action and interaction is thus not a matter of denying or minimizing this point, but expresses rather an urgent need to understand where "the system" comes from—how it is produced and reproduced, and how it may have changed in the past or be changed in the future. As Giddens argues in his important recent book (1979), the study of

[17] Parsons and his colleagues gave the term "action" central place in their scheme (1962 [1951]), but what they meant by this was essentially *en*-actment of rules and norms. Bourdieu, Giddens, and others have pointed this out, and have cast their arguments in part against this position.

practice is not an antagonistic alternative to the study of systems or structures, but a necessary complement to it.

The other major aspect of the newer practice orientation, differentiating it significantly from earlier interactionist and transactionalist approaches, resides in a palpable Marxist influence carrying through from the seventies. Partly this is visible in the way in which things like culture and/or structure are viewed. That is, although the newer practice theorists share with sixties anthropology a strong sense of the shaping power of culture/structure, this shaping power is viewed rather darkly, as a matter of "constraint," "hegemony," and "symbolic domination." We will come back to this position in greater detail later. More generally, the Marxist influence is to be seen in the assumption that the most important forms of action or interaction for analytic purposes are those which take place in asymmetrical or dominated relations, that it is these forms of action or interaction that best explain the shape of any given system at any given time. Whether it is a matter of focusing directly on interaction (even "struggle") between asymmetrically related actors, or whether it is more broadly a matter of defining actors (whatever they are doing) in terms of roles and statuses derived from asymmetrical relations in which they participate, the approach tends to highlight social asymmetry as the most important dimension of both action and structure.

Not all of current practice work manifests the Marxist influence. Some of it—like symbolic interactionism and transactionalism themselves—is more in the spirit of Adam Smith. The members of the subset with which I am concerned, however, implicitly or explicitly share at least the critical flavor of seventies anthropology, if not a systematic allegiance to Marxist theory per se.

Yet to speak of a Marxist influence in all of this is actually to obscure an important aspect of what is going on: an interpenetration, almost a merger, between Marxist and Weberian frameworks. In the sixties, the opposition between Marx and Weber, as "materialist" and "idealist," had been emphasized. The practice theorists, in contrast, draw on a set of writers who interpret the Marxist corpus in such a way as to render it quite compatible with Weber's views. As Weber put the actor at the center of his model, so these writers emphasize issues of human praxis in Marx. As Weber subsumed the economic within the political, so these writers encompass economic exploitation within political domination. And as Weber was centrally concerned with ethos and consciousness, so these writers stress similar issues within Marx's work. Choosing Marx over Weber as one's theorist of reference is a tactical move of a certain sort. In reality, the theoretical framework involved is about equally indebted to both. (On theory, see Giddens 1971; Williams 1976; Avineri 1971; Ollman 1971; Bauman 1973; Habermas 1973; Goldmann 1977. For substantive case analyses in this Weberian-Marxist vein, see Thompson 1966; Williams 1973; Genovese 1976.)

I will proceed to explicate and evaluate the "new practice" position by way of posing a series of questions: What is it that a practice approach seeks to explain? What is practice? How is it motivated? And what sorts of analytic relationships are postulated in the model? Let me emphasize very strongly that I do not offer here a coherent theory of practice. I merely sort out and discuss, in a very preliminary fashion, some of the central axes of such a theory.

*What is Being Explained?*

As previously indicated, modern practice theory seeks to explain the relationship(s) that obtain between human action, on the one hand, and some global entity which we may call "the system," on the other. Questions concerning these relationships may go in either direction—the impact of the system on practice, and the impact of practice on the system. How these processes work will be taken up below. Here we must say a few words about the nature of "the system."

