

tournaments, certainly; but also the fact that Manchester United is virtually the home team of Singapore) needs further exploration. The unpredictability of the outcome of any given game, further, contributes to blurring the boundary between football, religion and witchcraft. A research question which cannot be answered straightforwardly and conclusively, concerns what exactly is the 'object of worship' in spectator sports such as professional football. It is all of the above and more.

It is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the study of religion, rituals and practical/cognitive systems of knowledge that anthropological research generates insights which would not have been available without fieldwork. For instance, contrary to much theoretical philosophy, anthropological research has shown how it is fully possible, in practice, to hold notions which are contradictory in theory. Different kinds of knowledge are used in different kinds of situations, and as long as they are not confronted in the same situation they may easily coexist in the mind of one person. In a study of medical systems in polyethnic Mauritius, Linda Sussman (1983) shows that Mauritians may well consult three or four different kinds of doctors – who in a sense work within totally different realities and have irreconcilable views on illness and healing – to be on the safe side. If they have a backache, they may see a Chinese herbal doctor, an Indian ayurvedic doctor, a European physiotherapist and an African traditional healer.

The general point here is that meaning is use: that religious as well as other knowledge becomes important to people only when it can be used for something, only when it is connected to their experience. Rituals, in this regard, dramatise the rather abstract tenets of religion, render the content of religion concrete and recognisable, link it to experience and legitimate the social and political order. Moreover, different kinds of knowledge are made relevant in different situations. Therefore it does not necessarily lead to a practical contradiction to believe in both the Bible and the scientific theory of evolution, as long as the two bodies of thought are kept in separate realms. Similarly, a Kachin may be favourable to both gumlao and gumsa values, but not simultaneously; and a West Indian may be (indeed, most are) favourable to values of both respectability and reputation.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

- E.E. Evans-Pritchard: *Theories of Primitive Religion*. Oxford: Clarendon 1965.
 Clifford Geertz: Religion as a Cultural System, in Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books 1973.
 Jeremy MacClancy, ed.: *Sport, Identity and Ethnicity*. Oxford: Berg 1994.
 Victor W. Turner: *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 1967.

15 MODES OF THOUGHT

Animals are divided into (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) *et cetera*, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies.

— Jorge Luis Borges (quoting from 'a certain Chinese encyclopedia')

WHORF'S HYPOTHESIS AND THE PROBLEM OF TRANSLATION

Benjamin Lee Whorf was an insurance salesman in the US in the 1920s. A recurrent problem in his job concerned the interpretation of words; their precise meaning was often extremely significant with regard to indemnity payments. What did it mean, for example, that a fire was 'self-inflicted'? And what did it mean that a drum of petrol was 'empty'? In some cases, it could be empty of petrol, but full of petrol gas and highly explosive. A fire which was caused by an empty petrol drum exploding could, however, not be defined as self-inflicted. Whorf's company lost some money on such cases.

Some years later, Whorf developed an hypothesis on the relationship between language and the non-linguistic world which has enjoyed great influence in anthropology. Whorf's teacher in linguistic anthropology, Edward Sapir, played a part in the development of the idea, and the hypothesis is sometimes named the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, but I shall speak of it as Whorf's hypothesis (Whorf 1956). It postulates that there is an intimate connection between the categories and structure of a language and the ways in which humans are able to experience the world. Whorf paid special attention to the language of the Hopis, which was almost without nouns as we know them and which also lacked the standard verb conjugations common to Indo-European languages. Since the language of the Hopis had these peculiar characteristics, Whorf argued, they would experience the world in a fundamentally different way from the descendants of European settlers in North America, who had brought their languages and grammars to the continent. The language of the Hopis was process-oriented and focused on movement, whereas English and other European languages were oriented towards things and nouns in general.

Whorf argued that there was an intrinsic connection between the life-world of a people and its language; that every people will develop the

linguistic tools it needs to solve tasks perceived as necessary, and that the language of a people will therefore be a significant source of knowledge about their mode of thought, their cosmology and their everyday life.

An immediate implication of Whorf's hypothesis is the problem of cross-cultural translation, one of the perennial problems of anthropology. Is it necessarily possible to translate, say, the life-world and culture of the Azande into English? Or could it rather be that their form of life is so closely connected with the Zande language that such a project is doomed to fail – because we will always be forced to interpret them in our own terms, and not in theirs, when we try to describe them in a language other than their own? Whorf himself did not hesitate to describe the differences between the Hopi language and English in comparative, or 'etic', terms, and in practice he thus carried out cultural translation. Such translations are necessary for anthropology to be possible, but they are not unproblematic.

THE NOTION OF THE PRE-LOGICAL MIND

Such issues are fundamental to anthropology as a comparative social science. They do not concern research methodology only; they also deal with the question of whether all humans think in roughly the same way, or if there are culturally specific modes of thought which follow different logics and cannot be faithfully reproduced in a foreign language. When the German explorer von den Steinen reported, in the late nineteenth century, that the Bororo of Amazonas described themselves as red macaws, many – among them Lucien Lévy-Bruhl – drew the conclusion that the Bororo were clearly unable to think logically. For how can it be possible to think that one is a parrot and a human being at the same time? The Bororo mode of thought thus had to be pre-logical; this people violated Aristotle's principle of contradiction, which states that an object cannot both have and not have one and the same property at the same time and in the same respect. One cannot, in other words, both believe and not believe that one is a parrot. (Later it became evident that the Bororo by no means contradicted themselves, but rather spoke metaphorically in a way incomprehensible to von den Steinen. He interpreted them too literally.)

