

12 EXCHANGE

Money is to the West what kinship is to the Rest.
— Marshall D. Sahlins

Just as the anthropological study of politics is markedly different from the discipline of political science, economic anthropology distinguishes itself in important ways from the economic sciences. Anthropologists have always – at least since Malinowski – wished to call attention to the ways in which the economy is an integrated part of a social and cultural totality, and to reveal that economic systems and actions can only be fully understood if we look into their interrelationships with other aspects of culture and society. Just as politics ought to be seen as part of a wider system which includes non-political aspects as well, the economy cannot be properly studied as an isolated 'sector'. It has to be demonstrated in which way it is a cultural and social product, and this task can be undertaken in modern societies as well as traditional ones, although the economic system of modern societies is widely seen as 'rational', detached from other aspects of social life, and based on impartial market principles. A book aptly titled *The World of Goods* (Douglas and Isherwood 1978) tries to give an anthropological answer to the question of why people in modern societies want commodities. The drive for consumption witnessed in these societies is far from natural, even if it is taken for granted within academic economics and among lay people. Why is it, for example, that people want to eat food A instead of food B, if it can be shown that both are equally nutritious and even that food B is less expensive? The full answer must be sought in an analysis of the cultural categories of the society in question, not in an analysis of 'rational choice' and maximisation of value. For although it may be true that people everywhere try to maximise value, what is considered valuable varies cross-culturally and between individuals.

Apart from providing valuable insights into other peoples' economic life, anthropological studies of consumption and exchange can show that the capitalist way of arranging the economy is far from the only possible way. The capitalist economy, by now globally hegemonic, is a newcomer to the world. Seen from the perspective of cultural history, humans have been hunters and gatherers for over 90 per cent of their existence and horticulturalists or agriculturalists for most of the remaining time. If we envision the history of humanity as a full day and night, modern industry appeared at

five minutes to midnight. This is one main reason that this chapter takes non-capitalist economies as its initial point of departure.

Consumption in the Capitalist Market

A comparative approach to consumption clearly indicates that the economy does not simply amount to methods for material survival. Let us consider food. Why is it that the steaks of the middle classes are rarer than those of the working classes? Why did no *haute cuisine* develop in Africa when it did in Asia as well as Europe (Goody 1982)? Why did the inhabitants of Båtsfjord (northern Norway) start eating shrimps in the 1970s – a creature which had formerly been used exclusively as bait and was considered 'inedible' (Lien 1988)? Why do many North Americans refuse to eat horse meat (Sahlins 1976)?

When we ask this kind of question, it becomes evident that consumption concerns much more than the mere satisfaction of inborn needs. This is, perhaps, more easily observable in modern than in traditional societies, since the consumer has more choice there (it is not entirely without reason that these kinds of society are labelled 'consumer societies'). However, traditional societies have their own 'consumer cultures' and are also increasingly integrated into a capitalist system of exchange. People across the world watch television, buy food, sweets and clothes in shops: they consume. Through satisfying needs for food, clothes, etc., in culturally circumscribed ways, they communicate to others who they are – sometimes through conspicuous consumption. A theory which restricts itself to arguing that consumption amounts to the rational satisfaction of needs, not questioning how these needs are perceived locally, cannot explain why some prefer blue trousers to red ones, or why pictures of weeping Gypsy children are regarded as vulgar by the educated middle classes in Europe (Bourdieu 1979). In order to find answers to this kind of question, an anthropological approach to the economy is necessary – it becomes necessary to study consumption as a cultural system.

In anthropology, economy may be defined in at least two markedly different ways. One is systemic, as the production, distribution and consumption of material and non-material goods in society. The other is actor-centred, as the ways in which actors use the available means to maximise value. These two perspectives, sometimes labelled substantivist and formalist views, respectively, correspond to the two perspectives on politics demonstrated in the last chapter and, indeed, to the general tension in social science between actor-oriented and system-oriented accounts. Just as Dumont argues against what he sees as an ethnocentric conceptualisa-

tion of caste (Chapter 10) and Asad argues against an actor-oriented account of politics in Swat (Chapter 11), Sahlins (1972) has argued against the model of the 'rational agent' (*homo economicus*), a premiss on which much economic science rests, as a comparative concept. Individuals who maximise value and base their economic behaviour on cost-benefit calculations, he contends, are characteristic of capitalist societies, but the very concept of the maximising individual is meaningless in societies where the unit of production is not the individual, but rather the household. Drawing on the agricultural economist Chayanov's findings among Russian peasants, Sahlins argues that peasants do not maximise profits, but instead work just enough to survive and to generate an adequate surplus; they are 'optimisers, not maximisers'. Against this, a 'formalist' would nonetheless reply that this proves only that peasants have different economic priorities than, say, stock-brokers; that the values they maximise are different from those of people in capitalist societies, not that their economy functions on qualitatively different principles. Leisure time, it could thus be claimed, may be a 'value' which can be 'maximised'.