In two recent works in anthropology that explicitly attempt to elaborate a practice-based model (Bourdieu 1978 [1972]; and Sahlins 1981), the authors nominally take a French structuralist view of the system (patterns of relations between categories, and of relations between relations). In fact however both Bourdieu's *habitus* and Sahlins's "cosmological dramas" behave in many ways like the American concept of culture, combining elements of ethos, affect, and value with more strictly cognitive schemes of classification. The choice of a French or an American perspective on the system does have certain consequences for the shape of the analysis as a whole, but we will not pursue these here. The point is that practice anthropologists assume that society and history are not simply sums of ad hoc responses and adaptations to particular stimuli, but are governed by organizational and evaluative schemes. It is these (embodied, of course, within institutional, symbolic, and material forms) that constitute the system.

The system, further, is not broken up into units like base and superstructure, or society and culture, but is rather a relatively seamless whole. An institution—say, a marriage system—is at once a system of social relations, economic arrangements, political processes, cultural categories, norms, values, ideals, emotional patterns, and so on and on. No attempt is made to sort these components into levels and to assign primacy to one or the other level. Nor, for example, is marriage as a whole assigned to "society," while religion is assigned to "culture." A practice approach has no need to break the system into artificial chunks like base and superstructure (and to argue over which determines which), since the analytic effort is not to explain one chunk of the system by referring it to another chunk, but rather to explain the system as an integral whole (which is not to say a harmoniously integrated one) by referring it to practice.

But if the system is an integral whole, at the same time all of its parts or

dimensions do not have equal analytic significance. At the core of the system, both forming it and deforming it, are the specific realities of asymmetry, inequality, and domination in a given time and place. Raymond Williams, a Marxist literary/cultural historian, sums up both the insistence upon holism and the privileged position of domination characteristic of this view. Picking up Antonio Gramsci's term "hegemony" as his label for the system, he argues that

> "hegemony" is a concept which at once includes and goes beyond two powerful earlier concepts: that of "culture" as a "whole social process," in which men define and shape their whole lives; and that of "ideology" in any of its Marxist senses, in which a system of meanings and values is the expression or projection of a particular class interest.
>
> "Hegemony" goes beyond "culture" in its insistence on relating the "whole social process" to specific distributions of power and influence. To say that men define and shape their whole lives is true only in abstraction. In any actual society there are specific inequalities in means and therefore in capacity to realize this process. . . . Gramsci therefore introduces the necessary recognition of dominance and subordination in what has still, however, to be recognized as a whole process.
>
> It is in just this recognition of the *wholeness* of the process that the concept of "hegemony" goes beyond "ideology." What is decisive is not only the conscious system of ideas and beliefs, but the whole lived social process as practically organized by specific and dominant meanings and values. . . .
>
> [Hegemony] is in the strongest sense a "culture," but a culture which has also to be seen as the lived dominance and subordination of particular classes (Williams 1977:108–109, 110).

What a practice theory seeks to explain, then, is the genesis, reproduction, and change of form and meaning of a given social/cultural whole, defined in—more or less—this sense.

*What is Practice?*

In principle, the answer to this question is almost unlimited: anything people do. Given the centrality of domination in the model, however, the most significant forms of practice are those with intentional or unintentional political implications. Then again, almost anything people do has such implications. So the study of practice is after all the study of all forms of human action, but from a particular—political—angle.

Beyond this general point, further distinctions may be introduced. There is first of all the question of what are taken to be the acting units. Most practice anthropology to date takes these units to be individual actors, whether actual historical individuals, or social types ("women," "commoners," "workers," "junior siblings," etcetera). The analyst takes these people and their doings as the reference point for understanding a particular unfolding of events, and/or for understanding the processes involved in the reproduction or change of some set of structural features. In contrast to a large body of work in the field of history, there has been relatively little done in anthropology on

concerted collective action (but see Wolf 1969; Friedrich 1970; Blu 1980; see also the literature on cargo cults, especially Worsley 1968). Even in studies of collective action, however, the collectivity is handled methodologically as a single subject. We shall be discussing, throughout this section, some of the problems that arise from the essential individualism of most current forms of practice theory.