The general problem of translation is still with us, although it has been reformulated many times since the early 1930s. The problem has three main aspects. First, do 'primitive', non-literate peoples think in a fundamentally different way from ourselves? Second, if so, is it possible to understand their life-world and to translate it into a comparative anthropological terminology? Third, is the anthropological terminology inherently culturally embedded, or does it represent a kind of context-free, and therefore comparatively useful, kind of language? There are many ways to approach these issues, and the only answer on which nearly all anthropologists agree, is that any differences in modes of thought are not innate – they are not caused

by 'racial' differences. We must, therefore, study and compare culture and social organisation, even when the topic is the relationship between abstract modes of thought among different peoples.

THE MENTAL UNITY OF HUMANITY

One of the central dogmas of anthropology is the principle of the mental unity of humanity. This indicates that the innate characteristics of humanity are roughly the same everywhere – not in the sense that humans are identical, but rather in that inborn differences do not account for cultural variation. If, for example, one had believed that the 'races' had varying degrees of intelligence, one might have accepted that there were inherent genetic causes for the fact that Africans in colonial times were illiterate and engaged in ancestor worship whereas British gentlemen drank port and quoted Shelley. If this had been correct, the entire modern anthropological endeavour would have been superfluous, since it would have been futile to search in culture and social organisation for causes of human variation.

The scientific grounds for claiming that different human groups have systematically varying mental faculties has never been convincing. The variation *within* each group has frequently been shown to be greater than the variation *between* the groups. Within any random sample of individuals, there will be some 'smart' and some 'stupid' people, some enterprising and some lazy individuals, and so on; but it cannot be shown that, say, the Sami are intelligent whereas the Mbuti are stupid. This is to say that human groups worldwide are endowed with roughly the same innate faculties and potentials, and that cultural variation must be accounted for by referring to events taking place after birth.

Many kinds of cultural variation have been accounted for in this way in previous chapters. Neither the kula exchange of the Trobrianders, the ancestor cults of the Kaguru nor the agricultural technology of the Dogon have been explained through reference to inborn characteristics of the 'races'. This chapter focuses on variations between different cultural modes of thought, which are some of the most difficult cultural differences both to understand and to account for in comparative terms. We begin by discussing whether it may be reasonable to believe in witches, and then move on to classification, cultural knowledge and the relationship between thought, power and social organisation.

WITCHCRAFT AND KNOWLEDGE AMONG THE AZANDE

The Azande are a patrilineal people of agriculturalists who live largely in southern Sudan, a few hundred kilometres south-west of Nuerland (Evans-Pritchard 1983 [1937]). Their cosmology presumes (in the ethnographic present tense) the existence of a number of spirits of different kinds, including

ancestral spirits. In addition, the institution of witchcraft is central to their daily life and world-view. It is seen as the individual ability to create misfortune for others in spiritual ways. Only some Azande possess this ability. Unlike magic, which involves medicines and magical formulas, witchcraft is a purely spiritual, generally involuntary activity: the witchcraft power frequently commits its acts while the carrier (the witch) is asleep.

Death and other unfortunate circumstances are usually seen as caused by witchcraft. Traditionally, witches were executed ritually, but by the time of Evans-Pritchard's fieldwork in the late 1920s this practice had been abandoned, although the belief in witchcraft continued; even decades later, when many Azande had been proletarianised, witchcraft beliefs were common (Reining 1966).

The witchcraft institution provides answers to important questions and explains why people suffer misfortunes. It cannot explain in general why one develops a fever after a snakebite, but it does offer an explanation for why a certain person was bitten by a certain snake on a certain day. The scientific doctrine about cause and effect cannot provide explanations of this kind: it cannot tell why the granary had to collapse just when several Azande were resting in its shade. Although the poles supporting the granary were destroyed by termites, the victims held that the accident was ultimately caused by witchcraft.

The notion of witchcraft is not incompatible with a belief in causality. A Zande might agree that certain diseases are caused by bacteria in the drinking water, but he would also want to know why he became ill when his neighbour did not. He would look for the cause in his enemies, whom he would suspect of witchcraft.

Evans-Pritchard suggests that witchcraft is invoked as an explanatory principle 'whenever plain reason fails'. When somebody is accused of witchcraft, a prince or a witchdoctor consults an oracle to decide the matter. The most important is the poison oracle, which consists of a portion of poison and two fowls. The first fowl is served poison; if it survives, the accused is innocent, but if it dies, he or she is guilty. Then the validity of the verdict is double-checked by administering the poison to a second bird.

Evans-Pritchard took witches more seriously than anybody had done earlier, and was concerned to show how the belief in witches made sense and was perfectly rational within the Zande world. He was among the earliest to criticise and discard the idea that there existed a specifically primitive, 'pre-logical' mentality. His aim was to explore the interrelationships between thought and social structure, but not to reduce the former to the latter.

However, at two important points Evans-Pritchard indicates that, when all is said and done, the Azande are wrong in assuming that witches exist. First, he introduces a sharp distinction between the witchcraft logic and the scientific logic, and frequently makes statements to the effect that 'obviously, witches do not exist'. He also distinguishes clearly between mystical notions, notions based on common sense and scientific notions. Since witchcraft is

invisible and (in 'our' view) supernatural, a cosmology based on such beliefs falls squarely into the first category and must be less valid, on objective grounds, than scientific notions.

Second, Evans-Pritchard's monograph ends with a primarily structural-functional explanation of the witchcraft institution: the belief in witches and similar institutions exist, ultimately, because they contribute to social integration and check deviant behaviour – not because they produce valid insight and understanding.

