ENCHANTING BOOKS, REDEEMING FETISHISM: THEORY AND PRACTICE IN RELATION TO THE LIFE OF BOOKS

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ABSTRACT

ENCHANTING BOOKS, REDEEMING FETISHISM

This thesis is a study of books which seeks to understand them and their place in our life world not in terms of their role as a medium of communication but as enchanted and sacred objects which are active agents in that life world. I show how they work as totemic operators or caste marks (by the way they act to distinguish groups of people), enshrined objects (by the ways in which they are literally handled) and ritual instruments (by the way they act as the focus of the new ritual practices of book reading groups). The thesis seeks, simultaneously, to advance a theory of culture which allows us to take a more generous approach to animism and fetishism and it also advances new methodologies for doing ethnographic research in our own life world. To achieve this it draws on and extends the work of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, the work of the anthropologist Tim Ingold and the philosopher Susan Oyama. The thesis argues that anthropology, in relation to the "Western" (in New Zealand "Pakeha") life world, should practice forms of re-enchanting synthesis rather than the reductive, disenchanting forms of analysis characteristic of some anthropological work. The study is based on data collected in a large community survey, on interviews with members of book reading groups, and on ethnographic materials "given" by the world we live in. The location of the field research is a provincial city in New Zealand but materials from further afield in the "Western" world are drawn on as well.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe a large number of debts, both personal and intellectual, to many people who have assisted me in many different ways over the years. Let me begin with those individuals who gave their time and shared their experiences about books, both in survey and interview situations. Their observations have become the basis for such understanding of books and their lives that I have. Because these individuals have to remain anonymous does not mean that I have forgotten how essential they have been to the outcome of this project. I owe a debt, too, to the members of my book group for tolerating the presence of an anthropologist in their midst. I hope the account I give of what occurs at meetings such as ours gives them some sense of how important that experience has been for me, even if I have not been a particularly "good" member of the group!

Anthony Lewis, the City Librarian of Palmerston North (and also an anthropologist), very generously allowed my research interests to piggy back on his survey which was conducted to meet his more pressing practical need to find out about the place of books in the life of the community his institution serves. His staff were also brilliantly helpful. I also thank the parents of St. James's School who acted as interviewers with such care and professionalism and the coders who carried out an onerous task with cheerfulness and generosity. I would also like to thank Massey University for funding some parts of the research through its Research Fund.

A number of people have read and commented on various bits and pieces of this thesis as it has merged over time - Susan Abasa, Noeline Arnott, David Butts, Claudia Gross, Mary Murray, Edie Turner, Sita Venkateswar: I am deeply indebted to their interest, engagement and encouragement. They have helped me more than they might imagine.

I owe debts to my supervisors. Professor Richard Harker has been a friend, colleague, mentor over many years and, in the end, also a superb, meticulous and vigilant editor. He has helped me in numerous ways and it would be invidious to

single out any particular form his help has taken, though our common engagement with the work of Pierre Bourdieu has been at the heart of what we have shared and I have benefited hugely from both his knowledge and enthusiasm for this subject. Professor Jeff Sissons has contributed as both supervisor and colleague. We are, both, deeply interested in rethinking the concept of culture and his observations and comments over the years on this issue have been food for thought.

For helping to make the thesis production process less painful I am truly grateful to the generous friendship, intellectual and personal, of Susan Abasa, Robyn Andrews, Noeline Arnott, David Butts and Liz Mackay. I could not have done without their constant encouragement and support. Mandy Rudge gave me materials at a crucial moment of the research. She will, I hope, appreciate the use I have made of it.

Members of my school are animists too: they christened my thesis "Fatima". I have wondered if they did not instinctively know how recognising the life in this "thing" would be such an encouragement to me to nurture its growth towards independence and to allow it to make its own way in the world.