A second set of questions concerns the temporal organization of action. Some authors (Bourdieu is an example) treat action in terms of relatively ad hoc decision making, and/or relatively short-term "moves." Others suggest, even if they do not develop the point, that human beings act within plans or programs that are always more long range than any single move, and indeed that most moves are intelligible only within the context of these larger plans (Sahlins (1981) implies this, as do Ortner (1981) and Collier and Rosaldo (1981); for an older example, see Hart and Pilling (1960)). Many such plans are culturally provided (the normative life cycle, for example), but many others must be constructed by actors themselves. Even projects generated ("creatively") by actors, however, tend to take stereotyped forms, insofar as the constraints and the resources of the system are relatively constant for actors in similar positions. In any event, an emphasis on larger "projects" rather than particular "moves" underlines the point that action itself *has* (developmental) structure, as well as operating *in,* and in relation *to,* structure.

Finally, there is the question of the *kinds* of action taken to be analytically central to the current approach. Everyone seems to agree in opposing a Parsonian or Saussurian view in which action is seen as sheer en-actment or execution of rules and norms (Bourdieu 1978; Sahlins 1981; Giddens 1979). Moreover, everyone seems also to agree that a kind of romantic or heroic "voluntarism," emphasizing the freedom and relatively unrestricted inventiveness of actors, will not do either (e.g., Thompson 1978). What is left, then, is a view of action largely in terms of pragmatic choice and decision making, and/or active calculating and strategizing. I will have more to say about the strategic model in the next section, when I discuss the views of motivation entailed in practice theory. Here, however, I wish to question whether the critique of en-actment or execution may not have gone too far. Indeed, despite the attacks on Parsons by Bourdieu and Giddens, both recognize the central role of highly patterned and routinized behavior in systemic reproduction. It is precisely in those areas of life—especially in the so-called domestic domain—where action proceeds with little reflection, that much of the conservatism of a system tends to be located. Either because practice theorists wish to emphasize the activeness and intentionality of action, or because of a growing interest in change as against reproduction, or both, the degree to which actors really do simply enact norms because "that was the way of our ancestors" may be unduly undervalued.

*What Motivates Action?*

A theory of practice requires some sort of theory of motivation. At the moment, the dominant theory of motivation in practice anthropology is derived from interest theory. The model is that of an essentially individualistic, and somewhat aggressive, actor, self-interested, rational, pragmatic, and perhaps with a maximizing orientation as well. What actors do, it is assumed, is rationally go after what they want, and what they want is what is materially and politically useful for them within the context of their cultural and historical situations.

Interest theory has been raked over the coals many times before. Here it is sufficient simply to note a few points that have particular relevance for anthropological studies of practice.

Insofar as interest theory is, even if it pretends not to be, a psychological theory, it is clearly far too narrow. In particular, although pragmatic rationality is certainly one aspect of motivation, it is never the only one, and not always even the dominant one. To accord it the status of exclusive motivating force is to exclude from the analytic discourse a whole range of emotional terms—need, fear, suffering, desire, and others—that must surely be part of motivation.

Unfortunately, anthropologists have generally found that actors with too much psychological plumbing are hard to handle methodologically, and practice theorists are no exception. There is, however, a growing body of literature which explores the variable construction of self, person, emotion, and motive in cross-cultural perspective (e.g., M. Rosaldo 1980, 1981; Friedrich 1977; Geertz 1973a, 1975; Singer 1980; Kirkpatrick 1977; Guemple 1972). The growth of this body of work is itself part of the larger trend toward an interest in elaborating an actor-centered paradigm, as is the fact that the subfield of psychological anthropology seems to be enjoying something of a renaissance (e.g., Paul 1982; Kracke 1978; Levy 1973). One may hope for some cross-fertilization between the more sociologically oriented practice accounts, with their relatively denatured views of motive, and some of these more richly textured accounts of emotion and motivation.

