THE COMPARATIVE METHOD; PRELIMINARY THOUGHTS

(An unpublished typescript, written in August- September 1992)

Alan Macfarlane

Part one

A. NECESSITY OF COMPARISON

Any historian or social scientist will be aware that all the time s/he is indulging in comparison. In the case of history, the comparisons are usually in time, in that of social science, predominantly in space. The most familiar method of the historian is to take his or her own society as the norm, and then to see how far the past is similar or different from this. This is also what an anthropologist tends to do, taking his or her own society as the yardstick against which to measure things. "Informally, comparison is built into the method of the subject, for even in his first piece of field-work the anthropologist is comparing the categories of his own society with those of the society he studies; he has in mind also the works of his predecessors which deal with phenomena similar to those that he finds". (Pocock, Anthropology, p.90)

This comparison of one's own present society with either the past of that country or with another country is a perfectly reasonable procedure, and all I am suggesting here is that the method be made a little more explicit.

De Tocqueville's work illustrates the method of comparison being used explicitly, though the results are concealed. "In my work on America, I have almost always adopted the latter plan.

Though I seldom mentioned France, I did not write a page without thinking of her, and placing her as it were before me. And what I especially tried to draw out, and to explain in the United States, was not the whole condition of that foreign society, but the points in which it differs from our own, or resembles us. It is always by noticing likenesses or contrasts that I succeeded in giving an interesting and accurate description...." (Memoir, 1, 359)

The necessity of comparison is well stressed by E-P: "in the widest sense there is no other method. Comparison is, of course, one of the essential procedures of all sciences and one of the elementary processes of human thought." (E-P, Comparative, 3), and likewise "Durkheim said '...it is only possible to explain by making comparisons. Without this, even simple description is scarcely possible; one can scarcely describe a single fact, or one of which there are only rare examples, **because one cannot see it well enough**" (Lienhardt , Anthropology , p.30)

Others, likewise have stressed the need for a comparative perspective. "Whatever the problem with which you are concerned, you will find it helpful to try to get a comparative grip on the materials. The search for comparable cases, either in one civilization and historical period or in several, gives you leads". (Wright Mills , Sociological ,237)

Hence a number of observers have noted that in order to understand one phenomenon, one must place it in perspective or comparison to others. As Robert Lowie put it, "At the same time a phenomenon is understood only in relation to others: 'He little knows of England who only England knows'. Hence it is well to look at Western culture in perspective". (Lowie, Organization, 19). Or as De Tocqueville put it, "For no one, who has studied and considered France alone, will ever I venture to say, understand the French revolution". (Tocqueville, Ancien, 21).

B. PURPOSES OF COMPARISON

i. Generating questions.

The comparative method is just one of many tools used by historians and social scientists. As with all tools, it is necessary to consider both why one is using them - the purpose - and how best to use them. Considering first what use this tool has, one could use the analogy of a telescope.

1. Distancing the over-familiar.

A first use of the comparative method is to act like a reverse telescope, pushing away things which are too close, so that a gap is created and one can see them. This might be termed, 'distancing the (over) familiar', or turning the obvious into the unobvious (or 'nature' into 'culture' in anthropological terms).

One difficulty for all analysts is the strong pressure to leave unquestioned (and hence unexplained) a great deal of behaviour in the past or in other societies because it is similar to our

own and hence self-evidently 'normal'. As David Hume wrote, "the views the most familiar to us are apt, for that very reason, to escape us" or as Braudel put it, "...surprise and distance ...are both equally necessary for an understanding of that which surrounds you - surrounds you so evidently that you can no longer see it clearly". (Hume quoted in Dumont, Mandeville, 19; Braudel in ed. Burke, Economy and Society, p.24. Likewise, as Marx wrote "Human history is like paleontology. Owning to a certain judicial blindness even the best intelligences absolutely fail to see the things which lie in front of their noses..." (Marx, Pre-Capitalist ,p.140) Or as the anthropologist Kluckhohn (and likewise Tawney), put it, "it would scarcely be a fish that discovered the extent of water".(Bohannan, , Anthropology, p.14). Here they are alluding, in all probability, to the an old Chinese text, cited by Koestler from Professor Watts who says: "'As 'the fish swims in the water but is unmindful of the water, the bird flies in the wind but knows not of the wind'". (Koestler, Lotus, 269)

The difficulty is also alluded to by Sir Henry Maine, who writes that one of the major difficulties for all of us is "the difficulty of believing that ideas which form part of our everyday mental stock can really stand in need of analysis and examination". (Maine, Ancient Law, p.171)

The problem is acute for the historian of his own culture who needs some 'external fulcrum' in order even to be able to be aware of the central features of the past. Such a fulcrum is automatically present for an anthropologist who works in an alien culture, but even he needs support for, as Homans argued, "when a man describes a society which is not his own, he often leaves out those features which the society has in common with his own society" (English Villagers, 382).

This difficulty of studying 'the obvious' - being too close to the subject, is alluded to by Peter Laslett. "This feeling that it is all obvious is a curious and exasperating feature of the whole issue...the force of the contrast between our world and the world which the historian undertakes to describe has hitherto been somewhat indistinct. Without contrast there cannot be full comprehension." (Laslett, Lost World , p.7)

The benefits of a wider knowledge of alternative social structures through the comparative method acts as a distancer of the familiar parts of the past. This is probably what Bloch was referring to when he wrote that "The comparative method in the hand of ethnographers "has restored to us with a kind of mental shock this sense of the difference, the exotic element, which is the indispensable condition for a balanced understanding of the past". (Bloch , Land and Work , p.47) For, as he wrote elsewhere, "to speak of discovery is also to speak of surprise and dissimilarity". (Bloch, Historian Craft, p.120)

Or finally, to quote Dumont, "To see our culture in its unity and specificity we must set it in perspective by contrasting it with other cultures. Only so can we gain an awareness of what otherwise goes without saying, the familiar and implicit basis of our common discourse. " (Dumont in ed. Carrithers, p.94).

2. Familiarising the distant.

Equally problematic is the fact that many things are so unfamiliar and distant that we cannot get inside their logic or 'understand' them. Since, according to Collingwood, the historian has to imaginatively re-create the past in his own mind, any helps to this process are welcome. In this difficulty, we need to use the method with the telescope in its normal position, in other words to bring the phenomena closer. This is a particular problem for anthropologists, but it also afflicts historians. Often the historian of long-distant times or of social groups of which he is not a member, finds himself regarding a world which is based on premises so alien to his own that he cannot understand it at all. For instance, Collingwood argued in relation to Roman religion that "though we have no lack of data about Roman religion, our own religious experience is not of such a kind as to qualify us for reconstructing in our own minds what it meant to them. " (History, 329). The difficulty was well described by David Hume: "Let an object be presented to a man of never so strong natural reason and abilities; if that object be entirely new to him, he will not be able, by the most accurate examination of its sensible qualities, to discover any of its causes or effects." (quoted in Winch, Idea of Soc., p.7?). The usual temptation is either to avoid the subject altogether, or to dismiss it as irrational nonsense.

How does the comparative approach help? One way is through providing hypotheses concerning how some utterly strange system may work. This may be related to one of the two methods which the mathematician Polya suggests are used to solve complex problems: "(2) ransack our memory for any similar problem of which the solution is known." (in Burgess, Field Research, 217). Now the solution may be "known" in a sort of way through the studies of others in other societies. Examples would be the insights which anthropological studies of curious phenomena like the blood feud or witchcraft gave to historians studying the same phenomena in the West.

The comparative method provides possible alternative models of how things might be connected and what they might mean, it brings them within our range of comprehension, hence partly overcoming Hume's problem.