WINCH'S CRITICISM

The philosopher Peter Winch, reacting against Evans-Pritchard's distinction between mystical and scientific notions, started a lengthy and heated debate on comparison, rationality and cultural translation when he wrote a paper in 1964 entitled 'Understanding a Primitive Society' (Winch 1970 [1964]).

Winch rejects the idea that there are universal standards available to compare witchcraft beliefs and science. To him, science just as much as witchcraft is based on unverifiable axioms. Winch also claims that Oxford professors are scarcely less superstitious than Azande; they too trust blindly in forces they do not fully understand. One of his examples is drawn from meteorology. How many of us really understand its principles? Yet we watch the weather forecasts.

Winch agrees that ideas and notions must be tested in order for their validity to be justified. This, he argues, is done both in scientific experiments and in the Zande consultation of poison oracles, and there is no difference in principle between the two procedures.

Further, Winch claims that scientific experiments are meaningless to someone who is ignorant about the principles of science. For this reason, science – like witchcraft – is not inherently meaningful, but makes sense only within a particular, culturally created frame of reference. He compares the helplessness of an engineer deprived of his mathematics with the predicament of a Zande without access to his oracles.

To Winch, it is also important to note that the lives of the Azande seem to function well; that their relationship to witchcraft makes their existence meaningful, and that the system by and large is consistent.

The disagreement between Evans-Pritchard and Winch ultimately amounts to divergent views of science. Whereas Evans-Pritchard holds that the Azande are wrong, Winch argues that all knowledge is culturally constructed and that it can therefore only be deemed right or wrong within its own cultural context. Winch questions anthropology's assumption that its comparative concepts are culturally 'neutral' – when all is said and done, he suggests, even anthropology is a cultural practice.

He draws extensively on Ludwig Wittgenstein's theory of language games (1983 [1958]), where the latter argues that knowledge is socially created

and that different systems of knowledge (language games, or in Winch's sense, cultures) are incommensurable and therefore cannot be ranked hierarchically or, strictly speaking, compared. This line of reasoning, which Winch applies not only to anthropological analysis but also to the anthropologists themselves, can be glossed as a strong version of Whorf's hypothesis, and it seems to render different cultural universes incommensurable for want of a neutral language of comparison.

Let us pose the question differently. Why is it that anthropology as an academic discipline developed in Western Europe and the USA, and not, say, in the Trobriand Islands or Zandeland? As an experiment in thinking, we may imagine a Zande anthropologist who arrives in Britain to look into the local cosmology and cultural perception of death. She would quickly discover that the witchcraft institution is absent in that country, something which clearly must be accounted for. If she is a faithful structural-functionalist, she might search for functional causes for the strange denial, among the British, of the existence of witches. Perhaps she would eventually draw the conclusion that the denial of witchcraft, the blind faith in 'natural causes of death', strengthened social integration in British society, since it prevented open conflict between families and lineages.

This kind of argument seems to lend support to Winch's relativist position. However, it is a matter of fact that social anthropology did not develop in Zandeland but in Britain and other northern countries, and this must also be taken into account. Perhaps the hypothetical example of the Zande anthropologist is best seen as a warning against simplistic functionalist explanations, but not as an argument against anthropology as a generalising, comparative discipline. Later in this chapter, some reasons are suggested as to why the Zande did not develop their own comparative science of society and culture. It must also be emphasised that there is no reason to discard Evans-Pritchard's pioneering analysis of an African knowledge system as bogus, notwithstanding Winch's critical points. Mary Douglas has forcefully argued that the book is primarily about knowledge, not about social integration (Douglas 1980), and the anarchist philosopher of science Paul Feyerabend (1975) mentions it as an outstanding example of non-ethnocentric science.

HOW 'NATIVES' THINK

Just as many anthropologists had begun to believe that the rationality debate had been exhausted after a series of increasingly nuanced edited collections (B. Wilson 1970; Hollis and Lukes 1982; Overing 1985), it reappeared at the very centre of American anthropology in the 1980s and 1990s. The antagonists were Gananath Obeyesekere and Marshall Sahlins, both highly respected anthropologists, who disagreed fundamentally about details concerning the death of Captain Cook at the hands of Hawaiians in 1779.

Sahlins had originally argued that Cook was killed because the Hawaiians had initially perceived him as a god (Lono), but when he was forced to return at an inauspicious moment because of a broken mast, he spoiled the divine script that had been made for him, and had to be sacrificed (Sahlins 1985). An examination of Sahlins's argument led Obeyesekere to write a book, *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook* (1992), where he accuses Sahlins of depicting the Hawaiians more or less as childish, irrational savages. Obeyesekere, an anthropologist influenced by Freudian psychoanalysis, claims that Hawaiians acted according to the same pragmatic, calculating rationality as virtually everybody else.

A few years later, Sahlins responded in kind, by offering a new book entitled *How 'Natives' Think: About Captain Cook, For Example* (Sahlins 1995). The title is a pun on Lévy-Bruhl's *How Natives Think*, which represents exactly the tradition of Western thinking about 'primitive peoples' that Obeyesekere tries to associate Sahlins with. While Obeyesekere accuses Sahlins of imperialist thinking (it is naturally pleasing for a white man to fancy that 'natives' used to believe that white men were gods), Sahlins turns the cards and argues that Obeyesekere is the imperialist, as he tries to impose a Western, utilitarian, rational-choice model of action on to the Hawaiians. Obeyesekere, in other words, emerges as the universalist, Sahlins as the relativist, and both doubt the other's ability to portray a non-European people on their own terms. Through the heated, learned debate between Sahlins and Obeyesekere (where Sahlins admittedly has the advantage of being the regional specialist), the issues of translation, interpretation, relativity and universality re-emerge – fresh, challenging and difficult to resolve in a conclusive manner.