If interest theory assumes too much rationality on the part of actors, it also assumes too much active-ness. The idea that actors are always pressing claims, pursuing goals, advancing purposes, and the like may simply be an overly energetic (and overly political) view of how and why people act. We may recall here the distinction, underscored by Geertz, between interest theory and strain theory (1973c). If actors in interest theory are always actively striving for gains, actors in strain theory are seen as experiencing the complexities of their situations and attempting to solve problems posed by those situations. It follows from these points that the strain perspective places greater emphasis on the analysis of the system itself, the forces in play upon

actors, as a way of understanding where actors, as we say, are coming from. In particular, a system is analyzed with the aim of revealing the sorts of binds it creates for actors, the sorts of burdens it places upon them, and so on. This analysis, in turn, provides much of the context for understanding actors' motives, and the kinds of projects they construct for dealing with their situations (see also Ortner 1975, 1978).

While strain theory does not rectify the psychological shortcomings of interest theory, it does at least make for a more systematic exploration of the social forces shaping motives than interest theory does. Indeed, one may say that strain theory is a theory of the social, as opposed to psychological, production of "interests," the latter being seen less as direct expressions of utility and advantage for actors, and more as images of solutions to experienced stresses and problems.

Finally, an interest approach tends to go hand in hand with seeing action in terms of short-term tactical "moves" rather than long-term developmental "projects." From a tactical point of view, actors seek particular gains, whereas from a developmental point of view, actors are seen as involved in relatively far-reaching transformations of their states of being—of their relationships with things, persons, and self. We may say, in the spirit of Gramsci, that action in a developmental or "projects" perspective is more a matter of "becoming" than of "getting" (1957). Intrinsic to this latter perspective is a sense of motive and action as shaped not only by problems being solved, and gains being sought, but by images and ideals of what constitutes goodness—in people, in relationships, and in conditions of life.

It is a peculiarity of interest theory that it is shared across a broad spectrum of analysts, Marxist and non-Marxist, "old" and "new" practice theorists. The popularity and durability of the perspective, despite numerous attacks and criticisms, suggest that especially deep changes in our own practices will be required if anything is to be dislodged in this area.

*The Nature of Interactions between Practice and the System*

1. *How does the system shape practice?* Anthropologists—American ones, anyway—have for the most part long agreed that culture shapes, guides, and even to some extent dictates behavior. In the sixties, Geertz elaborated some of the important mechanisms involved in this process, and it seems to me that most modern practice theorists, including those who write in Marxist and/or structuralist terms, hold an essentially Geertzian view. But there are certain changes of emphasis, derived from the centrality of domination within the practice framework. For one thing, as noted earlier, the emphasis has shifted from what culture allows and enables people to see, feel, and do, to what it restricts and inhibits them from seeing, feeling, and doing. Further, although it is agreed that culture powerfully constitutes the reality that actors live in, this reality is looked upon with critical eyes: why this one and not some other? And what sorts of alternatives are people being dis-abled from seeing?

It is important to note that this view is at least partly distinct from a view of culture as mystification. In a mystification view, culture (= "ideology") tells lies about the realities of people's lives, and the analytic problem is to understand how people come to believe these lies (e.g., Bloch 1977). In the approach under discussion here, however, there is only one reality, and it is culturally constituted from top to bottom. The problem is not that of the system telling lies about some extrasystemic "reality," but of why the system as a whole has a certain configuration, and of why and how it excludes alternative possible configurations.

In any event, in terms of the specific question of how the system constrains practice, the emphasis tends to be laid on essentially cultural and psychological mechanisms: mechanisms of the formation and transformation of "consciousness." Although constraints of material and political sorts, including force, are fully acknowledged, there seems to be general agreement that action is constrained most deeply and systematically by the ways in which culture controls the definitions of the world for actors, limits their conceptual tools, and restricts their emotional repertoires. Culture becomes part of the self. Speaking of the sense of honor among the Kabyle, for example, Bourdieu says:

> . . . honour is a permanent disposition, embedded in the agents' very bodies in the form of mental dispositions, schemes of perception and thought, extremely general in their application, such as those which divide up the world in accordance with the oppositions between the male and the female, east and west, future and past, top and bottom, right and left, etc., and also, at a deeper level, in the form of bodily postures and stances, ways of standing, sitting, looking, speaking, or walking. What is called the sense of honour is nothing other than the cultivated disposition, inscribed in the body schema and the schemes of thought (1978:15).