3. Making the absences visible.

A third important service the comparative method can provide is by revealing absences. In all societies, many of the most interesting things are the absences, and it is extremely difficult to notice these. What I mean is rather well illustrated by Robert Smith, who recounts how a Japanese scholar who was asked why ancestor worship persists in modern Japan said "That is not an interesting question. The real question is why it died out in the West." (Smith, Japanese, 152). Of course, both are interesting questions - but the absence is certainly just as curious.

For instance, many of the most important features in Japan and England are the absences - the dogs that did not bark, the inverted mirror images, the weakness of kinship, the plurality of religion, the balance of the State etc. These can only be detected if we have a strong positive image of what is 'normal' in the course of history, and then see that in the miraculous cases the predicted did not happen - and something strange did so. This was the case with my discovery of the absence of

'peasantry' in England, and is even more so here. The absence of such strong comparative models is one of the reasons why there has been so little success in explaining the origins of modernity, and in particular England and Japan as industrial societies. In a sense, a comparative framework provides a strong back-cloth, against which the foreground can be seen. Without it, much of the foreground is invisible.

ii. Testing answers.

Another use for the tool is through its ability to test simple hypotheses. Although historians are aware that they are not trying to establish general laws, their 'descriptions' always contain elements of causal connections of the form "If this, then that". They are constantly on the lookout for both necessary and sufficient causes, links of a specific and general kind. In this task, they can and probably must, use comparisons. If they start with a problem such as "What caused the English Civil War", "What were the effects of printing" or "What caused the industrial revolution" or "How did attitudes to childhood change in early modern France" or whatever, they are always seeking causal connections and co-variations. Having come up with some hypothesis, they nearly always need to move outside the particular instance to see if the connection holds more widely. For instance, if Calvinism is a necessary ingredient of 'Capitalism', are there 'Capitalist' societies that are not 'Calvinist' etc.

Thus, as Nadel writes, "Even if we are initially concerned only with a single society and the appearance in it of a particular social fact (which we wish to 'explain'), our search of co-variations capable of illuminating our problem will often lead us beyond that society to others, similar or diverse, since the given society may not offer an adequate range of variations." (Nadel, Foundations, 227)

It may be that historians will claim that they are not trying to make general statements, but any brief look into their work shows that they usually are. And any general statement has to be tested cross-comparatively. "It is also evident that if any general statements are to be made about social institutions they can only be made by comparison between the same type of institutions in a wide range of societies." (E-P, Comparative Method, p.3)

As Pocock writes, "It was the kernel of Maitland's contention, therefore, that a basis of comparison must be found outside Britain. Until English law was viewed as part of the law of western Europe, none of the influences which had shaped its development could be discerned, and consequently no historical analysis of its growth was thinkable." Or again, "...as Maitland pointed out in the **Constitutional History**, comparison of English with continental law would reveal that the former contained certain principles, institutions and usages common to nearly every law of western Europe..."(Pocock, Ancient Custom,pp. 63, 68).

In discussing the European miracle and its causes "Comparisons, or contrasts, with other civilisations are essential for an assessment of Europe's progress. Otherwise conjectures based on a winnowing of the European historical literature are uncontrolled." (Jones, Miracle, p.153)

"Comparison remains the sole possible approach because, by searching out what Europe has in common with the rest of the world and what distinguishes it from it, the relevant factors of modernity might be revealed." (Baechler, (ed), p.39)

search for universal pre-conditions for emergence of capitalism A comparison of Japan and China "poses the question whether it is possible to discover basic preconditions which are universally applicable for the 'sociological' (italics) explanation of the origins and development of capitalism." (Jacob , Capitalism , p.1)

Comparative method and its value in understanding European miracle "The method of inquiry is to seek out these factors of European development that seem to be both significant and different; that set Europe apart, in other words, from the rest of the world. By holding Europe up against the mirror of the most advanced non-European societies, we should be able to discern some...of the critical elements in her economic and technological precedence." (Landes , Prometheus , p.15)

Nadel quotes R-Brown on "the study of a single society may...afford occasion for hypotheses, which then need to be tested by reference to other societies, it cannot give demonstrated results". and comments "Though this conclusion undoubtedly often holds, I do not think that it applies invariably. Thus, if we include time perspective and cultural change in our enquiry, the necessary co-variations will be available." (Nadel, Foundations, 240).

C. METHODS OF COMPARISON

Comparison can be undertaken in numerous ways, each appropriate to its task, and one cannot lay down in advance which would be the most appropriate. All one can do is to raise some of the alternatives facing one when undertaking comparisons.

A start might be made by noting three types of comparison isolated by Durkheim: "(1) We could consider a single society at a given time and analyze the broad variations in particular modes of action or relationships occurring in that society. (2) We could consider several societies of generally similar nature which differ in certain modes of action or relationships; more precisely, we could here compare either different and perhaps contemporaneous societies, or the same society at different periods, if these exhibit some limited cultural change. (3) We could compare several, perhaps numerous, societies of widely different nature yet sharing some identical feature; or different periods, showing radical change, in the life of the same society." (Nadel, Foundations, 226).

i. Searching for similarities or differences

One of the first things to think about is whether we are principally interested in locating similarities or differences between those things compared - though, in fact, as will emerge, we have to do both.

R. Rousseau:- "One needs to look near at hand if one wants to study men; but to study men one must learn to look from afar: one must first observe differences in order to discover attributes".
(Lienhardt , Anthropology , p.??)

"More formal comparison is both possible and desirable, but here again the concern will be not with similarities only, for the sake of some pseudo-biological classification, but with differences also, for the sake of heightened understanding". (Pocock, Anthropology, p.91)

"Comparison in this sense is concerned with similarities only to penetrate more profoundly into the differences".
(Pocock , Anthropology , p.114)

"I would like to place emphasis on the importance for social anthropology, as a comparative discipline, of differences, because it could be held that in the past the tendency has often been to place the stress on similarities...whereas it is the differences which would seem to invite sociological explanation. This is an involved question, for institutions have to be similar in some respects before they can be different in others..." (E-P, Comparative Method, 17)

"there is no true understanding without a certain range of comparison; provided, of course, that comparison is based upon differing and, at the same time, related realities." (Bloch, Craft, 42).

The comparative approach "means, in essence, the analysis of social situations which are at first sight already comparable, that is, which appear to share certain features (modes of action, relationships) while differing in others, or to share their common features with some degree of difference. (Nadel, Foundations, p.222)

"The study of co-variations is bound up, more specifically, with judgments on similarity and partial identity, the very concept of variations implying a sameness of acts which yet permits of some measure of difference." (Nadel, Soc. Anth. 225).

ii. Units of comparison.

The success of the comparative method will, of course, heavily depend on the comparison of things that can be compared. This consists of several features. One is that the units compared are roughly of the same order of magnitude - for instance, it would clearly be foolish to compare the hand-shake in England with the family system in China.

Secondly, in order for comparison to be effective, there must be some common ground, as well as difference. Things must be of the same class or order in some way. Thus to compare, say, marriage in America with tea chewing in China would probably be fruitless. The selection of the comparisons is all important - and is usually deceptive since words like 'city', 'marriage', 'family' etc. are notoriously slippery and difficult to compare. As E-P puts it, "it was obvious that the method depended entirely on the units of comparison being of equivalent value. Are, for example,

'monogamy' among the Veddahs of Ceylon and 'monogamy' in Western Europe units of the same kind..."(E-P, Comparative, p.9)

This is perhaps why anthropologists have tended to shy away from comparing 'things' in themselves, and stress the need to compare relationships. "The comparison can only be conducted in terms of relations, and not of items or isolated institutions; and this relational comparison begins from the moment that the research worker approaches his material". (Pocock, Anthropology, 114); or as E-P put it, "what the modern anthropologist compares are not customs, but systems of relations." (E-P, Social Anth, 57)

They have also reacted against what they take to be the Frazerian tendency to wrench bits of culture out of their context and stress the need to compare a whole culture, e.g. need to compare whole social systems "a solid and thorough comparison of values is possible only between two systems taken as wholes..." (Dumont, Individualism , p.243) (cf also EPThompson review of my Josselin).