This controversy concerns differences and similarities between people in societies ('are the others basically like "ourselves" or are they qualitatively different?'), as well as posing the perennial problem of fashioning context-free, comparatively useful concepts. We shall keep the problem in mind while considering some empirical material as well as some central issues in the anthropology of exchange.

THE ECONOMY AS PART OF A SOCIAL TOTALITY

The Trobriand islanders are, it should be recalled, matrilineal but virilocal horticulturalists. The most famous of Malinowski's monographs about this people, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1984 [1922]) is chiefly a study of one of the most famous and striking social institutions in the region, namely the *kula* trade, which is a large-scale trade network in shell bracelets and necklaces. Not only the *kula* trade, but also other aspects of the Trobrianders' economy aroused great interest and wonder when Malinowski returned with his material from the islands after the First World War. He showed, contrary to widespread expectations, that 'savages' were by no means driven by lowly material needs in everything they did, that they had a sophisticated religion and that a complex kinship system and a multitude of regulated practices upheld society and contributed to the fulfilment of far more needs than the purely biological ones. In *Argonauts*, Malinowski also argues against those who supposed that 'savages' were extremely 'rational' individualists who acted on pure self-interest. The Trobriander, he writes:

works prompted by motives of a highly complex, social and traditional nature, and towards aims which are certainly not directed towards the satisfaction of present wants, or to the direct achievement of utilitarian purpose ... [A]ll, or almost all of the

fruits of his work, and certainly any surplus which he can achieve by extra effort, goes not to the man himself, but to his relatives-in-law. (Malinowski 1984, p. 61)

Someone walking about in a Trobriand village just after harvesting will notice large heaps of yams displayed in front of many of the huts. This, as noted in an earlier chapter, will not be the household's own produce, but rather gifts received from kin and (possibly) political clients. The size of these heaps of yams thereby gives an indication of who is particularly powerful in the community. Malinowski tells of an especially important chief in the village of Omarakana, who had 40 wives and received 30-50 per cent of the total production of yams in Kiriwina. Exchange of yams, in other words, does not just contribute to reproducing social bonds and ties of kinship; it also has a highly visible political aspect.

In a capitalist economy, money is the common denominator for what is commonly thought of as economic activity, and it serves to single out an economic institution in those societies as something apparently separate from the rest of society. This kind of boundary may nevertheless be contested from an anthropological viewpoint, since it fails to include unpaid domestic work, for example, in the economy. In many societies, including the Trobriand Islands, there is no word for 'economy' as an institution separated from social life in general. When a man performs garden magic to make his yams grow, when he works hard for months just to give away his crop and when he exchanges shells with distant partners through the *kula* trade, he does not speak of this as an 'economic' activity: all of it is seen as a general part of his existence. With the Trobrianders, as with many other peoples, rights in women and children have an aspect which Westerners might call economic, since wives provide both labour and yams from one's affines. But nobody would claim that women and children, seen from the viewpoint of the Trobriand man, are solely an 'object of investment' to be regarded purely as an economic asset. When we single out the 'economic' aspect of the social life of the Trobrianders, therefore, this is in a sense an artificial abstraction, since it does not exist in Trobriand society itself. We nevertheless depend on this kind of abstraction for comparison to be possible in anthropology, even if it does not form part of native cultural categories.

In principle, a capitalist economy recognises only one form of commodity exchange, namely market exchange based on the laws of supply and demand. Among the Trobrianders, a multitude of forms of exchange (about 80, according to Davis 1992b) are included in what we would translate as 'trade', and some of the most famous varieties are the following.

Gimwali is market exchange, reminiscent of capitalistic commodity exchange. Pigs, vegetables and other foodstuffs are traded and bargaining is accepted. *Laga* is payment for magical incantations bought from non-relatives. *Pokala* is usually a kind of tithe; yams or similar paid to one's social superiors. It can also refer to payment for magical incantations bought from relatives. *Sagal* is food which is distributed free of charge at public events such

as funerals. *Urigubu* are yams given to one's sister's or mother's husband. *Wasi* is the exchange of fish for vegetables which takes place between coastal and inland villages.

Kula, finally, refers to the cyclical exchange of two kinds of valuables: shell necklaces and shell bracelets. The trade takes place over a large area of the south-western Pacific. The necklaces circulate clockwise, the bracelets anti-clockwise. The *kula* trade takes place both locally, within each island, and between the islands. The most valuable objects travel furthest. The people who travel with the shells are agents or partners of powerful men, usually aristocrats, in the various islands. *Kula* valuables are always named after their former owners.

It is difficult to argue that the *kula* trade is 'profitable'. The rule is actually that one exchanges two objects of exactly the same value. When a deal is completed, one may keep the bracelet or necklace for a while – perhaps several years – before putting it into circulation again. What is the purpose of this trade? Malinowski writes somewhere that the Trobrianders seem to exchange *kula* valuables 'for the sake of it', but elsewhere he argues that they have to be understood as token prestations, as a kind of symbolic valuable. He is not clear, however, as to what they symbolise. Pursuing the

Marshall D. Sahlins (b. 1930) was originally a student of the cultural ecologist Leslie White, and his early work was characterised by an evolutionistic mode of thought. In *Social Stratification in Polynesia* (1958) and *Moala* (1962), Sahlins analyses the relationship between state formation and kinship organisation in Polynesia, and shows which mechanisms create social integration and conflict at various levels, thereby developing the model of the segmentary lineage in new directions.