In a similar vein, Foucault says of the discourse of "perversions":

> The machinery of power that focuses on this whole alien strain did not aim to suppress it, but rather to give it an analytical, visible, and permanent reality: it was implanted in bodies, slipped in beneath modes of conduct, made into a principle of classification and intelligibility, established as a *raison d'être* and a natural order of disorder. . . . The strategy behind this dissemination was to strew reality with them and incorporate them into the individual (1980:44).

Thus insofar as domination is as much a matter of cultural and psychological processes as of material and political ones, it operates by shaping actors' dispositions such that, in the extreme case, "the agents' aspirations have the same limits as the objective conditions of which they are the product" (Bourdieu 1978:166; see also Rabinow 1975; Barnett and Silverman 1979; Rabinow and Sullivan 1979).

At the same time, however, those authors who emphasize cultural domination also place important limits on the scope and depth of cultural controls. The extreme case is never reached, and often never even approached. Thus while accepting the view of culture as powerfully constraining, they argue

that hegemony is always more fragile than its appears, and never as total as it (or as traditional cultural anthropology) would claim. The reasons given for this state of affairs are various, and relate directly to the ways in which the different authors conceptualize systemic change. This brings us to our final set of questions.

2. *How does practice shape the system?* There are really two considerations here—how practice reproduces the system, and how the system may be changed by practice. A unified theory of practice should ideally be able to account for both within a single framework. At the moment, however, it is clear that a focus on reproduction tends to produce a rather different picture from a focus on change, and we will thus take these issues separately.

Beginning with reproduction, there is of course a long tradition in anthropology of asking how it is that norms, values, and conceptual schemes get reproduced by and for actors. Prior to the sixties, at least in American anthropology, emphasis was laid upon socialization practices as the primary agents of this process. In England, however, the influence of the Durkheimian paradigm generated an emphasis on ritual. It was through the enactment of rituals of various kinds that actors were seen as coming to be wedded to the norms and values of their culture, and/or to be purged, at least temporarily, of whatever dissident sentiments they might harbor (e.g., Gluckman 1955; V. Turner 1969; Beidelman 1966). The ritual focus, or what might be called for focus on extraordinary practice, became even stronger in the sixties and seventies. American symbolic anthropologists took up the view that ritual was one of the primary matrices for the reproduction of consciousness (Geertz 1973b; Ortner 1978), even if they dissented from certain aspects of the British approach. And the structural Marxists too placed great weight on the power of ritual to mediate social structural contradictions and mystify the workings of the system. Ritual in fact is a form of practice—people *do* it—and to study the reproduction of consciousness, mystified or otherwise, in the processes of ritual behavior is to study at least one way in which practice reproduces the system.

The newer practice approaches, by contrast, place greater emphasis on the practices of ordinary living. Although these were not by any means ignored in earlier work, they assume greater prominence here. Thus despite his stress on the highly intentionalized moments of practice, Bourdieu also pays close attention to the little routines people enact, again and again, in working, eating, sleeping, and relaxing, as well as the little scenarios of etiquette they play out again and again in social interaction. All of these routines and scenarios are predicated upon, and embody within themselves, the fundamental notions of temporal, spatial, and social ordering that underlie and organize the system as a whole. In enacting these routines, actors not only continue to be shaped by the underlying organizational principles involved, but continually re-endorse those principles in the world of public observation and discourse.

One question lurking behind all of this is whether in fact *all* practice, everything everybody does, embodies and hence reproduces the assumptions of the system. There is actually a profound philosophic issue here: how, if actors are fully cultural beings, they could ever do anything that does not in some way carry forward core cultural assumptions. On the more mundane level, the question comes down to whether divergent or nonnormative practices are simply variations upon basic cultural themes, or whether they actually imply alternative modes of social and cultural being.