Some of the problems and a prescription are put forward by Baechler: "we must compare what is comparable...for example, it would be fruitless to compare the Europe of today with Africa South of the Sahara...Points of comparison of the same order of size must be selected - not pre-modern Europe on the one side and the rest of the world on the other, but Europe and a particular historical episode that occurred in a spatial and temporal framework of the same dimensions." (Baechler, p.40)

iii. Controlled and general comparison

One might note two major forms of comparison, general comparison between, say, civilizations, and more limited comparisons, where the range of difference is limited. The latter method of controlled comparison is described by Lowie: "It is the method of intensively comparing groups of common derivation, or with a basically identical culture, yet differing in some specific factor, the point being to ascertain what other elements likewise differ". (Lowie, Organization, p.47)

iv. Contrast and compare

We also need to distinguish contrast (A is different from B in the following...), and comparison (A and B have certain features in common and certain differences). Both have their place. The contrast method can stimulate thought. As Wright-Mills puts it, advocating the studying of extremes and opposites. "Often you get the best insights by considering extremes - by thinking of the opposite of that with which you are directly concerned. If you think about despair, then also think about elation; if you study the miser, then also the spendthrift". (Mills, Sociological, 235). Or again, he writes, that in order to stimulate mental activity, "...what you can do is to give the range and the major types of some phenomenon, and for that it is more economical to begin by constructing 'polar types', opposites along various dimensions". (Wright Mills, Sociological , p.235)

While the method of contrast is initially stimulating, in the long run it is probably not as fruitful as that of comparison. It helps with posing questions; for instance the contrast method might lead one to ask why English and Japanese cities do not have walls, why neither country had 'castes', why neither had concepts of pollution or mana, why there were no professional money-lenders in the villages of seventeenth century England etc. But while stimulating questions, its gives little help in suggesting answers. Hence all binary contrasts, whether of Levi-Strauss, Dumont or any others, in the end leaves the explanatory task as it was. Only through proper comparison can one begin to connect the threads. A recognition of the difference between comparison and contrast is noted by Jones. "Japan provides, intriguingly enough, a comparison rather than a contrast with Europe...(its demography, e.g.)..This was remarkable for its outline similarity with late preindustrial Britain. Yet there was only the slenderest connection with Europe..." (Jones, Miracle , p.157)

v How many poles of comparison?

This needs to be developed. Usually, when just two types are brought into play, for instance 'holism' and 'individualism', or 'hot' and 'cold' or 'pre-industrial' and 'industrial', then one is dealing with contrasts. As stated above, this is a start, but only a start. More fruitful, because leading one towards a comparison, is a three-way comparison, for instance, as with Jacobs, of China, Japan, Europe, or De Tocqueville, of France, England, America.

It will make a very considerable difference as to whether we make a straight comparison between two poles - say Europe and India, or three poles. Some of the most fruitful applications of the method have had three poles of comparison, for instance De Tocqueville with England, America and France, or Jacobs with China, Japan and Europe. In my earlier work on England, however, I took a roughly binary comparison, as follows.

I decided to take Eastern Europe as the illustrative area for comparative purposes... partly because I felt that in order to provide a sufficiently strong sense of 'otherness' it would be helpful to move outside western Europe. I did not want to go too far away as it would be easy to ridicule attempts to compare England with India or China, for instance.... From this it seemed to me that although Eastern Europe, as described by the authorities I relied on, was an extreme case, there were many features which could be found in other agrarian civilizations which comparative analysts termed "peasant"...

Some argued that rather than using Eastern Europe as my central concrete comparison, I should have used a model based on western Europe, perhaps located in France, Italy or elsewhere. This is a reasonable point...by taking a very pure concrete case, I have pushed the argument to its extremes. It would have been safer to have chosen somewhere nearer to England, and this would indeed have brought out some of the subtler similarities and differences within western Europe. But I am not sure that as a first effort it would have revealed as much. Like Jack Goody and John Hajnal (note 8), I find it refreshing to look from outside western Europe in order to see some of the peculiarities. The work of making the finer discriminations within Europe I saw as a second stage.... Yet there is no doubt that Robert Rowland has a strong argument when he points out that I need to show why

England, France, Italy all "differed in **different ways** from the ideal type."

D. Some preliminary reflections on a test case.

In trying to understand what are the central features of modern societies, and the reasons for its emergence, it would, of course, be possible to look at only one case, for instance modern Europe. If one did this, there would be an implicit comparison, namely pre-industrial/ pre-capitalist/ pre-modern somewhere (probably Europe) and its opposite, post nineteenth century, character. Many people have approached the problem in this way and though some discussions are illuminating, in the end one goes away dissatisfied for various reasons. There is a sort of inevitability about the account; we know it happened, therefore it is difficult not to believe that it had to happen. Secondly, it is really impossible to test causal hypotheses. Factors which are stressed as necessary and sufficient causes seem to be so if they are present, but we cannot carry out a counter-factual thought experiment and wish them away. Are they just 'noise' or are they really deeper causes?

Furthermore, we are left wondering whether there are other even more important and deeper factors which are necessary, a sort of lowest common denominator, which can only be exposed by looking at other examples. Given this desirability for some explicit comparisons, what shall we compare?

If we start with the assumption that the central case is England, the precocious developer of modern industrial capitalism, one strategy would be to compare it systematically with other parts of Europe. There is something to be gained for choosing areas where many of the factors could be held constant; within Europe we can assume an Indo-European language, a Graeco-Roman past, Christianity, a temperate climate and so on. And yet, it was within this common heritage that one country 'broke away'. Why was such a development blocked elsewhere? With such a strategy, we could compare England with almost anywhere in Europe, Ireland, Portugal, France, Italy etc. This procedure was mainly the one taken by thinkers until the nineteenth century, of whom Adam Smith, Voltaire, Montesquieu, Arthur Young and others are notable examples. It might be called the Enlightenment approach.

It gets us a certain way, but it is of limited use, since it leads us away from examining those very things which are held in common. It is the enormous facts of language, religion, climate, law etc. which are part of the necessary equation - alongside the differences. Just because they are in common, and in Ireland or Portugal there was a different outcome, cannot lead us to conclude that they are unimportant. Studying closely allied cultures tends to make us overlook the largest factors. We are like the crew of sailors who moored on a whale, thinking it an island; it is too big for us to see, and too close. We need to combine this approach with a move further away.

A second approach, which might be termed the Weberian or anthropological comparative approach, stretches the comparison much further, comparing the whole of Europe with civilizations

which did not 'escape' into modernity. Weber did this with Islam, China and India, and Marx did it historically with the Asiatic and Ancient modes of production, and Maine with India and England. It was thus one of the favourite strategies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Such an approach gets us a long way further, in that the hidden whale on which we have moored is suddenly revealed. We realize the huge hidden weight of our peculiar linguistic, kinship, religious and political systems. Some very significant central features like Christianity, the peculiar nature of the western city, the peculiar kinship system, begin to be revealed.