CLASSIFICATION

Durkheim and Mauss were among the earliest to explore the interrelationship between social organisation and patterns of thought. The basic idea in their book *Primitive Classification* (1963 [1903]) was that thought is a social product and that different societies thereby produce different kinds of thought. (Unlike Winch, they did not question the privileged position of scientific thought.) A great portion of the book discusses primitive systems of classification; and since its publication, the study of classification has been a central concern in anthropology.

Classification, in the anthropological sense, entails dividing objects, people, animals and other phenomena according to socially pre-established categories or types. This is an important part of the knowledge system of any society, and knowledge is always related to social organisation and power. Arguments have just been presented against the notion that some kinds of knowledge are 'objectively and universally true', and in exploring systems of knowledge it is necessary to be aware of the interrelationship

Cannibalism

In which sub-field of anthropology does research on cannibalism properly belong? In the study of economic systems, politics, religion, cultural ecology, symbolism and modes of thought, classification – or in the autocritique of anthropology? Let me outline some highlights in research on cannibalism.

Some scholars, including Marvin Harris, held that the assumed widespread cannibalism among the Aztecs was caused by protein scarcity. Others, notably Sahlins, argued that there was enough protein available, and that the ritual consumption of human hearts was rather a deeply religious act.

According to Lévi-Strauss's theory of symbolic relationships between different kinds of food, boiled and roasted food constitute a binary pair of oppositions. In accordance with this model, Lévi-Strauss held that it was likely that endocannibals (who eat parts of deceased relatives) would boil them, while exocannibals (who eat enemies) would roast them. In a bid to test the 'hypothesis', the Harvard anthropologist Paul Shankman processed data from sixty societies assumed to practise cannibalism. He found that seventeen boiled while twenty roasted; six did both. The rest used other techniques for preparation, including baking. Shankman found, further, that there was no correlation between the categorisation of the eaten and the mode of preparation (Harris 1979).

It must be said, in defence of Lévi-Strauss, that anthropological reports of cannibalism are uncertain and tend to be second-hand. Indeed, they are so uncertain that William Arens, in *The Man-Eating Myth* (1978), argues that cannibalism has probably *never* existed as a cultural custom. All the sources he has consulted suffer from weaknesses and inconsistencies. To the Spanish conquistadors, for example, it was useful to depict the Aztecs as bloodthirsty cannibals to justify destroying their highly advanced civilisation. Arens, referring to a mass of anthropological research, could not find a single reliable eye-witness account of cannibalism. He points out that many peoples tell stories to the effect that the neighbouring tribe are cannibals, which may explain why the belief in cannibalism is so widespread. Actually, he intimates that a rule against cannibalism may be as universal as the incest taboo.

If Arens is at least partly right, cannibalism has to do with classification, but not classification of food. Instead, it concerns the classification of people, and both anthropologists and other people have taken part in this kind of classification.

between knowledge and other parts of the social world; this includes one's own knowledge.

Just as witchcraft beliefs may seem 'irrational' to the ethnocentric observer, alien systems of classification may seem unsystematic to someone who takes the Western system for granted. Ethnographic studies have revealed great variations in the ways other people classify. One famous example is the Karam of highland New Guinea, who do not regard the cassowary as a bird (Bulmer 1967), although Linnaeus (the founder of the scientific system of plant and animal classification) would definitely have done so. The cassowary resembles an ostrich: it has feathers and lays eggs, but does not fly. Therefore the Karam do not consider it a bird. On the other hand, they classify bats together with birds (as flying creatures), even though we 'know' that they are 'really' mammals.

For a long time, anthropologists tried to show that the logic of any system of classification was intrinsically connected to the usefulness of plants and animals; that it was simply a functional device for the material reproduction of society. This idea eventually had to be abandoned, and we now turn to showing why.

CLASSIFICATORY ANOMALIES

The Lele of Kasai (in present-day Zaïre) distinguish meticulously between different classes of animals (Douglas 1975). For instance, birds are characterised by feathers, their ability to fly and the laying of eggs, and are thereby distinguished from other animals. However, there are certain animals that do not fit neatly into this logic. The monitor lizard and the tortoise are examples of such exceptions: they lay eggs, but walk on all fours and lack feathers. Douglas describes such 'deviant' creatures as anomalies; they fail to fit in. The anomaly, like the liminal phase in Turner's model of the ritual process (Chapter 9), is both outside and inside; it threatens the established order. Anomalous animals are subject to certain rules; one can only eat them under specific circumstances, women are not allowed to touch them, and so on.

The most important anomalous creature among the Lele is the pangolin (*Manis tricuspis*). It has, the Lele explain, the tail and body of a fish and it is covered with scales, but it gives birth like a mammal. It has four small legs and climbs trees (Douglas 1975, p. 33). This animal, it turns out, has an important place in the mythology and ritual life of the Lele. There is a cult of fertility centred on it. The reason, argues Douglas, is that the pangolin is anomalous in a crucial way: in addition to everything else, it gives birth to only one offspring at a time. In this regard it resembles a human more than an animal. Just as the parents of twins and triplets (who are also anomalies on this score) are seen as mediators between the human and the spiritual worlds, the pangolin is seen as a mediator between humanity and the animal world.