These two formulations are grounded in two quite different models of systemic change. One is the classic Marxist model, in which the divisions of labor and the asymmetries of political relations create, in effect, incipient countercultures within the dominant system. At least some of the practices and modes of consciousness of dominated groups "escape" the prevailing hegemony. Change comes about as a result of class struggle in which formerly dominated groups succeed to power and institute a new hegemony based on their own distinctive ways of seeing and organizing the world.

There are a variety of problems with this model that I will not review here. I will simply note that it appears to overstate the differences of conceptual, as opposed to tactical, orientations between classes or other asymmetrically related entities. The model seems to work best when class differences are also, historically, cultural differences, as in cases of colonialism and imperialism (e.g., Taussig 1980). It works less well for many other sorts of cases with which anthropologists typically deal—culturally homogeneous systems in which inequities and asymmetries of various kinds (based on gender, age, or kinship, for example) are inseparable from complementarities and reciprocities that are equally real and equally strongly felt.

Recently, Marshall Sahlins has offered a model which derives systemic change from changes in practices in a rather different way. Sahlins argues that radical change need not be equated with the coming to power of groups with alternative visions of the world. He emphasizes instead the importance of changes of meaning of existing relations.

In a nutshell, Sahlins argues that people in different social positions have different "interests" (a term Sahlins worries over, and uses in an extended sense), and they act accordingly. This does not in itself imply either conflict or struggle, nor does it imply that people with different interests hold radically different views of the world. It does imply, however, that they will seek to enhance their respective positions when opportunities arise, although they will do so by means traditionally available to people in their positions. Change comes about when traditional strategies, which assume traditional patterns of relations (e.g., between chiefs and commoners, or between men and women), are deployed in relation to novel phenomena (e.g., the arrival of Captain Cook in Hawaii) which do not respond to those strategies in traditional ways. This change of context, this refractoriness of the real world to

traditional expectations, calls into question both the strategies of practice and the nature of the relationships which they presuppose:

> . . . the pragmatics had its own dynamics: relationships that defeated both intention and convention. The complex of exchanges that developed between Hawaiians and Europeans . . . brought the former into uncharacteristic conditions of internal conflict and contradiction. Their differential connections with Europeans thereby endowed their own relationships to each other with novel functional content. This is structural transformation. The values acquired in practice return to structure as new relationships between its categories (Sahlins 1981:50).

Sahlins's model is appealing in a number of ways. As already noted, he does not equate divergence of interest with an almost countercultural formation, and is thus not forced to see change in terms of actual replacement of groups (although there is some of this, eventually, in the Hawaiian case too). Further, in arguing that change may come about largely through (abortive) attempts to apply traditional interpretations and practices, his model unites mechanisms of reproduction and transformation. Change, as he says, is failed reproduction. And finally, in stressing changes of *meaning* as an essentially revolutionary process, he renders revolution itself less extraordinary (if no less dramatic, in its own way) than the standard models would have it.

One may nonetheless register a few quibbles. For one thing, Sahlins is still struggling with the interest perspective. He confronts it briefly, and he offers a formula that attempts to soften some of its more ethnocentric qualities, but he does not really grapple with the full range of thought and feeling that moves actors to act, and to act in complex ways.

Further, one may suggest that Sahlins makes change appear a bit too easy. Of course the book is short, and the model only sketched. Moreover, the relative "openness" of any given system, and of different types of systems, is probably empirically variable (see, e.g., Yengoyan 1979). Nonetheless, Sahlins notes only in passing the many mechanisms that tend, in the normal course of events, to hold a system in place despite what appear to be important changes in practices. The moves to maintain the status quo by those who have vested interests are perhaps the least of these, and in any event they may backfire or produce unintended novel results. More important is the sort of "drag" introduced into the system by the fact that, as a result of enculturation, actors embody the system as well as living within it (see Bourdieu 1978). But mature actors are not all that flexible. An adequate model of the capacity of practice to revise structure must thus in all probability encompass a long-term, two- or three-generation developmental framework.