The final stages of the thesis process can be very difficult. I would like to thank all those who have made it easier. Susan Abasa for generously exploring the possibilities of making the spirit of the work incarnate in its physical form. Her knowledge of, and sensitivity towards, the "material" world have been an inspiration. I am truly grateful to those who helped with the final editing of the thesis: Pam Mayo, David Butts, and Fay Butts.

I would like to thank my *whanau*. My wife, Di, accompanied and lived with me at all my field sites. Without her company the work would have been intolerable. She carefully proofed the thesis, assisted in the onerous tasks that mark the final stages of its production, and has "been there" for me in many different ways. My children have had to put up with a lot whilst I have laboured over this work. My in-laws have also been a support in their own quiet way.

Finally, I dedicate this thesis to my mother. Her presence marks the beginning and the end of the argument.

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INTRODUCTION

PREAMBLE

On Saturdays, mid-afternoon, I drive to my mother's house. I let myself in and call out to her. She is sitting in her living room waiting for me. She is nearly 88 years old, slow and somewhat uncertain on her feet, but her eyes are full of life. I collect the library books that are arranged neatly in piles on top of her bookshelf and place them in the bag of her trolley. I then help her into her shoes before making our way to the car, I with her trolley and handbag, she with her walking stick.

We drive to the rear entrance of the Public Library and park in the disabled persons car park. I collect the trolley from the boot and we head to the lifts. I get off at the mezzanine floor where books are returned whilst she heads on up to the first floor. After I have deposited her books in the book return I take the lift to the first floor. Close to the entrance is the new book stand and by this time my mother is sitting in a chair already examining books from the lower shelves. I reach up to the highest shelf and pass her the books, one at a time, for inspection. She examines them. Occasionally, without so much more than a glance at the cover and title the book is passed back to me. More often, she looks at the comments on the jacket and then opens it at random to read a paragraph or two. Without a word, she either puts it in a pile next to her or passes it back to me as I, equally wordlessly, pass her the next one. Occasionally, a comment is made on a book. If the author is well known she will say something like "I always take her books" or, alternately and more frequently, she will tell me why she is rejecting the book: "You know me, Henry, I am not interested in psychological thrillers", "There is just too much sexuality around these days. Sex is OK but I can't stand sexuality", and so on.

This goes on until all the books on the new book stand have been inspected. I pick up the pile that she has selected and take it to the librarian's desk a few feet away, collect her bag and move a chair for her to sit in. A moment of truth: how many of the books that she reserved in previous weeks will be available today? "You have three books waiting for you" - Disappointment. "You have eight books waiting for

you" - Pleasure. The librarian reserves the books selected today and then my mother instructs her to see if some books that she wants are available. There is occasionally a brief discussion of the authors being selected (`Barbara Pym, Kingsley Amis, etc) with the librarian. When we have collected a few books we move on to the non-fiction new book stand on the other side of the library on the same floor. I lead the way with her trolley and handbag.

At the non-fiction I do not hand her the books one-by-one. Whilst she inspects the shelves on one side from her chair I inspect the other side. I look for books that she might like - biography and science. The pickings are usually thinner amongst the new non-fiction books even though there are more of them!! When will libraries learn?

We then reserve the books at the nearest desk and move on to the biography section of the library. She seats herself in front of the newly returned books and selects one or two while I look over the shelves generally to see if I can find anything she might like.

When we have finished we head back down to the mezzanine floor. She sits in the foyer while I take her handbag with her library card and cash card and pay for her reserves, collecting the books that have been accumulated in her name over the previous week. I return to her and we head back to the car and then back home.

These occasions have their comic moments too. On one of these trips my mother had selected the latest Patricia Cornwell. It sat in the middle of the pile of books that was growing at her side, to be taken to the librarian's desk to be reserved. A late middle-aged woman, passing by the new book stand, saw it sitting there in the pile and with a cursory `Excuse me' grabbed it and took it to the reservation desk. My mother looks up at me from the book that she is currently examining saying, "I want that book!". “She’ll bring it back”, I say. But that is not the point, of course: if it is reserved by the woman then my mother will be further down the queue for it. We look at each other. "Bit bloody cheeky, if you ask me!" I say in a loud voice. The woman proceeds unflinchingly. She has the book reserved and returns it to us

and rushes off. The kind of person who would steal from a blind person's begging bowl.