Natural Symbols

An original view on the relationship between nature and society is expressed in Mary Douglas's writings on cultural conceptions of nature, purity and pollution (Douglas 1966, 1970; see Chapter 6). Her thought on this issue is inspired by Lévi-Strauss's postulate on the universality of the culture-nature distinction, by Durkheim's and Mauss's work on classification, and by British structural-functionalism. Her general argument is as follows.

Humans are classifying beings who distinguish between order and disorder, inside and outside, pure and impure. The reason why the pig is considered unclean in the Middle East, for example, is that it is a non-ruminating cloven-footed animal and therefore does not fit into the classificatory system for animals. Cultural ecologists, among them Marvin Harris, would rather argue that the pig is considered impure because it is a potential carrier of trichinas.

Douglas deals with the social classification of the body from the same perspective. The socialised body is ambiguous: it is simultaneously cultural and natural, both orderly and chaotic. Its natural aspects, including ageing and bodily functions, are threatening and potentially dangerous, since they are symbolic reminders of the continuous threat of chaos and dissolution to the fragile social organism (society). The cultural body thereby becomes a metaphor for society, and the boundaries of the body are metaphors for the boundaries of society. For this reason, she argues, it is socially important to circumscribe bodily functions with strict cultural (and cultivating) rules. Menstruating women, for example, are seen as polluting in many societies, and are sometimes secluded.

Anomalies are usually associated with danger and pollution. One example, described by Douglas elsewhere (1966), is the pig in Middle Eastern religions: as a cloven-hoofed but not ruminant mammal, it was not classified as edible since edible animals ought to be both cloven-hoofed and ruminant – it was an anomaly. The rather more positive status of the pangolin is caused by the fact, Douglas argues, that the Lele have succeeded in turning a potential curse into a blessing, exploiting the ambiguous status of the animal to their advantage. The pangolin is not economically important, and yet it occupies a central place in Lele cosmology: it is a mediator.

TOTEMIC CLASSIFICATION

When the Bororo spoke of themselves as red macaws, to the bewilderment of von den Steinen, they referred to a system of classification known in the

professional literature as 'totemism'. Totemism – the term is of Ojibwa origin – is a generic term for a kind of knowledge system whereby each sub-group in a society, usually a clan, has a special, ritual relationship to a class of natural phenomena, usually plants or animals. Totemism has traditionally been particularly widespread in Australia and the Pacific, the Americas and Africa. For example, the totems of the Algonquin in Quebec include the bear, the fish and thunder in a symbolic system whereby natural phenomena are seen to correspond to aspects of society. The question posed by many anthropologists, from Frazer onwards, was the exact nature of this correspondence.

Malinowski, writing on totemism in the Trobriand Islands, held that totemic plants and animals were chosen because they were inherently useful to the maintenance of society (1974 [1948]). Radcliffe-Brown, who developed a more complex view of totemism, drew on Durkheim's notion that the attitude towards a totem was caused by a special relationship between it and the social order, and that the ultimate function of totemism was to maintain social integration (1952 [1929]). The totem is thus a tangible identity marker for a group; Durkheim himself mentions flags as a kind of totem.

Radcliffe-Brown then poses the question of why certain animals and plants are chosen as totems. Like Malinowski and others before him, he assumes that there must be a practical reason, so that, for example, experts in bear hunting take the bear as their totem. In this way, totemism could be seen as a symbolic expression of the division of labour in society.

In a later article, Radcliffe-Brown (1951) raises doubt about his earlier assumption that totemic animals are economically useful to society. At this point, he rather focuses on their symbolic meaning. However, he fails to draw a clear conclusion, and Lévi-Strauss is generally credited with resolving the enigma of totemism in anthropology (1963, 1966 [1962]). Drawing on an enormous mass of recorded ethnography, largely from North America and Australia, Lévi-Strauss shows that there is no inherent connection between the utilitarian value of a creature and its significance in the totemic system. Instead, he argues, certain animals are chosen because of their mutual relationship – that is, not because of their direct relationship to groups in a segmentary society. The differences between totemic animals (the way they are perceived by the people) correspond to the differences between groups in society (see Figure 15.1).

Totemic animals contribute to the creation of order; up to this point, Lévi-Strauss agrees with earlier theorists. However, as he puts it, they are not chosen because they are good to eat, but because they are 'good to think' (*bons à penser*).

The system of totems and the clans in society are further connected symbolically in two complementary ways, through metaphor and metonymy. A metaphor is a symbol which stands for something else, in the way the milk tree among the Ndembu stands for fertility among women (Chapter 14). A metonym is rather a part which symbolically expresses a whole. Metaphori-

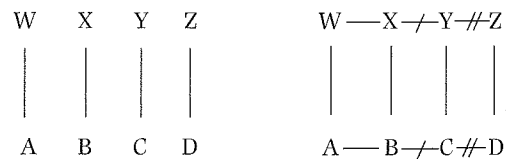


Figure 15.1 Radcliffe-Brown's early view of the relationship between totemic animals and clans (left) and Lévi-Strauss's view (right)

cally, the king may be represented by a lion, metonymically by the crown he wears on his head. The relationship between metaphor and metonymy can be said to correspond to the relationship between melody and harmony (see E. Leach 1976; Lakoff and Johnson 1980). A metaphor acquires its meaning through its association with the object it represents, while metonymy consists of using a part to represent the whole.