Sahlins's later work has been informed by a strong cultural relativism, and much of it is inspired by Marxist and structuralist thought. In *Stone Age Economics* (1972), Sahlins attacks individualistic and universalistic perspectives on economic systems (including dominant trends in economic science), showing how the economy is always culturally constituted. In *Culture and Practical Reason* (1976), he argues against the notion of the 'rational actor', and shows how all human life-worlds – including the presumed 'rationalised' bourgeois society – presuppose a level of symbolic meaning. In later books, including *Islands of History* (1985), Sahlins proposes a non-ethnocentric historiography, which is nevertheless strongly marked by structuralist influence. In *How 'Natives' Think* (1995), he defends a cultural relativist interpretation of the death of Captain Cook at the hands of Hawaiians in 1779, against accusations of ethnocentric exoticism (see Chapter 15).

analysis of the *kula* trade further, Weiner (1988) argues that its main source of motivation is the quest for fame. The names of earlier owners are connected to *kula* shells, and the most valuable shells remain in circulation for a long time. In accordance with this reasoning, Leach (1982) has pointed out that the Trobrianders are generally proud of the existence of a book like *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*: like their own *kula* trade, this book contributes to increasing their fame. The *kula* trade, as with other forms of trade among the Trobrianders, may be classified as an economic activity, but its significance has ramifications far beyond what is usually thought of as the economy.

GIFTS AS TOTAL SOCIAL PHENOMENA

When a Trobriand islander gives yams to his affines, he does not require an immediate counter-prestation. The yams could thus be classified as a gift. The same could be said of the pocket money given by a European father to his daughter. She is not expected to pay it back. However, in both cases, the givers do anticipate some kind of counter-prestation. The Trobriander expects his affines to help him when necessary, and the European father may expect some kind of gratitude or even that the daughter will feel responsibility for him when he grows old.

Many of the world's economies have traditionally been described as 'gift economies' (Strathern 1988); that is to say that the distribution of goods takes place with no fixed price. Within the household and the lineage, goods are distributed according to individual needs and rights, and gifts are also an important means of making contact with outsiders: a means of creating peace, friendship or, as in the case of the Melanesian 'big man', political loyalty. If it is the case that friends make gifts, Sahlins writes (1972, p. 186), gifts make friends as well. In societies where the exchange of gifts is very widespread, this contributes significantly to systemic integration. In a shrewd analysis of some of the categories of Norwegian culture, Eduardo Archetti (1991 [1984]) notes that whenever one buys a cup of coffee for someone in a university canteen, the recipient will hold out a few coins in payment the moment one returns with the drink. Archetti interprets this as an unwillingness to enter into a morally committing relationship with others. To accept the coffee as a gift would imply a vague debt of gratitude which Norwegians are reluctant to incur.

Some criteria are necessary if a transaction is to be defined as gift-giving. Apart from the absence of a fixed price, the return gift or prestation should not be given at once. Only when these conditions are met is gift exchange socially integrating by its creation of webs of vague obligations on the part of large numbers of people. In some societies, such as the Polynesian ones Mauss deals with in his famous essay on the gift (1954 [1924]), virtually everyone in a local community has vague long-term obligations towards each other connected with gift exchange.

The gift is a characteristic expression of reciprocity. The obligation to give implies the obligation to receive; the recipient again commits him- or herself to making a counter-prestation to the giver. The analytical interest of a gift thus lies chiefly in its social and cultural aspects, not in the purely economic aspect. Mauss describes a particularly important category of such gifts as '*préstations totales*' or total social phenomena: they involve the entire person and embody, by symbolic association, the totality of social relations and cultural values in society. Through such *préstations totales*, 'all kinds of institutions are simultaneously expressed: the religious, judicial, moral and economic' (Mauss 1954, p. 1). In modern societies, the exchange of wedding rings is, perhaps, the ultimate *préstation totale*.

POTLATCH, RECIPROCITY AND POWER

A famous social institution which was once widespread on the north-western coast of North America is known in the literature as *potlatch* (Boas 1897; Mauss 1954; Benedict 1970 [1934]). The *potlatch* was practised by Kwakiutl groups and their neighbours. These peoples were prosperous hunters and fisherfolk, and lived in more hierarchical societies than is common among groups with this kind of livelihood. The aristocrats within the system continuously had to defend, and to try to improve, their relative rank by giving spectacular gifts to each other. This phenomenon, which could be described as competitive gift exchange, contains a mechanism for acceleration. When chief B received a gift from chief A, he would have to surpass the latter in his return gift. This competition could, in some cases, culminate in the destruction of considerable material wealth. Each winter the chiefs invited each other to large parties, where abundant food and drink were served and lavish presents were given to the guests. In addition, they destroyed valuables, throwing salt fish away and setting fire to tents and carpets; in the old days, Boas wrote around the turn of the century, they even threw slaves into the sea to show off their wealth. At the return party, the hosting chief would have to surpass the previous host in destructive capabilities. The chief who could afford to destroy most, achieved the highest rank in the regional hierarchy.