But again, this seam of grand comparative work, later mined to good effect by Gellner, Goody, McNeill, Braudel and others, has run out of good returns. Perhaps part of the problem is that it tends to go to the other extreme of solution one. Instead of there being too much overlap, so that one misses the central features because they are assumed in the model, there is too little - and hence one is left with those vast binary oppositions (as in the work of Levi-Strauss on hot and cold societies etc.), which are again, ultimately, only of limited value. Put in another way, one is getting the benefits of contrast, but not those of comparison. Since there are so many and so great differences, one is left confused as to which are important and which subsidiary. For instance, is it the absence of caste and pollution, is it the absence of magical religion, is it the absence of corporate kin groups, or other factors, which explain the curiosity of Europe? Furthermore, when we compare a civilization like India or China we instinctively compare it with Europe - thus lumping together different cases.

In some ways, in a very modest way, the above is what I did in the 'Individualism' era. The question of the problem of looking with an individualist eye at an individualistic society is raised, somewhat unconsciously in my work on English individualism. I sensed, obviously, that if I just looked at the past 'directly', it would lose its peculiarity. So instead of looking directly, as many historians do, I looked at it sideways, through an artificially constructed mirror - namely a model of a 'peasant' society. In this mirror, artificially created, the peculiarities of the past were brought to light. This may be a device which is central to comparative studies. For instance, Maitland and Maine looked on the history of English law through the comparative perspective of world jurisprudence, where the non-individualist tradition of Roman law is the norm, against which the exceptions of England became obvious. (This is also what Stein does...).

A third approach, which has not really been tried, is to take a controlled comparison between England and Japan. It has the novel feature that both achieved the 'miracle', and more or less independently. This makes Japan different from France or Germany which were cases of 'emulation'. Therefore, we might assume that there must be something in common, assuming that there are some necessary ingredients to the process. Furthermore, there seems enough similarity in this and other respects for some interesting factors to emerge. Thus a comparison with Japan has an advantage over a comparison with something as dissimilar as India or China, which is too distant. On the other hand, the fact that Japan is in many respects so utterly different means that very large areas of apparently necessary and sufficient causation in one case, but not in the other, can be ruled out. It opens up deeper issues and stretches the mind.

Such a comparison also forces one to re-think the nature of capitalism, which through the earlier

two methods was left unproblematic, either because in the European context it is unitary (all European capitalism is similar), or in the world context, where European capitalism is neither opposed nor achieved. But Japan has capitalism **with a difference**, and hence shows up the **peculiarity of western capitalism** itself, not only in comparison to preceding or non-capitalist societies, but also in relation to a very different form of equally successful industrial and technological society.

Yet this approach depends on one major assumption. It assumes that while Japan is different, it is not too different. We want something that has both elements of difference and overlap. We also need to establish that there is not too much mutual contamination. The problems are well discussed by Jacobs. "If every similarity (i.e. of Japan and West - Alan) was due to borrowing, sociological analysis would be limited to social history. The independent origins standpoint, on the other hand, prevents generalised analysis, limiting the validity / of social analysis to one specific reference; the development of capitalism in both Japan and Western Europe would be attributed to coincidence. Following the principle of convergence, we see that the structures of Japan and western Europe show important underlying principles in common, despite variants in traits...."
(Jacobs, 12-3)

Or, to put it in another way.....

In **Individualism** I basically set up an alternative model of 'peasantry', culled from various sources, which then suggested how different England was from a traditional peasant society. The method was one of a **two-way contrast**. What it does is show what England was not, rather than what it was.

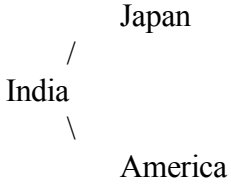
In my present work on Japan, I am trying to set up a **three-way comparison**; England, 'traditional', 'Japan'. This is more complex, but probably more rewarding, as it does not make such a stark binary contrast. Furthermore, in the case of England and Japan it is a matter of a good deal of overlap and similarity, with a good deal of difference as well. This makes the picture more nuanced and interesting I think.

The idea of bench-marks (Weber) or ideal types is useful, but one has to be careful that they do not become rulers from A to B, where every society has to fit along them. This was my tendency with Japan, until I realized that it could not be represented thus:

'India'.....'Japan'.....'America'

or even thus:

which is better, but still implies that Japan is half-way between, with a bit of each. Probably the best representation, though without any implication of evolution, is...



Thus Japan and America stand as united in their opposition to India, but divided in their opposition to each other.

Just as I have written above of the advantages of looking at Japan from various angles, likewise it is an advantage to look at England both from the Continent and other peasantries, but also from another, non-peasant but also non-western perspective. That is the great luxury Japan affords us intellectually.

Part two

THE OBSERVER'S CONTEXT AND ASSUMPTIONS

4. Holistic and individualistic perspectives.

Let me make this more concrete by focusing on Japan. Now supposing one is trying to understand this very difficult and apparently anomalous case. One could start with the premise that 'normal' man is 'modern Western' man, i.e. **Homo Americanus**. This is the basic premise of many sociologists and anthropologists. From this perspective, what strikes one is how strangely **holistic** and **embedded** Japan is. The classic text is Ruth Benedict's **Chrysanthemum and the Sword**. In this case, Japan is compared to America, and is found to be very much more group-based etc. Now the comparative method in this instance, based on methodological individualism, throws up many differences, making Japan seem very different and a long way towards the tribal/traditional direction. We are given one relief picture of Japan, from one angle. But it is difficult to gain an idea of the thickness and other side of the phenomenon from such an exercize; we just learnt about the differences.

On the other hand, one could start from the premise that man is 'naturally' holistic and large-groupish. Few have attempted to do this in relation to Japan, but the nearest are perhaps Chie Nakane and Norman Jacobs. Although Japanese, Nakane's training and primary experience made India her model, and this made her aware of how very far Japan was from India. (quote XXX) Thus Japan was a long way from a caste-like and holistic world. Or, again, one could look at Japan from China, as Jacobs attempted to do. Again, Japan seemed a long way from China, and indeed, from that perspective, as Jones succinctly summarized it, "in certain respects Japan was as 'European' as if it had been towed away and anchored off the Isle of Wight." (Jones, Miracle, p.159). It seemed utterly different from China, with structural features in common with the West.

We now have a triangulation of a sort on Japan - from three comparative perspectives, American,

Indian, Chinese, and it floats separate from them all. But at least we begin to get an idea of some common features that lie behind all the images we have of it, as Hofstadter describes of his feelings of something lying behind Godel, Escher and Bach.

The point I want to make is that many different models of man have evolved, but we may simplify them down to the major and standard ones currently existing in western social science. These are the residues of that very process of modernization. On the one hand there is the tradition which grew in the heartland of 'modernity', namely England, and later America, which assumes individualism as the basic state of man, a Hobbesian or Lockian world. When such a methodology is applied to non-individualistic based civilizations such as India, China, South American Indians, it is extremely effective in depicting their holistic social structure. Thus most of the best accounts of their political, economic and social institutions are created by people surprised by the differences. Yet such people find it very different to penetrate to the essence and inter-connectedness, and especially the culture of holistic civilizations.

It is thus no coincidence that the best accounts of the total holistic civilizations have tended to come from those who have a strong sympathetic streak of holism in their thought, particularly the French as with Dubois, Bougle and Dumont on caste, Bloch on feudal society, Granet on China, Levi-Strauss on South American Indians. They seem get inside the inter-connectedness and the structural method, delving into the relations of relations, shows the inner patterns of a civilization. It is by stressing the differences of the world they are studying from the modern individualistic one that they are able to provide such a convincing picture. Yet the other world is only reached through a form of empathetic understanding arising from the fact that part of the observer also feels the holistic interconnection in his own mind and background. Thus, for instance, Levi-Strauss wrote revealingly that "Today I sometimes wonder if I was not attracted to anthropology, however unwittingly, by a structural affinity between the civilisations which are its subject matter and my own thought processes. My intelligence is neolithic." (Tristes Trophiques, quoted in (ed.) Manners, Theory, p.551).