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I have described in detail an activity that is central to the lives of both my mother and myself. I do see her on other occasions but this book-centred event is our most regular encounter, important to us both in very many different ways. It sets her up with reading for the week, her most important occupation. It is also the springboard for other activities such as the selection of the occasional book for my wife and the source of experience which is the basis of a lot of her conversation. I find it is a way of engaging with my mothers spirit, reading her in order to allow her to read.

To this task of reading her, I bring my practical knowledge of her complex trajectory through life: two decades in India through the 50s and 60s in various tertiary institutions from Aligarh and Varanasi in the north to Hyderabad in the south – it would not surprise me if she were the only person to have taught at both the Muslim and Hindu Universities of India; our move to New Zealand; her brief, but important, sojourn in later life in Kunming, China.

But at the centre of all this is a seemingly humble and ordinary everyday object: the book. Books bind the lives of my mother and myself together and our lives are caught up in their lives. The structures that inform and form these lives and these occasions are so taken for granted that they are, as John Searle says, "weightless and invisible" (Searle 1995:4). Yet critical reflection leads to the realisation that for both of us there is a profound complexity to the meanings and relationships sedimented in this reality.[1]

THE BOOK: A SOCIALLY INSIGNIFICANT OBJECT?

> The *summum* of the art, in the social sciences, is, in my eyes, to be capable of engaging very high `theoretical' stakes by means of...very

[1] Some will detect a phenomenological tendency in this work. I do not make extensive use of phenomenological vocabulary such as "natural attitude", "noesis", "recalcitrance", "sedimentation", etc. However, these ideas are present in other forms.

> mundane, if not derisory, empirical objects...The power of a mode of thinking never manifests itself more clearly than in its capacity to constitute socially insignificant objects into scientific objects...The sociologist today is in a position quite similar to Manet or Flaubert who, in order to realise fully the mode of construction of reality they were inventing, had to apply it to objects traditionally excluded from the realm of academic art...The sociologist could well make his or hers Flaubert's motto: "To write well about the mediocre". (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:221)

The spirit that informs this work is one that is encapsulated in Bourdieu's comments on the importance of the study of "socially insignificant objects" in the social sciences. In this thesis I take one such object - the book - and subject it to examination from a variety of angles and, simultaneously and equally importantly, subject a number of social scientific issues to examination in the light of data drawn from the study of books. The thesis gives weighting to both theoretical and empirical issues and is meant as a contribution to both. The chapters on `Why things matter' and `Methodology' which are the most general in scope and do not specifically deal with books were, nevertheless, occasioned by reflecting on issues raised by thinking about books.

Books have, of course, been the objects of study in "the realm of academic art" for a long time but the focus of this art has been on the discourse contained in them, on the text as text. Whole disciplines have been built around these traditional forms of engagement with the book. Furthermore, the media - from radio reviews to reviews in weekly magazines - replicate this academic art for a wider public.

More than this, the book, as the product of a technical craft, has also been the subject of a number of other disciplines, collectively working under the title of bibliography. From book-binding to cataloguing the book is the focus of a great deal of interest from a number of quarters. This is all a part of its life as well, a part which, however, I will not be exploring in any depth in this thesis, though it deserves attention in its own right.

Books are not, then, insignificant objects. They have received attention in various fields, including a number of academic ones. However, what Bourdieu means by "socially" insignificant objects is that the objects in question are so much a part of our ordinary everyday lives that their particular significance as part of that life fades into the background. Familiarity rather than breeding contempt, which still marks out an object as worthy of attention, actually breeds indifference. They are unmarked or unremarked (except in the special circumstances discussed later in the thesis). They, and practices relating to them, form part of the taken for granted social realities that we, human beings and books, live in. Just as paintings on the walls of art museums are the object of a range of disciplines but paintings on the walls of homes are the taken for granted background of ordinary life so too books live a double life: objects of intense interest by a few, taken for granted by the majority.