Institutions similar to the *potlatch* exist among many other peoples. The purpose of the waste is to establish a political hierarchy with oneself on top. Mauss (1954) has identified a milder form of *potlatch* in the French custom of trying to surpass others by giving lavish wedding presents. Mauss describes the *potlatch* institution as a 'perverted' form of the more widespread phenomenon of reciprocity, which is an important social institution in many societies.

Mauss's essay on the gift has been extremely influential in later anthropological theorising on reciprocity and exchange. In Lévi-Strauss's theory of kinship (1969 [1949]; see also Chapter 8), a principal axiom is the uni-

versality of exchange, a notion indebted to Mauss, as a fundamental human mode of existence. Marriage systems, politics and everyday social interaction alike have been analysed in terms of exchange, both in Mauss's wide sociological sense and in a more restricted 'economic' sense, and this shows clearly the inadequacy of a division of the social world into political, economic, religious and other 'sectors'.

In his wide-ranging studies of symbolic power, Pierre Bourdieu has also drawn on Mauss and the social logic of reciprocity. In one of his Kabyle ethnographies (the Kabyles are Berbers in Algeria), he describes a situation where 'the generalization of monetary exchange' enters into a relationship formerly defined through reciprocity:

[A] well-known mason, who had learnt his trade in France, caused a scandal, around 1955, by going home when his work was finished without eating the meal traditionally given in the mason's honour when a house is built, and then demanding, in addition to the price of his day's work (one thousand old francs), an allowance of two hundred francs in lieu of the meal. (Bourdieu 1977 [1972], p. 173)

Here the mason was trying to convert a personal ritual gift to a decontextualised and quantifiable economic sum. Bourdieu explains that the mason thereby exposed 'the device most commonly employed to keep up appearances by means of a collectively concerted make-believe', the pretence that the economic transaction really amounted to a generous exchange of gifts. In pursuing this line of analysis, Bourdieu in a sense turns Mauss on his head, by focusing on the ways in which gifts and 'total social phenomena' conceal power relations and exploitative practices. The kind of social integration and mutual obligations created through reciprocity are not necessarily beneficial to everyone involved. Indeed, feudal lords in medieval Europe frequently sustained their power by offering gifts to their subjects. It could also be argued that development aid from North to South is a subtle technique of domination intended to ensure the continued submission of Southern governments to global policies pursued by the rich countries. The former dictator of Uganda, Idi Amin, clearly understood this aspect of reciprocity when, some time in the 1970s, he sent a shipload of bananas as emergency aid to crisis-stricken Britain.

In some interpretations of Mauss's seminal work on gift-giving and reciprocity in general, the institution of the gift is seen as constitutive of society as such. While the principle of gift-giving is certainly important – Lévi-Strauss, it should be recalled, based his theory of kinship on it – Mauss did not see it as the only principle of integration. He also wrote on sacrifice (Hubert and Mauss 1964 [1898]; see also Chapter 14). The aim of sacrifice, in Mauss's view, was to establish a particular kind of relationship to divine powers, but it also served to integrate society.

A more radical view was introduced in Annette Weiner's influential *Inalienable Possessions* (1992), which argues against the view usually associated with Mauss and Lévi-Strauss, according to which reciprocity is a

fundamental social act. In Weiner's view, reciprocity and exchange can often be seen as surface phenomena that serve as a foil for the ultimate concern of the people concerned, which amount to the protection and preservation of assets that are felt to represent their very identity – that is, inalienable possessions.

FORMS OF DISTRIBUTION

Gifts are socially integrating at the same time as they define and reconfirm specified relationships between individuals. Commodity exchange in a capitalist system works in a different way. When buying food at the supermarket, it is exceedingly likely that one will not remember the face of the cashier later.

In an important study which aimed to explain the historical transition to capitalism, Karl Polanyi (1957 [1944]; see also Godelier 1991) distinguishes between three different principles in the circulation of material goods, or forms of distribution: reciprocity, redistribution and market exchange. Reciprocity is the dominant principle of distribution in gift economies such as those found in the egalitarian societies of Melanesia. Such communities are to a great extent integrated through the principle of reciprocity; through those mutual obligations created by gift-giving.

Redistribution means that a central actor (such as a chief or a state administration) receives goods from the members of society, which he commits himself to redistribute to them. This kind of system confirms and strengthens the legitimacy of the ruler, as well as creating a social safety net for the needy. Redistribution is thus centralised and can be described as a hierarchical principle of distribution, whereas reciprocity is a decentralised, egalitarian principle of distribution.

The third form of distribution is the market principle, which is based on a contractual relationship between the exchangers. The market is anonymous and involves abstract rules about contractual liberty (that is, one can choose one's trading partners). It normally creates an impersonal form of interaction.