On the other hand, when trying to understand individualistic and capitalistic civilizations, again some of the deepest insights have come from those who harbour a holistic thread in their make-up, who stress the differences. Looking from holistic France, Tocqueville and Taine saw England very clearly. Looking from highland Scotland, the Scottish philosophers and later Miller, saw the new civilization of the south for what it was. Looking from partly holistic Germany, the great German philosophers saw the new individualistic capitalism in a clear way (Marx, Weber, Simmell, Sombart et al.). But their secret was always to stress the dissimilarities with their own holistic background. As Tocqueville, for instance, so clearly put it, "In my work on America... Though I seldom mentioned France, I did not write a page without thinking of her, and placing her as it were before me. And what I especially tried to draw out, and to explain in the United States, was not the whole condition of that foreign society, but the points in which it differs from our own, or resembles us. It is always by noticing likenesses or contrasts that I succeeded in giving an interesting and accurate description...." (De Tocqueville, Memoir, 1 , p.359)

What does not seem to work very well is to apply the holistic structuralist method too forcefully to a non-holistic society, hence, for instance, the poor results of French attempts to provide 'total' portraits of European societies since about 1800. Foucault, Levi-Strauss, Dumont and others, whose work is often so rich and suggestive in one setting, become thin and unconvincing when trying to apply it to the modern west. No amount of wishful Utopian thinking can make the modern west into a holistic society. The attempt to force history and to make a society into the image of such thought leads tragic and unsuccessful experiments like that in Russia.

Thus one ends with a theoretical compromise, which is again well illustrated by the methodology needed to understand a complex case like Japan. If one applies a rigorous methodological individualist method to Japan, a great deal of its peculiarity emerges - along the lines already noted. Yet one is left unable to grasp its essence. Its peculiar culture eludes one. Another approach is needed to complement methodological individualism. Here one starts, with Barthes, by approaching Japan **as if** it is an empire of 'signs', ie. as if it is a civilization of a truly structural or holistic kind, where meaning does not lie in things, as in an Aristotelian, individualistic, tradition, but in the relation of things, neither in signifier nor signified, but in the sign.

This is clearly how the Japanese see themselves and it would appear that it is ripe for structuralist analysis. Of course, such analysis would only reduce Japan to our terms, act as a kind of translation device. But by suggesting a way of understanding Japan it would help us to bring into comprehension a third major case, neither modern, nor pre-modern. And in doing this it could perhaps help in that enlarging debate about what is happening in a world of 'post-modernity'. For what is happening in much of the western world, esp. California, where the foundations of the inherited associations between individualism, equality, capitalism and industrialism are being undermined, seem to be melting away under the impact of the post-Gutenberg communications revolution, forces us to look more closely at the place where this is happening most dramatically - South East Asia. There we have emerging a new civilization which is neither 'modern' in the sense of the associated set of features, nor 'pre-modern', nor even 'post-modern', but a new shaping of the complex set of features which it has been the task of our intellectual ancestors, including R-B, to try to understand.

(SOME EXTRACTS TAKEN FROM WRITINGS ON JAPAN, ESP. CH 2, 12.)

The importance of comparative models

The important features in Japan and England are the absences - the dogs that did not bark, the inverted mirror images, the weakness of kinship, the plurality of religion, the balance of the State etc. These can only be detected if we have a strong positive image of what is normal in the course of history, and then see that in the miraculous cases the predicted did not happen - and something strange did so. This was the case with my discovery of the absence of 'peasantry' in England, and is even more so here. The absence of such strong comparative models is one of the reasons why there has been so little success in explaining the origins of modernity, and in particular England and Japan as industrial societies.

The use of comparisons

In trying to understand what are the central features of modern societies, and the reasons for its emergence, it would, of course, be possible to look at only one case, for instance modern Europe. If one did this, there would be an implicit comparison, namely pre-industrial/ pre-capitalist/ pre-modern somewhere (probably Europe) and its opposite, post nineteenth century, character. Many people have approached the problem in this way and thought some discussions are illuminating, in the end one goes away dissatisfied for various reasons. There is a sort of inevitability about the account; we know it happened, therefore it is difficult not to believe that it had to happen. Secondly, it is really impossible to test causal hypotheses. Factors which are stressed as necessary and sufficient causes seem to be so if they are present, but we cannot carry out a counter-factual thought experiment and wish them away. Are they just 'noise' or are they really deeper causes?

Furthermore, we are left wondering whether there are other even more important and deeper

factors which are necessary, a sort of lowest common denominator, which can only be exposed by looking at other examples. Given this desirability for some explicit comparisons, what shall we compare?

If we start with the assumption that the central case is England, the precocious developer of modern industrial capitalism, one strategy would be to compare it systematically with other parts of Europe. There is something to be gained for choosing areas where many of the factors could be held constant; within Europe we can assume an Indo-European language, a Graeco-Roman past, Christianity, a temperate climate and so on. And yet, it was within this common heritage that one country 'broke away'. Why was such a development blocked elsewhere? With such a strategy, we could compare England with almost anywhere in Europe, Ireland, Portugal, France, Italy etc. This procedure was mainly the one taken by thinkers until the nineteenth century, of whom Adam Smith, Voltaire, Montesquieu, Arthur Young and others are notable examples. It might be called the Enlightenment approach.

It gets us a certain way, but it is of limited use, since it leads us away from examining those very things which are held in common. It is the enormous facts of language, religion, climate, law etc. which are part of the necessary equation - alongside the differences. Just because they are in common, and in Ireland or Portugal there was a different outcome, cannot lead us to conclude that they are unimportant. Studying closely allied cultures tends to make us overlook the largest factors. We are like the crew of sailors who moored on a whale, thinking it an island; it is too big for us to see, and too close. We need to combine this approach with a move further away.

A second approach, which might be termed the Weberian or anthropological comparative approach, stretches the comparison much further, comparing the whole of Europe with civilizations which did not 'escape' into modernity. Weber did this with Islam, China and India, and Marx did it historically with the Asiatic and Ancient modes of production, and Maine with India and England. It was thus one of the favourite strategies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Such an approach gets us a long way further, in that the hidden whale one which we have moored is suddenly revealed. We realize the huge hidden weight of our peculiar linguistic, kinship, religious and political systems. Some very significant central features like Christianity, the peculiar nature of the western city, the peculiar kinship system, begin to be revealed.

But again, this seam of grand comparative work, later mined to good effect by Gellner, Goody, McNeill, Braudel and others, has run out of good returns. Perhaps part of the problem is that it tends to go to the other extreme of solution one. Instead of their being too much overlap, so that one misses the central features because they are assumed in the model, there is too little - and hence one is left with those vast binary oppositions (as in the work of Levi-Strauss on hot and cold societies etc.), which are again, ultimately, only of limited value. Since there are so many and do great differences, one is left confused as to which are important and which subsidiary. For instance, is it the absence of caste and pollution, is it the absence of magical religion, is it the absence of corporate kin groups, or other factors, which explain the curiosity of Europe. Furthermore, when we compare a civilization like India or China we instinctively compare it with Europe - thus lumping together different case.

A third approach, which has not really been tried, is to take a controlled comparison between England and Japan. It has the novel feature that both achieved the 'miracle', and more or less independently. This makes Japan different from France or Germany which were cases of 'emulation'. Therefore, we might assume that there must be something in common, assuming that there are some necessary ingredients to the process. Furthermore, there seems enough similarity in this and other respects for some interesting factors to emerge. Thus a comparison with Japan has an

advantage over a comparison with something as dissimilar as India or China, which is too distant. On the other hand, the fact that Japan is in many respects so utterly different means that very large areas of apparently necessary and sufficient causation in one case, but not in the other, can be ruled out. It opens up deeper issues and stretches the mind.