A related point derives from the fact that much of systemic reproduction takes place via the routinized activities and intimate interactions of domestic life. To the degree that domestic life is insulated from the wider social sphere (a degree generally much greater than is the case in Polynesia), important practices—of gender relations and child socialization—remain relatively un-

touched, and the transmission of novel meanings, values, and categorical relations to succeeding generations may be hindered. At the very least, what gets transmitted will be significantly—and conservatively—modified.

In short, there are probably far more linkages, and far more possibilities of slippage, in the route leading back from practice to structure than Sahlins's relatively smooth account allows for. Nonetheless, if the course of structural change is more difficult than he makes it appear, Sahlins presents a convincing account of how it may be easier than some would claim.

I close this final section with two reservations beyond those already expressed. The first concerns the centrality of domination within the contemporary practice framework, or at least within that segment of it upon which we have focused here. I am as persuaded as many of the authors that to penetrate into the workings of asymmetrical social relations is to penetrate to the heart of much of what is going on in any given system. I am equally convinced, however, that such an enterprise, taken by itself, is one-sided. Patterns of cooperation, reciprocity, and solidarity constitute the other side of the coin of social being. In this post-seventies context, views of the social in terms of sharing, exchange, and moral obligation—in David Schneider's famous phrase, "diffuse, enduring solidarity"—are treated largely as ideology. Often of course they *are* ideological. Yet a Hobbesian view of social life is surely as biased as one that harks back to Rousseau. An adequate model must encompass the full set.

My second point is not so much a critical reservation as a kind of fingering of an irony at the core of the practice model. The irony, although some may not feel it as such, is this: that although actors' intentions are accorded central place in the model, yet major social change does not for the most part come about as an *intended* consequence of action. Change is largely a by-product, an *un*intended consequence of action, however rational action may have been. Setting out to conceive children with superior mana by sleeping with British sailors, Hawaiian women became agents of the spirit of capitalism in their society. Setting out to preserve structure and reduce anomaly by killing a "god" who was really Captain Cook, the Hawaiians put in motion a train of events that ultimately brought down their gods, their chiefs, and their world as they knew it. To say that society and history are products of human action is true, but only in a certain ironic sense. They are rarely the products the actors themselves set out to make.[18]

[18] Michel Foucault, whose later work (1979 and 1980) is certainly part of the current practice trend, and who is making an impact in at least some quarters of anthropology, has put this point nicely: "People know what they do; they frequently know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what what they do does" (quoted in Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982:187). I regret having been unable to incorporate Foucault into the discussions of this section. In particular, he has been struggling against some of the ramifications of the individualism at the heart of much of practice theory, although he has wound up tying himself into other knots—such as "intentionality without a subject, [and] a strategy without a strategist" (*ibid.*)—in the process.

## CONCLUSIONS AND PROSPECTS

It has not been my intention, as I said earlier, to give an exhaustive account of any single school of anthropological thought over the last two decades. Rather I have been concerned with the relations between various intellectual trends in the field, within and across time. Nor has this been, as is surely obvious, a wholly disinterested inquiry. The strands of thought I have chosen to emphasize are those which I see as being most important in bringing the field to a certain position today, and my representations concerning where we are today are themselves clearly selective.

Much of what has been said in this essay can be subsumed within Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's little epigram: "Society is a human product. Society is an objective reality. Man is a social product" (1967:61). Most prior anthropologies have emphasized the second component of this set: society (or culture) has been regarded as an objective reality in some form or another, with its own dynamics divorced in large part from human agency. The American cultural and psychocultural anthropologists, in addition, have emphasized the third component, the ways in which society and culture shape personality, consciousness, ways of seeing and feeling. But until very recently, little effort has been put toward understanding how society and culture themselves are produced and reproduced through human intention and action. It is around this question, as I see it, that eighties anthropology is beginning to take shape, while at the same time maintaining—ideally—a sense of the truths of the other two perspectives.