Although the market principle dominates in modern capitalist societies, redistribution in feudal societies and reciprocity in egalitarian small-scale societies, in Polanyi's scheme one form of distribution does not exclude the others. In most societies, all three principles are at work in different situations and different social fields, as witnessed in the Trobriand example, although their relative significance varies. Polanyi's point is that the principles of distribution are adapted to fit very different kinds of society.

In Polanyi's and Sahlins's view (Sahlins 1972), the redistribution principle supports a centralised and hierarchical political structure, while the market principle is capable of integrating an enormous number of people in a single web of exchange as it is anonymous and based on abstract rules, while

reciprocity proper creates solidarity on the basis of horizontal interpersonal obligations. As Bourdieu's Algerian example shows, however, this kind of typology makes sense only at an idealised model level since all societies embody a variety of exchange forms.

MONEY

Reciprocity, or gift exchange, is more important as an economic institution in kinship-based societies than in modern state societies, and can be a key to an understanding of fundamental differences. However, what we may think of as market exchange is certainly not uniform either, and it functions in different ways in different societies.

In most places, there are rules regulating what can be sold and purchased and what cannot. Even in modern capitalist societies, there is general agreement that there are values which cannot be bought – love, friendship and loyalty, for example. Still, it is easy to see that the scope of a capitalist market economy is much greater than that of a village market; not only with respect to its scale and the selection of goods, but also in the sense that all commodities are comparable: they are measured on a shared scale, namely that of money. A collection of short stories becomes 'equivalent' to three packs of cigarettes because they have the same price (or exchange value, in the Marxist terminology). Money renders different goods and services comparable by measuring their value on a shared scale.

As the example of the Trobriand Islands shows, the exchange of goods and services may be much more complicated than this and may thus involve a wider repertoire of social relationships. How can three hours of work be compared with a suckling pig or a bag of rice if one cannot measure them on a common scale? In many traditional societies, barter has been a common form of exchange. 'Primitive money', or special purpose money, has also been widespread, the functions of which are reminiscent of money in modern societies. In large parts of West Africa cowrie shells functioned as a kind of money, insofar as one could buy food and other subsistence items for them. The sale and purchase of labour and land, however, are frequently unthinkable in traditional societies, where land is tied to the kin group and labour cannot be measured (not least because time cannot be measured on a shared, objectified scale; see Chapter 15). Special purpose money has functioned as a means of payment in a restricted way: some, but not all material goods and services could be mediated in this way. Thus special purpose money has not, unlike the general purpose money characteristic of the contemporary world, functioned as a value standard: it has not been capable of measuring and comparing all kinds of material goods and services on a common scale.

In traditional societies, there are often different categories of goods that are incommensurable in value, that circulate in different, relatively closed

spheres. We now turn to considering an example of such an economy and its transformation, which also gives an indication of general changes taking place in traditional subsistence economies being integrated into the capitalist system of production and exchange.

ECONOMIC SPHERES AMONG THE TIV

The Tiv are traditionally farmers who live in the savannah belt of central-eastern Nigeria (Bohannan and Bohannan 1953; P. Bohannan 1959). They are patrilineal and also transfer land rights along the patrilineage. As in many other kinship-based societies, it was traditionally not possible for Tiv to buy and sell land, since the land ultimately belonged to the ancestors. Personal identity was, as one might expect, intimately tied to the lineage land.

The Tiv grew cereals, fruit and vegetables and kept livestock. They produced food for subsistence in addition to a surplus which was either redistributed or sold in the market. Their system of distribution was multicentric, which is to say that economic resources were distributed according to different principles and did not form a uniform 'single market'. (The opposite of a multicentric economy is a unicentric system, where one institution, usually the market, dominates completely.)

Until around the time of the Second World War, the Tiv had three economic spheres, or centres, in their economy. These were ranked morally. The lowest was the subsistence sphere, where cereals and other foodstuffs, kitchen utensils, spices and tools circulated. These commodities were exchanged in the market and were thus commensurable: they were the same kind of products.

The second sphere was the prestige sphere. Here cattle, brass rods, magical paraphernalia and a highly valued, imported cloth circulated. In this sphere, brass rods functioned as a means of payment.

The third and highest sphere was where women and children were exchanged. Generally, a person could only be paid for with another person. If my lineage received a woman from yours, you could only be repaid with another woman from my lineage. Payment, obviously, did not have to take place immediately.

Within each sphere, exchange was considered morally neutral, which was to say that someone did not become subject to condemnation for exchanging fowls for pots, or brass rods for magical aids. Problems arose only with exchange *between* the spheres, when values were converted. Since there was no common denominator encompassing all three spheres, there were no rules as to the amount of subsistence goods required to pay for prestige goods. It was considered foolish and irresponsible to convert downwards, selling off brass rods for grain, for example – this was possible, but not a well-advised thing to do. Prestige objects were an indication of symbolic capital and were comparable to, say, aristocratic titles in Britain or France, or ritual purity in

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Hindu society. To rid oneself of brass rods therefore entailed a qualitatively different loss than did selling off one's agricultural surplus. Similarly, only a desperate lineage would sell off its women for brass rods, since the ultimate aim of Tiv men was to have as many wives and children as possible.