Such a comparison also forces one to re-think the nature of capitalism, which through the earlier two methods was left unproblematic, either because in the European context it is unitary (all European capitalism is similar), or in the world context, where European capitalism is neither opposed nor achieved. But Japan has capitalism **with a difference**, and hence shows up the **peculiarity of western capitalism** itself, not only in comparison to preceding or non-capitalist societies, but also in relation to a very different form of equally successful industrial and technological society.

search for universal pre-conditions for emergence of capitalism

A comparison of Japan and China "poses the question whether it is possible to discover basic preconditions which are universally applicable for the 'sociological' (italics) explanation of the origins and development of capitalism." (Jacobs, p.1)

The three approaches; diffusion, difference, convergence

"If every similarity (i.e. of Japan and West - Alan) was due to borrowing, sociological analysis would be limited to social history. The independent origins standpoint, on the other hand, prevents generalised analysis, limiting the validity / of social analysis to one specific reference; the development of capitalism in both Japan and Western Europe would be attributed to coincidence. Following the principle of convergence, we see that the structures of Japan and western Europe show important underlying principles in common, despite variants in traits...."
(Jacobs, 12-3)

SOME EXTRACTS FROM \WRITING\DRAFT1

ON INDIVIDUALISM - some first thoughts re possible R-B lecture
July 1992

The basic theme is roughly the way in which three things are linked; the observer's background and deepest assumptions, the societies he studies, and the methodology he develops.

It has long been known that it is only out of the tension between the model and the facts, the expectations and the events, that thought has arisen. Whether in Tawney's "It would hardly be fish...", or De Tocqueville's remarks on his comparative method with America, it is obvious that it is out of the implicit or explicit tension that worthwhile observation comes.

If this is so, it perhaps explains why some of the most fruitful analysis of what one might roughly call 'Group' based societies has come from those who come from Individualistic backgrounds (Anglo-Saxon), while some of the best analyses of individualistic societies has come from those who come from relatively Group based societies (e.g. De Tocqueville on America). But the gap must not be too great - hence partly relational observers, such as Dumont on India or Levi-Strauss on S.America are often notably successful as well.

Also to be considered are the blinding effect, for example one cannot observe things that are too close (as D.Hume observed) - hence the blindness which De T noted in relation to the English and their class system.

Now the powerful hold of one's culture over one's perception is known in theory, but surprisingly, observer's often do not examine this. This may be partly because they do not see its depth and length, historically.

New findings on the history of individualism in the west stress this dangers. It was once thought that 'individualism' was part of the so-called capitalist revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But the work of many recent writers, and not least R-B's own realization of the ancientness of the English cognatic kinship system, makes one realize how long a certain tradition of thought in the west has existed which assumed a form of molecular individualism. (cf. Stubbs on Germanic nature of England and the alternative development in France).

One might look at attempts to apply structuralist (French) approaches to individualistic societies and see how unsatisfactory they are, e.g. Levi-Strauss on France, Foucault on the West, Dumont on the west etc. Why?

Very crudely, and no doubt to many people's distaste, one could divide thinkers into those whose basic premise is one of the following:

The Group, Relational

Marx, Levi-Strauss,
Dumont, Mauss, Foucault, Plato

The Individual, Grid

Ockham, Hobbes, Locke, Bentham, Mill, R-Brown, Malinowski, Bracton, Descartes, Aristotle, Darwin, Spencer (cf. Marx on Darwin's projection onto the animal kingdom), Weber

Above both camps, seeing them as alternatives

De Tocqueville, Maine, Maitland, Gellner

To be decided....

Vico, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Montaigne, Rousseau, Hume

When considering research, one can use the analogy of constructing a fishing net. If the shape of the net is right, i.e. the holes are of a different size (smaller) than the fish, one catches them. If the shape is wrong, nothing is caught. It looks as if to sweep a structuralist net through individualist waters throws up certain oddnesses, hence the best observers are people from relational backgrounds (Scots, French), for they observe the large things.

An individualist, on the other hand, sweeping through relational waters comes up with some very interesting findings - i.e. most of the anthropological tradition of the last 150 years, starting with Maine, Morgan & co. & ending with structural-functionalists including R-Brown.

Another possibility is a part relationist (i.e. modern French man) looking at relational structures - e.g. Dumont on India, Granet on China, L-Strauss on S.America. Enormous achievements.

(Perhaps the best way of writing 'On Individualism' so that it is both theoretically interesting and amusing and playful and fun to listen to is to explore the problem of comprehending three main types of social structure, individualistic, relational and the Japanese hybrid, using the two major methodologies, methodological individualism and the structural (structuralism and Marxism).

This would be the serious centre or heart, but one would give as examples some of my favourite quotations from various authors, e.g. Taine and De T on England, A. Young & others on France, English on India, Wilde (Irish) on England, Scottish on England. etc. Thus there would be lots of amusing and judicious remarks set in a serious argument.

On the surface it would be a pleasure to hear as insights into national character and manners, but below the surface a serious argument about the ways in which one implicitly compares and the need to make explicit, the comparative method and one's own roots in an individualistic culture. It would also talk about the difficulty of comprehending a third case which is neither one nor the other - i.e. Japan. (cf. M.Douglas, "If only the Dogon...")

One might, for simplicity, envisage the following possible situations. With the observer coming from an individualist background, an examining a 'relational' structure (e.g. India, Tribal, China), the resulting methodology tends to be an attempt at some kind of holism which stretches individualism - i.e. the functionalism and structural-functionalism of R-B, Fortes, Spencer and co. This has the merit of illuminating the differences, and takes one a certain way. But in the end, particularly in the conceptual field one does not feel that one has captured the essence of the relational system - this is left to the structuralists.

With the observer coming from an individualist background and studying an individualist society (e.g. England or America), one has methodological individualism, e.g. Weber, Riesman, A.Smith et al. This is a circular and re-enforcing tendency, confirming what we know etc.

With the observer coming from a relational background and studying a relational structure (e.g. India, tribal), then one gets the full-blown structuralism of the French kind - e.g. Mauss, Hertz et al. This is very helpful in many ways at the cultural level at least...

With the observer coming from a relational background and studying an individualistic system, one gets two outcomes. If it is pushed too hard, then one gets an impoverished structuralism (as with attempts of Leach, Levi-Strauss, Foucault & others). But if a more relaxed approach is taken, e.g. De Tocqueville,e Bloch, Taine and co, then it is very illuminating.

There is a particular problem in the case of Japan because it is neither individualist, nor relational and hence no methodology is entirely adequate for it. Two of the most notable attempts to understand it have been from opposite ends of the spectrum, however. One is by comparing it with, being written by, an individualist (American) perspective, that of R. Benedict. This tends to bring how certain things, particularly the absence of individualism in Japan - i.e. the shame and guilt discussion). On the other hand, Chie Nakane, as an Indianist, approached it in contrast to a caste society. Here she notes particularly and famously the situational ethics, the vertical (but not caste) society, the high degree of dyadic and contractual ties.

By definition the Japanese cannot understand themselves (too close). Yet how can others do so ? (cf. De Tocqueville). If one applies a methodological individualist approach, as R. Benedict, one finds

certain things but exasperates the Japanese. If one applies a relational approach (as Nakane), they are equally exasperated. Is this a failure due to method - or is due to a very odd phenomenon that is worth looking at? Perhaps Japan is a sort of trick mirror. If one looks into it from an individualist viewpoint, one sees Japan as very relational. If one looks into it from a structural' group aspect, it is very individualist. It seems to project outwards two different reflections.