In a totemic system therefore, each totemic animal stands metonymically for the whole chain of totems, just as each clan stands for the whole society (as a single word may represent the whole sentence). Simultaneously, of course, the totems are metaphors for each clan. The relationship between the bear and the eagle corresponds to the relationship between the bear clan and the eagle clan. Now, the totems themselves – say, the bear and the eagle – are arbitrary; what counts is the relationship between them.

UNDOMESTICATED THINKING

A major concern in Lévi-Strauss's work on totemism was to invalidate notions to the effect that there existed a 'pre-logical, primitive mode of thought' – although he follows a different path from Evans-Pritchard. The structuralism of Lévi-Strauss seeks to reveal not similarities in actual reasoning, but universal underlying principles for thought and symbolisation.

In *La Pensée sauvage*, 'Undomesticated thinking' (misleadingly rendered in English as *The Savage Mind*, Lévi-Strauss 1966), the fundamental cognitive processes among modern and non-modern peoples are seen as identical. People everywhere think in terms of metaphor and metonymy, and above all they think in contrasting pairs, so-called binary oppositions. This general model depicting organising principles of thought resembles Bateson's theory of information (1972, 1979), where he argues that only differences that make a difference can create knowledge. Both Lévi-Strauss and Bateson are concerned to show that what is essential are relationships rather than the objects themselves.

Lévi-Strauss argues that fundamental thought processes are identical everywhere, but he also indicates that people with different kinds of technology at their disposal will express their thought in very different ways.

Those who depend on script and numbers clearly think along different lines than non-literates, he says. Lévi-Strauss compares the literate and non-literate styles of thinking, and describes the latter as the science of the concrete (*la science du concret*). When a non-literate person, living in a society with no script, is to think abstractly, he or she is forced to align his or her concepts with concrete, visible objects. Spirits, for example, are abstractions described in terms of their visible manifestations; this explains why many early explorers and missionaries erroneously thought that tribal peoples 'worshipped trees and rocks'. Originality, in this kind of society, is possible through novel juxtapositions of concepts referring to familiar objects. Lévi-Strauss describes this thought operation as *bricolage* (a 'bricoleur' can be translated as a handyman, a jack-of-all-trades). This creative, associational and 'playful' mode of thought is contrasted with that of the 'engineer'; the abstract science dominant in Western societies, imprisoned and disciplined by writing and numbers.

However, bricoleurs have a limited repertory of symbols at their disposal. Engineers, who creates abstractions from abstractions, may rather try to transcend the familiar. They are tied up – their thought is tamed or domesticated – by writing and numbers, but at the same time they are liberated from the direct communication with natural objects enforced on the 'untamed thought' of the bricoleurs.

The distinction between bricoleurs and engineers should not be seen as absolute. Today most societies in the world are 'semi-literate', and even Lévi-

The Social Construction of Emotions

Knowledge, belief systems and classification are social products, and a great deal of research has been carried out regarding their variations and relationship to power structures and other aspects of social organisation. Other aspects of culture have been studied less thoroughly until recent decades; one such aspect is *emotions*. Many anthropologists still take them more or less for granted and presume that they are inborn. The capacity for love, hatred, empathy, aggression and so on is thus seen as more or less uniformly distributed in the world, and it has also been tacitly assumed that emotions function roughly in the same way in different societies. This view has been challenged, especially since the late 1970s, by scholars who argue that emotions are socially constructed. For example, it has been shown that the European distinction between 'reason' and 'emotion' does not exist in societies such as the Ilongot of the Philippines (Rosaldo 1980), Ifaluk in the Pacific (Lutz 1988) and in Bali (Wikan 1992). It has also been argued (Howell and Willis 1989) that aggression, believed by many to be inborn, is a cultural product, and that there exist societies where no concept comparable to our concept of aggression occurs.

Strauss himself admits that some modes of thought reminiscent of bricolage, notably in music and poetry, exist even in thoroughly literate societies. Still, the distinction can be a useful starting-point for an exploration of the inter-relationship between knowledge, technology and social organisation.

WRITING AS TECHNOLOGY

In *La Pensée sauvage* Lévi-Strauss distinguishes between what he calls 'cold' and 'hot' societies. Cold societies see themselves as essentially unchanging, while hot societies are based on an ideology perceiving change as inevitable and potentially beneficial. This distinction corresponds not only to the bricoleur-engineer dichotomy, but also to the distinction between 'traditional' and 'modern' societies. For the sake of the argument, the contrast between these societal 'types' is overstated here, but the reader should keep in mind that 'modern' and 'traditional' are ideal types, and that real societies on the ground are much more complex than this simple dichotomy implies.

The role of script as a form of technology has been discussed by generations of anthropologists (see for instance Goody 1968; Ong 1982; Finnegan 1988; Street and Besnier 1994). In a number of books, Jack Goody among others has argued that the introduction of writing may have fundamental effects on thought as well as social organisation, and his idea of a 'Great Divide' between non-literate and literate societies is close kin to Lévi-Strauss's studies of totemic versus historical thinking and the bricoleur-engineer contrast – characteristically, one of Goody's books on literacy is called *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (1977). It could be said that just as Marx turned Hegel on his head (or on his feet!), Goody tries to operationalise and sociologise Lévi-Strauss. Controversial among anthropologists who hold that this kind of distinction is simplistic (for example, Halverson 1992), Goody's main arguments nevertheless merit an outline here.

The introduction of writing, Goody argues, enables people to distinguish between concepts and their referents. Writing allows us to turn words into things, to freeze them in time and space. Speech, by contrast, is fleeting and transient and cannot be fixed for posterity. In this sense, writing entails a reduction of speech: the two are not 'the same', and the written version of a statement lacks its extra-linguistic context – facial expression, social situation, tone of voice, etc. Writing can indeed be seen as a kind of material culture; like artefacts, it is solid and enduring, and it can be analysed as objectified subjectivity; as 'frozen intentions'.