With the effective colonisation of the interior of Nigeria, great changes, observed by the Bohannans during their fieldwork, took place in Tiv society. The colonial government created a peaceful situation (*pax Britannica*) enabling villagers to extend trade networks over much larger areas than had been possible earlier. The Tiv now had access to hitherto unknown imported goods, and trade became on the whole much more important than it had been before. Many Tiv left the subsistence economy entirely and became small capitalist farmers producing specialised crops, notably sesame seeds, for the international market. Those crops were sold for money (general purpose money, that is pounds and shillings), which was now spent on food and other necessities.

The introduction of general purpose money had important consequences for Tiv society, and the monetary economy proved to be irreconcilable with the former, rigid distinction between spheres of circulation. Money entered the system at all levels, and in a matter of a few years, brass rods, white cloth, fowls and grain alike could be measured on a common scale. As early as the 1950s, Paul Bohannan reports (1959), the Tiv used money as a value standard even when engaged in direct barter: even when they exchanged 10 pounds of tomatoes directly for a chicken, they agreed that the price for both was 5 shillings and that they were therefore equivalent. Money, in other words, became a common denominator for all goods. Eventually bridewealth began to be paid in cash. Many felt this was a devaluation of women, since the new practice indicated that they were a commodity of the same kind as pots and chickens.

In accordance with the distinction between actor perspectives and systemic perspectives employed elsewhere, it should be noted that Bohannan's analysis of change in Tiv society represents a typical systemic perspective. Change, in his analysis, is caused by exogenous factors (outside factors) modifying the system as a whole. In an actor-oriented analysis of the breakdown of economic spheres in another African society, the Fur in western Sudan, Barth (1967) instead emphasises endogenous factors of change. He shows how an enterprising individual (an entrepreneur) discovers new, profitable ways of exchanging goods through conversion between spheres, and the result is roughly the same as in Tiv society: a breakdown of the moral economy, and the universalisation of the market principles of monetary exchange based on supply and demand. As usual, both the actor-centred and the systemic perspective can be illuminating in understanding social process.

It would be too facile to draw the conclusion, on the basis of Bohannan's rendering of changes in the Tiv system of exchange, that the monetary principle (or 'general-purpose money') is inevitably 'morally bad'. Its spread

has different consequences in different societies and for different persons, and an implication of Bourdieu's argument is that monetary exchange liberates the exchangers from the web of moral obligations, including hierarchy, entailed in reciprocity. Instead, monetary exchange creates new hierarchies. Social disruption is not necessarily undesirable and it may entail a liberation from feudal bonds. In several European societies, a change in domestic reciprocity relations has led to changes in the marriage institution since the 1960s. It is evident that the sharp increase in divorces is connected with the increased economic independence of women: they now earn their own money and are no longer forced into webs of reciprocity with male breadwinners. Many of the women concerned perceive this as an improvement. The same could be said of the challenges posed to the institution of arranged marriages in countries such as Pakistan and India and among immigrants in Europe. In some segments of these populations, particularly in the middle classes, young men and women are no longer willing to be exchanged by their kin groups. Insofar as they are economically independent of their families because of participation in the capitalist labour market, they may actually marry on the basis of individual choice rather than being part of a family-based system of exchange. Although it may certainly be relevant to evaluate the moral and political aspects of a transition from a subsistence economy to capitalism – and the change has certainly been disastrous to many, not least Africans – the initial anthropological task lies in mapping out the social and cultural consequences of the changes.

MONEY AS INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

The collapse of the economic spheres, or the moral economy, of the Tiv entailed a wider comparability of values formerly regarded as incommensurable, as different in kind. The economy thereby lost its moral character and was gradually disengaged from the cultural values which had originally constituted it. Pure market principles of supply and demand replaced rules of right and wrong as well as distinctions between 'high' and 'low' values. Because of the introduction of general purpose universal money, however, the Tiv were also enabled to communicate economically through trade on a much larger scale than before. The brass rods, the former special purpose money of the Tiv, had no value outside their tribal area, whereas pounds sterling (and later Nigerian *nairas*) had the same value over an enormous area. The sesame seeds grown by a Tiv after the introduction of general purpose money could be sold to a wholesale retailer in the nearest city and might eventually end up on a breakfast table in Birmingham. For their own part, the Tiv could from now on buy, say, printed T-shirts and radios for money; goods which could not be bought for brass rods. With the introduction of general purpose money, the Tiv thereby became integrated into a global system of production, distribution and consumption.

The economy of any society is always part of a wider social and cultural context, and the introduction of general purpose money into any society, including Tiv society, has profound consequences. As noted, money challenged the traditional value hierarchy, altered the pattern of agricultural production and led to changes in marketing strategies and in consumption. Money was the medium enabling (or forcing) the Tiv to become economically integrated on a larger scale. In this way, money may be regarded as a form of information technology. The brass rods also had this function, but on a much more local scale. Money is impersonal and anonymous. It can be accumulated and invested. It makes communication and exchange on a vast scale possible: I can draw money from my bank account from a bank or ATM in any country in the world, and the money is a common denominator making it possible to compare a vast number of goods and services of the most diverse origins. Perhaps it could be said that the relationship between money and brass rods is comparable to the relationship between television and personal conversation? It is certainly no coincidence that the spread of the monetary economy has usually been concomitant with the spread of state institutions, literacy and quantified, linear time, all of which can be seen as standardising devices accompanying the transition from small-scale to large-scale integration.