In this thesis, I take this `mediocre' object, the book, or more precisely this object in its `mediocre' state and discuss it from a variety of angles. Each chapter of the thesis can almost stand on its own and is an essay, in more than one sense of the word, in its own right. The thesis as a whole, however, is a sustained attempt to show that there are dimensions to the book and its life not encompassed by the traditional disciplines devoted to it and that a kind of synthetic ethnography of the book allows one to see that this mediocre object is in fact implicated in our lives in important ways.

To repeat, the thesis is unashamedly theoretical, methodological as well as empirical. Ghassan Hage has recently written about the problems of combining these elements in an anthropological work. "Having ethnography" has become, for a minority, those he call "boring old farts", a yardstick for maintaining the disciplinary space of anthropology (Hage 1998:287). He urges us to embrace hybrid interdisciplinarity in a specifically anthropological way and this includes absorbing the work of those who "engage in empirically free theorising", much of which is more interesting than the work of those "who `have an ethnography' but seem to walk around carrying it like a cross" (Hage 1998:289).

This thesis has grown. In it one will find what Bourdieu calls "the constant intervention of chance" (Bourdieu 1998:232). I am not particularly gifted at one "academic" skill – the skill of polishing a piece of writing to iron out the muddles and confusions that I encountered in my explorations. As Bourdieu says "Homo academicus relishes the finished" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:219) and seeks to "spoil" the results of research "by putting the finishing touches stipulated by the ethic of work well done and well polished" (Bourdieu and Wacquant:219). Not having this particular skill, I have allowed the subject to take me where it will, not knowing like E. M. Forster, from one moment to the next, what I really thought about something until I had begun the task of researching it and writing about it. This work, then, is presented in what Bourdieu calls a state of "becoming", in all its "fermenting confusion" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:219).

The thesis begins with two theoretical chapters which develop a general theory of culture and social life which affords a different way of dealing with the world of `goods', `things' and `artefacts'. This theory is based on a critique of cultural idealism and its replacement with a form of materialism in which the material world is seen as being an integral part of the social world and in which the social encompasses more than just human beings. A theme that runs through this theory is that cultural theory is too anthropocentric and that we need a way of thinking which allows us to see human life as an integral part of a larger life world which includes objects. We need to develop a sense of the world as animate. I draw on the work of Susan Oyama, Tim Ingold as well as Bourdieu in the development of this perspective.

In chapter three I instantiate this theory in relation to books and argue that books are particularly significant in our own life world. What I mean by this is that, even when we take things for granted, they can still matter in important ways. The chapter develops this idea theoretically, in the first instance, and then proceeds to develop it through a series of demonstrations drawing on empirical materials. It begins with an examination of the object domains that have interested anthropologists in the past and I show how the choice of these domains has been influenced by an anthropological unconscious, an influence which has led to the

neglect of other object domains. In the light of this a study of the book is a significant departure from other material culture studies. There is a brief excursus on the print revolution to show that the perspective I am developing is different and complementary to the kinds of studies of books that emerge from a study of that revolution. I then proceed to show how books are of particular significance in the material world, that they are in fact `charismatic' objects. This is evidenced in a number of different ways in ordinary and extraordinary practices.

Chapter four is a methodological chapter. It may seem odd to place it at this point and it would, normally, have come immediately after the theoretical chapters but in this instance it was important to maintain the continuity of the argument between the general theoretical chapter and the chapter devoted to why books matter. One consequence of this disruption to the normal order of presentation is that I have already employed some of the methods before I discuss them. As Bourdieu has said we are hampered in our work by the fact that our discourse "unfolds in a strictly linear fashion" when it would be more appropriate to push forward on a number of fronts simultaneously (Bourdieu 1984:126).