This is unusual indeed. In other cases the two different viewpoints do not bring out different viewpoints - but the same. Eg. a relationalist and an individualist looking at India will see roughly the same thing. There are of course differences, as in the famous Redfield/Lewis case, or the demography that led to the founding of modern kinship studies. But these are quibblings over details. It is deeper than this in Japan & may reflect that the mirror itself is not neutral or empty. It is bent in the middle and reflects different things depending on how one looks at it - a very Japanese concept. One sees in it what one wants to see - but distorted. This is because it is such a curious combination of the two principles.

Normally if one looks into the ,mirror, f another culture, one sees that the other culture is either like one's own, or very different. In Japan one has both these sensations at the same time. Unusually one sees that its principles and structures are based on the same premises as one's own, or very different. In Japan one feels both difference and similarity. Why is this?

One could start with the premise that anthropology is a comparative science, but comparing what with what? At the deepest, it is compare a (usually implicit) model of what is taken to be 'normal' with what one finds. There are many dangers in this, for example projection onto the evidence (cf. Marx on Darwin here).

There are two difficulties which are particularly worth drawing attention to. The first is that the methodology and the data, the assumptions and the world, are so congruent/ identical, that one notices nothing - there is no 'problem'. The method and the data have the same shape so on sees nothing (cf. D.Hume on this).

The second is that the methodology and the data are so far apart that there is no fit; the problem of farness (cf. Hume), which means usually that there is both incomprehension and or projection.

As a side issue, it is worth noting that in the first hundred years of anthropology, almost all anthropologists came from a background which while predominantly individualist, had a touch of collectivism in it which gave them a sympathy - either they were Jewish (many eg's), or they were Celts (Frazer, McLennan, Lang), or they were E. European or they were French.

Another way of representing the situation would be that societies have a Venn overlap. What overlaps helps to make it possible to understand what does not. Thus L-Strauss found that the French and Borroro overlapped in parts, likewise Dumont for India and Granet for China. But there is, of course a danger that if there is not an overlap, one forces one - cf. Andrew Lang's amusing quote about the contorted rubber doll of cultures...and 'The Mission of Primitive Man'.

In terms of the Venn overlap theory, the British should do best with individualistic cultures, whether Hunter-Gatherers, New Guinea, Eskimo etc, and less well with structural ones. This is, to a certain extent, true.

To sum up, in essence one needs to set up

a. two basic types of social structure, individualistic (grid) and relational (group). From these come

observers who usually share their premises. They then study of these two types of society. Out of the tension of these comes comparative anthropology. In a nutshell

Individualism (I) Observer	Relationalism (R) Observed	Methodology
I	I	methodological individualism
I	R	functionalism/structural - f
R	R	structuralism
R	I	***

The last is a little more complicated. One either gets 'bastard structuralism' (Marxism, Utopianism or a failed fit) or modified and contrastive structuralism, as De Tocqueville & Taine.

There are now two odd cases. One is Japan, because the data is sliding about, or lies on the borderline between the Individual and the Relational. The other is post-modernism, because the observers are sliding about and lying on the borderline between the two (as in France and California). In these last two cases a sense of confusion and vertigo, but for different reasons - everything is out of focus, blurred, uncertain etc., like things seen in a mist or from a very fast moving train.

Western sociology, at least in the Herbert Spencer tradition, is based on the premise of methodological individualism of necessity. This is because it is created in a society where the division of labour, disassociation etc. has already occurred and the fully constituted individual is already present. Hence, see Spencer & co. Is this also true of the French tradition of Montesquieu, Comte, Durkheim and Mauss, or of the German tradition from Weber? Worth pursuing. Likewise the Italian tradition from Vico through to Pareto. Others could look at. Likewise American anthropology (Boas, Lowie) and sociology (through to Talcott Parsons and beyond).

Another way of putting the hunch is as follows. Where there is a binding infrastructure - i.e. a totalitarian society (as in tribal or Ancien Regime societies), then a structuralist mentality will develop and then a structuralist approach will be worthwhile. Where there is autonomy and the separation of spheres (as Greece from 5th century, NW Europe from very early on, esp. England), there the structuralist approach will not work, but individualism does do so.

It occurs to me that the two approaches combined may be necessary. In looking at 'total' societies (tribal & Ancien Regime), it makes sense to analyse the institutional structure in the way that functionalists and structural-functionalists do - as a sort of organism with relations between parts. A lot of mileage is made by decomposing them into western-style categories and then re-assembling them in a new way to show how integrated it all is. But this approach will not do with 'culture', because it cannot be analytically separated off into bits. Doing so immediately loses its specialness. It must be more warily pursued and captured alive, as it were. With the social structure it can be shot, dismembered dead, and re-assembled and we have something interesting. Culture cannot be killed and stuffed; once no longer alive it is not interesting. Hence it needs a different approach - the structuralist one, which assumes the integration of things, the absence of disassociation, the poetic vision, the inter-connectedness from the start, and tries to bring that back. Thus the two approaches fit together.

In the West, the functionalist approach based on individualism also works, for it dismembers and then re-assembles. But what it re-assembles is now familiar, the divided institutions of 'modernity'. What is less successful is the structuralist method, which is in certain ways too powerful, or based

on an assumption of inter-connectedness of thought which does not hold. It does hold for China or India or the Borroro, but it does not for seventeenth century Holland (cf. Schama's book) or seventeenth century England (cf. K.Thomas on animals) - except in a very limited way. Why is this? It seems to reflect the fact that people are not thinking in a structural way because it is not a structural society. Attempts to force it into a structuralist mould (as Foucault) only succeed in so far as they mystify and confuse. When one unscrambles it all, apart from minor triumphs such as Yates on certain aspects of science, of Lefebvre & the Annales school on certain selected features, it usually fails. (cf. P.Burke on structuralism).

In the case of Japan, assuming that Barthes is right and that it is in its mentality and social structure basically a relational civilization (an Empire of Signs), both approaches are also needed. At the institutional level it is essential to have the functional and structural-functional approach in order to dismember the parts and see how they fit together. A combination of the classical approaches with Weber's insight into the relations of things will take one a long way. But to go the final mile, one needs to switch to a structuralist approach for the thought (concepts of self, aesthetics, language etc.) is situational and relational and cannot be grasped except with a structural method. Again, if it is approached with the dissecting structural-functional tools it slips between the fingers and dies before it reaches the dissecting table.
Another thought occurs to me as to the effects of what is most fruitfully looked at depending on the analyst's model and the data. In the case where the two are congruent, e.g. where an Individualistic methodology is applied to an individualistic society, or relational to relational, it is the similarities which are most fruitfully analysed - as in the case of India or China or Bororo by structuralists, or England and Holland and America by individualists. But in the case of a contradiction or tension, although we should try - and learn from the failures - in the end the most fruitful approach will be to look at the differences, as did De Tocqueville (quote) in America, Taine in England etc.

*

If we look now at the great masters, we find two major streams of thought. There is the functionalist and structural-functionalist tradition of the Anglo-Saxon world, with its positivistic and empiricist tradition. This is a fruitful methodology in many ways, but it has its limitation. Then we have the mainly French (but also Italian - Vico) tradition of structuralism (L-Strauss, Foucault, Barthes et al). This again is fruitful but has its limitation.

In particular, if we apply either of these methodologies to 'total' societies of the tribal/ancien regime type, we seem to leave a lot of corners untouched. Both are needed. Likewise, if we apply either to Japan, a lot is left untouched.

6. One needs to create encompassing, shot-gun, methodology that will deal with many possible phenomena - in particular with the four which one could already imagine, the 'total' of pre-industrial societies, the 'mixed mode' of artificial Community of Japan, the purely individualistic of the modern west, and the 'totalizing' of post-modernist modern communications societies. These models need to be separate from the data, and artificially created.