THE MEANING OF ARTEFACTS

Clearly, as Appadurai (1986, p. 5) observes, 'things have no meaning apart from those that human transactions, attributions and motivations endow them with'. Their meaning thus varies cross-culturally, and, moreover, 'abstract objects', such as words or services, may take on the character of goods or commodities. In the Trobriand Islands, for example, magical incantations are inherited and sometimes purchased. There is no easy answer to the question of what turns an object (or non-material resource) into a commodity, but, as the earlier discussions on exchange, gifts and trade have shown, a study of the circulation of goods (in the wide sense, encompassing non-material valuables) can be highly illuminating. Since commodities are by definition scarce (Georg Simmel, quoted in Appadurai 1986, p. 3, says that 'we call those objects valuable that resist our desire to possess them'), the circulation of goods tells us about the cultural values dominant in a society. In the famous introductory chapters to *Capital*, Marx (1906 [1867–94]) describes how commodification entails the exchangeability and comparability of highly different objects, and several writers inspired by him, including György Lukács (1971 [1923]) and Jürgen Habermas (1967), have written about the spread of the commodity logic in modern society; how the market principle enters into a variety of social relationships formerly organised according to a different, more 'human' logic, and thereby contributes to social alienation and 'commodity fetishism'.

Contemporary anthropological perspectives on commodity circulation and consumption tend to differ from this line of thought, focusing not on alienation but rather on the ways in which commodities mediate and define social relationships and self-identity – in other words, their cultural meaning and social significance. Referring *inter alia* to Bohannan's study of economic spheres among the Tiv, Appadurai (1986) introduces the concept of regimes of value, which he defines as systems within which there are more or less consistently shared notions of value and exchangeability. Several such regimes may coexist within any society. Economic spheres clearly constitute such discrete regimes of value, but it is also obvious that many other distinct regimes exist in modern capitalist societies as well. Bourdieu (1988 [1984]) has thus analysed academia as an arena for the exchange of prestige and power, which thereby makes up a field in which only a minority of the population participate. Studying regimes of value can thus be a strategy for exploring diversity in a society, since the concept presupposes that there is no uniformity in the evaluation of commodities.

Although there is a calculative dimension present in all exchange, as both Appadurai (1986) and Daniel Miller (1987, 1994) acknowledge, it cannot be divorced from its cultural content and social implications. On the one hand, objects and artefacts form part of the taken-for-granted part of our environment and thereby contribute to shaping our habitus – they 'order people' (Miller 1994, p. 404); on the other hand, they are consciously selected through consumption to create meaning and a particular self-identity. In a study of an English working-class housing estate, Miller (1988) shows how interior decorating conveys very specific messages about the people who live in each flat. The kitchens, which were initially identical, have been shaped self-consciously by their inhabitants, who, using standardised products available in shops, combine them in personal ways to express their individuality. Rather than seeing them as the alienated victims of 'commodity fetishism' (the orthodox Marxist view), Miller analyses the consumers as conscious actors who appropriate the material culture of their environment to strengthen their own sense of personhood and identity. Viewed in this way, things become important elements in cultural projects; they objectify social relationships and hierarchies, are used in the articulation of self-identity, are variously interpreted by different persons, and contribute to defining social relationships. Social and personal memory can also be embedded in artefacts; not just in tombstones and cathedrals, but also in mundane objects like 'old beer cans, matchbooks and comic books' (Kopytoff 1986, p. 80). In Miller's words (1994), 'commodities as well as gifts have the capacity to construct cultural projects wherein there is no simple dichotomy between things and persons'. In his later *A Theory of Shopping* (D. Miller 1998), Miller argues against what he sees as common, misleading views of consumption in modern society as an egotistic form of behaviour. Basing his argument largely on fieldwork among London housewives, he shows that their shopping expeditions are motivated by

emotional concern for others; indeed, that shopping often satisfies the requirements of the Maussian total prestation. The longest chapter in his book is entitled 'Making Love in Supermarkets'.

A RECONSIDERATION OF EXCHANGE

In the anthropological literature, it has been common to contrast 'the West' and 'the Rest' with regard to the logic of exchange (for a classic study, see Sahlins 1972). It should therefore be emphasised that the picture is less clear-cut than the previous discussion may suggest. Reciprocity and market exchange are not mutually exclusive, nor is it easy to draw a clear distinction between them. As Sahlins himself has noted in an essay on economic and cultural change in the Pacific (1994), tribal peoples in highland New Guinea have by now become waged workers, and money has bridged the boundaries between formerly discrete spheres. However, he adds, the highlanders do not invest the money chiefly in radios, cassette recorders and other paraphernalia of modernity, but in traditional institutions. The money may, for instance, enable them to sacrifice more pigs to the ancestors than they were formerly able to. We should not, therefore, believe that the introduction of a new economic system necessarily kills the old one, or that societies are either 'traditional' or 'modern'.