I have thus taken practice as the key symbol of eighties anthropology. I am aware, however, that many would have chosen a different key symbol: history. Around this term clusters notions of time, process, duration, reproduction, change, development, evolution, transformation (see Cohn 1981). Rather than seeing the theoretical shift in the field as a move from structures and systems to persons and practices, it might thus be seen as a shift from static, synchronic analyses to diachronic, processual ones. Viewing the shift in this way, the practice approach comprises only one wing of the move to diachrony, emphasizing microdevelopmental processes—transactions, projects, careers, developmental cycles, and the like.

The other wing of the move to diachrony is macroprocessual or macrohistorical, and itself comprises at least two trends. On the one side, there is the political economy school already discussed, which attempts to understand change in the small-scale societies typically studied by anthropologists by relating that change to large-scale historical developments (especially colonialism and capitalist expansion) external to the societies in question. On the other, there is a more ethnographic sort of historical investigation, which pays greater attention to the internal developmental dynamics of particular societies over time. External impingements are taken into account, but there is greater

effort to delineate forces of both stability and change at work within a given system, as well as the social and cultural filters operating to select and/or reinterpret whatever may be coming in from outside (e.g., Geertz 1980b; Blu 1980; R. Rosaldo 1980; Wallace 1980; Sahlins 1981; Ortner, in preparation; Kelly n.d.).

Anthropology's rapprochement with history is in my view an extremely important development for the field as a whole. If I have chosen in this essay not to emphasize it, it is only because, at the moment, the trend is too broad. It covers, rather than reveals, important distinctions. Insofar as history is being amalgamated with virtually every kind of anthropological work, it offers a pseudointegration of the field which fails to address some of the deeper problems. As argued in this essay, those deeper problems were generated by the very successes of systems and structuralist approaches, which established the reality of the thinglike nature of society, but which failed to ask, in any systematic way, where the thing comes from and how it might change.

To answer these questions with the word "history" is to avoid them, if by history is meant largely a chain of external events to which people react. History is not simply something that happens to people, but something they make—within, of course, the very powerful constraints of the system within which they are operating. A practice approach attempts to see this making, whether in the past or in the present, whether in the creation of novelty or in the reproduction of the same old thing. Rather than fetishizing history, a practice approach offers, or at least promises, a model that implicitly unifies both historical and anthropological studies.[19]

There have, of course, been attempts to put human agency back in the picture before. These attempts, however, yielded either too much or too little to the systems/structures perspective. In the case of Parsons's "general theory of action," action was seen almost purely as en-actment of the rules and roles of the system. In the cases of symbolic interactionism and transactionalism, systemic constraints were minimized, the system itself being viewed as a relatively unordered reservoir of "resources" that actors draw upon in constructing their strategies. The modern versions of practice theory, on the other hand, appear unique in accepting all three sides of the Berger and Luckmann triangle: that society is a system, that the system is powerfully constraining, and yet that the system can be made and unmade through human action and interaction.

[19] It might be objected that the political economists themselves put practice in a central position in their model. As external events impinge, actors in a given society react and attempt to deal with those impingements. The problem here is that action is primarily re-action. The reader might object in turn that re-action is central to Sahlins's model too. But the point in Sahlins is that the nature of the reaction is shaped as much by internal dynamics as by the nature of the external events.

All of which is not to say either that the practice perspective represents the end of the intellectual dialectic or that it is perfect. I have touched upon many of its defects in the present essay. Like any theory, it is a product of its times. Once, practice had the romantic aura of voluntarism—"man," as the saying went, "makes himself." Now practice has qualities related to the hard times of today: pragmatism, maximization of advantage, "every man," as the saying goes, "for himself." Such a view seems natural in the context of the failure of many of the social movements of the sixties and seventies, and in the context of a disastrous economy and a heated up nuclear threat. Yet however realistic it may appear at the moment, such a view is as skewed as voluntarism itself. A lot of work remains to be done.

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*Note:* This article was originally submitted in July 1982. A number of relevant works have been published since then which could not be incorporated into the discussion or the bibliography.