Writing arguably liberates thought from the necessity of mnemotechnics; we do not have to remember everything, but can look it up instead. By implication, writing makes the accumulation of vast amounts of knowledge possible in ways orality is unable to. Writing also narrows the meanings of thoughts in the sense that it lends itself, Goody argues, to accurate critical

examination in ways which oral statements do not. We may isolate a small bit of human discourse and subject it to thorough examination in ways that cannot be achieved in societies which lack writing. However – and this is a criticism that has repeatedly been levelled against this kind of theory – there are many examples of literate societies where criticism (in the scientific sense) is not encouraged. On the other hand, it may be retorted that writing is a necessary but not sufficient condition for science as we know it. This argument, one may agree, goes a long way towards explaining why the Azande did not develop their own comparative science of culture and society – but it does not alone explain why many literate peoples have not done so.

Writing also has great potential importance for social organisation. It has been noted that it was used at a very early stage (ancient Mesopotamia) for lists, inventories of the amount of grain in the granary, the number of slaves and animals in the city and so on. As the Christian evangelists witness, censuses were also used very early in the history of writing. Writing thus facilitates not only analytical thought, but also the surveillance of vast numbers of people. It can therefore be regarded as an important kind of technology in the political administration of complex societies.

Finally, a chief use of writing in most literate societies has lain in the building of archives, some of which eventually become history. Lévi-Strauss, commenting on the 'totemic void' in Europe and Asia (1966), concludes that these societies have chosen history instead of totemic myths. He does not see history as inherently 'truer' than myth, but rather as a special kind of myth.

The difference between literacy and orality should not be overemphasised: there is by no means a clear-cut distinction. It is nevertheless obvious that the uses of script form an important part of the technology of a society. An abstract ideology such as nationalism, for example (see Chapter 18), is scarcely imaginable without the information technology of writing, which enables members of society to disseminate ideas over a vast area, thus creating bonds of solidarity between millions of individuals who will never know each other personally.

TIME AND SCALE

Abstract time, that is the kind of time represented in clocks and calendars, may have effects analogous to those of writing. In the kind of society where most of the readers of this book were raised, it is generally believed that time is something one may have much or little of; something which can be saved, something which 'is money', something which can be measured independently of concrete events. Concepts like 'one hour' or 'one week' are meaningful even if we do not say what they contain by way of events. Time, in this kind of society, is conventionally conceptualised as a line with an arrow at the end, where a moving point called 'the present' separates past

and future. This kind of abstraction is a cultural invention, neither more nor less. In a certain sense, clocks do not measure time but create it.

Societies lacking clocks do not 'lack time', but rather tend to be organised according to what we may call concrete time (although, as usual, there are very important variations). In this kind of society – historically speaking, the vast majority of human societies – time exists only as embedded in action and process, not as something abstract and autonomous existing outside the events taking place. Rituals do not take place 'at 5 o'clock', but when all is ready – when the preparations are completed and the guests have arrived. In clockless societies, time is not a scarce resource, since it exists only as events. One cannot 'lose' or 'kill' time there.

Past and future take on a different meaning in societies with and without an abstract concept of time, respectively. Obviously, peoples without dates and calendars do not date previous events in the same way that we do. Bourdieu, further, has written of the Kabyles that they were shocked to learn of the way the French related to the future (Bourdieu 1963). 'The French see themselves as greater than God', they said, 'for they believe that they can control the future. But the future belongs to God.' Many peoples, moreover, do not conjugate verbs in the future tense. One philosophically sound way of explaining this may be that events in the world create time, and since no events have yet taken place in the future, the future cannot constitute a time (Tempels 1959).

Linear, quantified, abstract time is not detached from social organisation, but it did not arise mechanically in response to 'societal needs'. Just as writing, a tool for political control and the advancement of science, was first developed for ritual purposes, the first Europeans to use clocks were monks who needed them to coordinate their prayers. However, abstract time has taken on an important place in the social organisation of contemporary societies. Lewis Mumford has written that the most tyrannical and authoritarian device developed in modern societies was neither the car nor the steam engine, but the clock. The philosopher Henri Bergson, writing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was concerned to save the subjective experience of time, *la durée*, which he saw as being threatened by quantified, mechanical time in the era of technocratic rationality.

Why is it that people living in modern societies have become slaves of the clock, as it were, while others seem to manage perfectly well without it? The answer must be sought in the social organisation of society. If I wish to travel, say, from Oslo to Prague, it would be extremely inconvenient to have to go to the airport and wait for a day or two until a sufficient number of passengers to Prague have found their way to the airport. It seems more reasonable that the airline states that the departure will be at 11 a.m., that all of the passengers agree on the meaning of 11 a.m. and thus appear at the airport more or less simultaneously. In other words, the concept of abstract time and the omnipresence of clocks make it possible to coordinate the actions of a much larger number of people than is possible in a society with

no shared, quantified notion of time. Thus, both script and abstract time make social integration on a very wide scale possible. Money, dealt with in previous chapters, does roughly the same thing to exchange and wealth as clocks do to time, thermometers to temperature and writing to language: standardisation and, therefore, increased scale creates a society relying on ever more abstract relations.