A different, more fundamental critique of the classic dichotomy between reciprocity and market exchange is represented in a fascinating essay by John Davis (1992b), who argues forcefully and elegantly against what he sees as an arbitrary distinction between gift-giving and market exchange. He is sympathetic to the project initiated by Mauss and developed further by Sahlins (1972), where the wider social and cultural contexts of exchange are revealed and where it is shown that non-industrial economies must be understood in cultural terms. However, Davis sees a shortcoming in that anthropologists, while showing the limitations of economic science when applied to non-industrial societies, have not developed similar cultural accounts of exchange in modern industrial ones. After discussing some of the forms of exchange made famous in Malinowski's studies of the Trobriands, he thus goes on to show that there are indeed at least as many distinct cultural categories of exchange in British culture (Figure 12.1), each of them associated with a particular, culturally based evaluation. Quite contrary to those who complain of the 'commercialisation of Christmas', Davis is 'rather pleased since it seems to me that it could be put the other way around: it could be an instance of the gifting of the market, and could be a demonstration of the instability of markets relative to the continuing strength of gift-giving' (1992b, p. 53). Reciprocity is also an important part of everyday social interaction in any society, perhaps especially significant in the household. Davis's essay is a contribution to the current anthropological project of deconstructing simplistic boundaries between 'us' and

'them', 'moderns' and 'traditionals', '*Gemeinschaft*' and '*Gesellschaft*'; in Appadurai's words, 'to restore the cultural dimension to societies that are too often represented simply as economies writ large, and to restore the calculative dimension to societies that are too often simply portrayed as solidarity writ small' (1986, p. 12).

alms-giving	expropriation	reciprocity
altruism	extortion	renting
arbitrage	futures trading	retailing
banking	giving	robbery
barter	huckstering	scrounging
bribery	insider dealing	shoplifting
burglary	insurance	shopping
buying/selling	marketing	simony
charity	money-lending	social wage
commodity-dealing	mortgaging	swapping
corruption	mugging	theft
donation	pawning	tipping
employment	profiteering	trading
exploitation	prostitution	wholesaling

Figure 12.1 Part of the British repertoire of exchange types
(Source: Davis 1992b, p. 29)

This does not mean that all systems of exchange are 'the same'. The breakdown of the 'economic spheres' among the Tiv and other peoples was an irreversible change with profound social implications. The generalisation of monetary exchange certainly does alter social relations and social scale, but its local importance needs to be studied empirically. In the next chapter, we consider social and cultural implications of changes in a different aspect of what we call economy, namely production.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

- Arjun Appadurai, ed.: *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1986.
 John Davis: *Exchange*. Buckingham: Open University Press 1992.
 Bronislaw Malinowski: *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, Chapter III. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press 1984 [1922].
 Daniel Miller: *A Theory of Shopping*. Oxford: Berg 1998.
 Marshall D. Sahlins: *Stone Age Economics*. Chicago: Aldine 1972.

13 PRODUCTION AND TECHNOLOGY

We live in a consumer society. I am quite sure that we will dispose of the 'natural peoples' when it becomes clear that they do not fulfil the intellectuals' demands for purity, that they do not incarnate Nature, but rather in many respects are more 'artificial' and 'civilised' than ourselves.

— Hans Peter Duerr

HUMANITY'S EXCHANGE WITH NATURE

The idea that there is an interrelationship between ecological conditions and ways of life is old; it appears in the Enlightenment philosophy of the mid- to late eighteenth century (for instance in Montesquieu and in the Marquis de Sade's non-pornographic writings). Montesquieu, like many others, held that the main cause of Europe's technological and scientific advances was the harsh climate, which required the inhabitants to be inventive and sharp-witted to survive. Somewhat more recently, the human geographer Ellsworth Huntington (1945) argued for climatic determinism in an original study where he shows, among other things, the statistical correlation between rainy days and booklending at libraries in Boston. On sunny days, the inhabitants of Boston tend not to borrow books. (In other words: too much sun seems to make people uninterested in intellectual pursuits.) Even today, many lay people assume that Africans never invented the combustion engine and the microchip because their material survival was so easy that they never 'had to use their brains'.

From a comparativist perspective, it is easy to argue against this kind of mechanical determinism, the idea that one single causal factor (in this case climate) can account for the principal cultural variations in the world. For one thing, there are other regions in the world with climatic conditions comparable to those prevalent in Europe, in pre-conquest North America and southern Australia, for example, which have not developed along the same lines. In Indonesia, under roughly the same ecological conditions, there are rice cultivators, horticulturalists and hunters and gatherers.

There is no simple causal link between ecological conditions and social organisation. However, there is no doubt that nature – in both senses of the word (see Chapter 4) – sets limits to the options available to humanity. If it is true that our inner nature is identical everywhere (this is the dogma of the mental unity of humanity), that is certainly not the case with respect to