7. The degree to which models and data fit and the ways in which they fit will influence what we find.

Thoughts re. R-Brown lecture (11.8.91)

What does the Japanese case make one re-think? It makes one wonder about models of social

structure. Roughly the two major ones are functional - where all parts contribute to the whole, and the structural (with ideas of levels - Leach/Marx), with mind or the material world as the infrastructure. One needs to return to Weber (and possibly as developed in Giddens - structuration?), a dynamic tension . The meaning lies in the relations; not the institutions per se, but the relations between them, the clash, contradictions, tensions and dissonance, productive tension and instability.

Some further stray thoughts (July 15 1992)

E.Gellner in his paper on 'Concepts and Society' shows how the interpretation of data as 'good' or 'bad', 'rational' or 'irrational' is altered by the context, which refracts it in a different way. One might use his imagery and idea, but instead of looking at just the object of analysis & its context, also look at the observer's social context. In this way, one could draw a circle round, for instance, nineteenth century Frenchmen as opposed to the British, and show how they interpreted what they saw in different ways depending on their context. In one situation they were in an individualistic context, in another in a group context - hence they interpreted things in opposite ways. This could be developed quite considerably. For if we have both observers and observed with circles round them, there are a number of possibilities opened up - to consider.

Related indirectly to this is the puzzle as to why both of the major developments of the understanding of 'other' cultures should come out of France in the nineteenth century? (Or, alternatively, why the best understanding of capitalist societies should come out of Germany - Marx, Weber, Tonnies). The first wave of functionalism and structural functionalism comes through the genealogy of Comte, through Durkheim, into E-P, Radcliffe Brown and others in functionalism and structural functionalism. This provided enormous dividends (when combined with Malinowskian methodology) in the understanding of primitive institutions. It even gave a great boost to the understanding of certain aspects of primitive mentality - particularly witchcraft. But it seemed to leave other very large areas, particularly taboo, classification, models of thought, rather thinly described. Here the second wave of French thought, namely that from Durkheim, through De Saussure, to Levi-Strauss and the structuralists, became important. Why was this?

One might hazard a guess that the first wave, when tempered by the pragmatism and positivism of the Anglo-Saxon tradition, appeared to overcome the excesses of Anglo-Saxon individualism. It provided a way of conceiving of non-individualistic structures, yet putting it in terms that an individualist could understand - i.e. it acted as a translation bridge between cultures. One could both be an individualistic westerner, and understand the seamless culture of the non-west. It was a perfect middle road, combining both.

An alternative approach was through the holistic method of Marxism, which posited deep structural relationships between institutions. This gave a little more depth to the institutional analysis, but it was notoriously defective, as was structural-functionalism, in analysing 'culture', which it tended to regard as just residual.

Unfortunately, however, while it dealt well with social structure, this approach was not very satisfactory for the understanding of 'culture'. Here something even less individualistic was needed - and it was found in relational mathematics and relational linguistics - which then found its way through the work of Mauss & co. into modern structural analysis. A less fruitful approach was followed by Geertz and co. who drew on literary analysis rather than linguistics - analysing the style of a culture, using dramatic and other metaphors. This was again a partial solution to the problem of how one explained other cultures to us, thus helping in the translation problem. But it was less effective as a tool of comprehension, since it was based on literary styles and conventions which were very western.

While wishing to avoid too much navel-gazing, it is perhaps worth exploring a little further the way in which the observer's world influences his or her perception of both his/her own culture and other cultures. Of course, it has long been realized that this is the case. Indeed, it is in periods when this has most been realized that we seem to undergo paradigmatic changes (cf. Kuhn). Thus Lienhardt (JRAI, 94,pp. 1-2) writes: "Looking back over the subject, I think we may recognize that points of growth have occurred when we come to see that schematizations of our material, schematizations that seemed obviously to be derived from the nature of the 'facts', have in fact been influenced, if not determined, by the philosophies, the social backgrounds, even the individual convictions and interests, of particular men at particular times." (cf Geertz, Works & Lives & work of Stocking on). Yet while realizing this, most anthropologists then stop thinking too much about it.

They tend to hope that, as Lienhardt goes on to say, "the best anthropologists have had the self-criticism and flexibility of mind to free themselves from some of the received ideas their society, of their times, and - more insidious - of their own disciplines" (ibid, 2) (though it is worth noting that L. starts this sentence with an 'if' and uses the word 'some'). It is a qualified belief.

This question is discussed by Evans-Pritchard (Soc. Anth). He gives a rather muddled answer. On the one hand he is optimistic. He argues that "It is almost impossible for a person who knows that he is looking for, and how to look for it, to be mistaken about the facts if he spends two years among a small and culturally homogeneous people doing nothing else but studying their way of life."(p.83) Later he adds re-assuringly that "If allowances are made for the personality of the writer, and if we consider that in the entire range of anthropological studies the effects of these personal differences tend to correct each other, I do not think that we need worry unduly over this problem in so far as the reliability of anthropological findings is in question."

On the other hand, he makes remarks which throw doubt on this. Firstly, he admits that "whatever kind of person he may be, the anthropologist is working within a body of theoretical knowledge which largely determines his interests and his lines of inquiry." (p.83) Secondly, "the personality of an anthropologist cannot be eliminated from his work any more than the personality of an historian can be eliminate from his." (p.84)

Even more underminingly, he correctly observes that anthropologists have "cultural categories and values which direct their attention to selected characteristics of the societies being studied. Religion, law, economics, politics, and so forth, are abstract categories / of our culture into which observations on the life of primitive peoples are patterned. Certain kinds of fact are noticed, and they are seen in a certain kind of way, by people of our culture. To some extent any rate, people who belong to different cultures would notice different facts and perceive them in a different way. In so far as this is true, the facts recorded in our notebooks are not social facts but ethnographic facts, selection and interpretation having taken place at the level of observation." (pp.84-5) This opens up an abyss - from which E-P quickly withdraws, continuing "I cannot now discuss, but only state, this general question of perception and evaluation." (p.85)

While E-P recognizes that people from different cultures would see different things, and that there may be differences of temperament within western observers, he seems to assume a uniformity in the 'western' observers model which is just what I would like to question.

He writes that "However much anthropologists may differ among themselves they are all children of the same culture and society. In the main they all have, apart from their common specialist knowledge and training, the same cultural categories and values which direct their attention to selected characteristics of the societies being studied." (p.84) And later, as we have seen, he talks about "people of our culture" observing other cultures.

Now there are two problems about this, at least. One is that the "specialist training" or orientation is not uniform; the second is that the observer's cultures are not uniform. (cf. Beteille on this).

What I would like to explore is the way in which 'the observers' have for long come from two major traditions or types of society, which might roughly be labelled individualist and relational. Even more complicatedly, such is the power of models and paradigms, it was possible for someone living and brought up in one of these cultures to convince himself that the alternative was better - as with the conversion of E.Leach to structuralism etc. But in essence, the position is that the French tradition is structuralist/relativist because that is the kind of society France was until very recently. Germany is probably on the borderline and hence Marx, Weber, Tonnies, Simmel et al. could look down and use both methodologies. The Anglo-Saxon tradition of England and America was basically individualist and only by very hard effort (or perhaps from a Celtic or Jewish background) was it possible to develop a structuralist streak.

One wonders whether E-P did not recognize this, even in 1951 when the influence of French structuralism was beginning to be felt. Perhaps he thought it would make things too difficult if one had observers whose views were not just slanted by their personalities but by their paradigms.... Nor does he discuss the question of changes in paradigms over time, though he was perfectly well aware that the evolutionist, diffusionist, functionalist paradigms led people to select (and even see) different worlds. Does he discuss this elsewhere?