KNOWLEDGE AND POWER

Evans-Pritchard once wrote that he believed his studies of Azande witchcraft might contribute to the understanding of communist Russia (Evans-Pritchard 1951). What he meant was that an understanding of the ideological underpinnings of the knowledge system of one society may give clues as to similar structures elsewhere. Undoubtedly, knowledge systems create a particular order in the world, and this does not only concern ideologies of gender, caste, class or ethnicity as dealt with in other chapters here, but also the very structuring of experience. In his celebrated novel 1984, George Orwell (1984 [1949]) describes a society where the language has consciously been changed by the power elite, in order to prevent the citizens from critical thought. In 'Newspeak', the word 'freedom' has thus lost its meaning of 'individual freedom' and can only be used in sentences like 'the dog is free from lice'. Although such conscious manipulation of language may be rare, there can be no doubt that the kind of insight introduced by Whorf may profitably be used to study ideology and power structures. In our kind of society, the shift from 'chairman' to 'chairperson' (or simply 'chair') and similar changes in language use indicate a growing consciousness about the ideological character of language and concepts.

A different approach to the relationship between knowledge and power is exemplified in the study of so-called secret societies. Initiation into such societies, common in several parts of the world, is accompanied by the acquisition of esoteric, highly valued knowledge. In some societies, such as dynastic China, literacy was seen as esoteric knowledge and kept away from the masses. In *Homo Academicus*, Bourdieu (1988 [1984]) describes academic knowledge as a political resource of a similar kind. He describes the inaccessible language spoken by academics, the pompous rituals and conventions surrounding academic life in France – allegedly necessary for the 'advance of science' – as expressions of symbolic power.

The relationship between knowledge and social organisation can be illuminated in many ways. For example, it is common to assume that culinary differentiation, particularly the development of '*haute cuisine*', is connected with social differentiation and hierarchy. Virtually everything which is taken for granted has a social origin, be it totemic classification, dogmatic belief in the blessings of liberal democracy, belief in God or the idea that one should eat with a knife and a fork. Karl Marx was profoundly aware

of this kind of relationship when he wrote, in the mid-nineteenth century, that even the functioning of our five senses is a product of the whole of history up to this day.

Finally, we should be wary of empirical generalisations regarding the knowledge of this or that people. Knowledge is always socially distributed. Surveys indicate that less than half the adult population of Britain and the USA have any idea of what DNA is, and a survey cited by Peter Worsley (1997, p. 6) suggests that a third of adult Britons believe that the sun goes around the earth. It should also be remarked that it is not primarily the business of the anthropologist to make value judgements about knowledge systems. Good studies of knowledge, ranging from Evans-Pritchard via Latour and Woolgar's study of the social production of scientific knowledge (1979) to Worsley's recent *Knowledges* (1997), primarily try to make sense of the world according to the native's point of view, whether the native is a nuclear physicist or an Australian aborigine. This perspective is not tantamount to 'postmodern relativism'; it is simply the only viable strategy for developing and transmitting an understanding of the various life-worlds human beings create and maintain.

This chapter has discussed a number of simple contrasts frequently invoked by anthropologists (especially in the past), between witchcraft accounts and scientific accounts, between the bricoleur and the engineer, between literacy and orality, between abstract linear time and concrete time, and ultimately between large-scale, 'modern' and small-scale, 'traditional' societies. Such dichotomies, which have never provided a satisfactory empirical description of the world, have been maintained for generations, at least partly because they facilitate the classification of social and cultural phenomena – if not entire societies. In the remaining chapters, this kind of dichotomous modelling is subjected to critical scrutiny, and both its strengths and limitations are made clear.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

E.E. Evans-Pritchard: *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, abridged edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1983 (1937).

Jack Goody: *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1977.

Edmund Leach: *Lévi-Strauss*. Glasgow: Fontana 1970.

Peter Worsley: *Knowledges: What Different Peoples Make of the World*. London: Profile 1997.

16 THE CHALLENGE OF MULTIPLE TRADITIONS

Now that the Polynesian islands have been clad in concrete and transformed into hangar ships anchored in the Pacific Ocean, when all of Asia is beginning to look like a polluted suburb, when cities of cardboard and sheet metal spread all over Africa, when civilian and military airplanes violate the untouched innocence of American and Melanesian forests even before they take away their virginity – what can the so-called flight from reality entailed by travelling then result in, other than confronting us with the most unfortunate aspects of our own history?

— Claude Lévi-Strauss

In earlier chapters, we looked at different forms of political organisation, world-views and systems of economic production and distribution. It has repeatedly been noted that the ethnographic present, the tense conventionally used when anthropologists talk about different societies, is increasingly becoming a past tense (Davis 1992a). In Australia, 250 languages were spoken in the late eighteenth century. At the end of the twentieth century, there were about 30 left, and few of them seemed likely to survive for another generation in Anglophone Australia. Virtually all inhabitants of the world live in states which define them as citizens (see Chapter 18), and a growing majority of the world's population depends on general purpose money in their daily life. At least nominally, more than half of the world's adult population is literate.

URBAN ANTHROPOLOGY: CHANGE AND CONTINUITY

One of the most visible aspects of social and cultural change in the period since the Second World War has been urbanisation. While less than 5 per cent of Africa's population lived in cities in 1900, about 50 per cent did in 1990, and the numbers for Asia and Latin America are of a similar order. For the first time in human history, a majority of the world's population is now urban. There are several related causes of urbanisation. Population growth in the countryside and transitions from subsistence agriculture to the production of cash crops lead to a general land shortage and greater vulnerability; simultaneously, new opportunities for waged work arise in and near the cities. Most urban dwellers in non-industrial countries, however,