In the methodological chapter, I make a strong argument for a more catholic approach to what is considered appropriate in doing ethnography. In particular I make a case for rejecting the rejection of statistics and a case for its subsumption into ethnography as just another mode of representation. Simply put, the argument is that *all* methods are qualitative and that the quantitative/qualitative division makes little sense. I go on to argue that there are forms of statistical discourse which resonate particularly well with ethnographic goals and that descriptive statistics is a neglected dimension of statistical procedures. This argument is made in the context of the use of these methods in the following chapter on genres. I conclude with a discussion of some other methodological issues raised by the strategies I have adopted in other chapters of the thesis.

In chapter five I explore types of books. Just as the types of books chosen by readers classify them, so too the types of readers chosen by books classify them. This may seem like a conceit but we should not forget Marx's comment, in a

different context, that it may appear that people inherit land but it is the land that inherits the people. In brief, books act as "totemic operators", to use a Lévi-Straussian phrase. Analysis of the results of a community survey allow one to develop a model of the social space of books. This social space is homologous with and reciprocally defined by the social space of readers. It is a complex hierarchical space and the delineation of the hierarchy contributes to the major theme of the thesis, that books have their being in a dynamic social space. A key armature of this space is the distinction between the sacred and the profane. In other words, the chapter extends the argument already being developed: to see books as sacred objects.

In chapter six, I use materials from survey questions relating to the `jewel in the crown' of local public institutions, the Public Library, to try to resolve a conundrum in recent social theory: is the structure of `advanced' (sic!) capitalist society informed by hierarchies of cultural value? Or is it the case now that no regime of value is considered more `legitimate' than any other and that we live in a post-modern society in which all regimes of value are relativised in relation to each other and are seen as being more or less equally legitimate. This debate is closing linked to the `death of class' debate. Nearly all of this debate has tried to resolve the question on paper rather than to subject it to empirical test. In this chapter I outline the argument by comparing it to similar arguments made in quite another context - caste India - so as to clarify the issues involved. This clarification also affords a perspective on the work of Pierre Bourdieu in *Distinction* which highlights key themes in Bourdieu's argument in that book which I think have been overlooked. Thus, in this chapter, a number of different goals are accomplished: an issue of critical concern to the understanding of the kinds of society in which we live is clarified, a resolution to it is advanced and, finally, a new perspective on Bourdieu's most famous work is developed.

In Chapter seven, I describe a social phenomenon - the Book Reading Group. My approach to it is phenomenological and is significantly different from that of other students of it who have tended to focus on the content of the books that are at the centre of book reading group activities rather than on the forms and practices of the

groups themselves. This is not surprising because these other students have come from a literary background and are particularly interested in the questions of the formation of literary taste. In this chapter I defamiliarise the Book Reading Group and its activities by comparing and contrasting it with activities drawn from a completely different social space, that of North Indian Sufi culture. I analyse the book reading group occasion as a ritual centred on a sacred object, the book.

THEMES

The outline above gives a schematic sketch of the structure of the thesis. However, certain key themes have emerged in the course of the work. These have emerged as the work has progressed and have to some extent forced themselves on me. In particular, the `sanctity' of books is one which I had not anticipated.

Recently, in New Zealand, books have been seen to have an almost magical power of transformation. A notorious New Zealand author, Alan Duff, has started a programme to insert books in homes, especially Maori homes.[2] The view is that the simple presence of these objects in homes will lead to the social transformation of the lives of those whose homes these objects inhabit. On the surface, this idea would seem to have some merit. A recent study by Harker and Nash has established that one of the key predictors of educational success is the number of books to be found in the home (Harker and Nash 1998; Nash 1993). It would seem reasonable, then, to hope that by inserting these objects into homes where they are absent that educational success would follow. However, the authors of this study are sceptical that such a result would be achieved. They would argue that, though book ownership is an indicator of academic success, the forms of ownership that they were investigating were based on an organic growth of what I call habitus/habitat. In other words, the magical effect only takes place in the right context. This, however, has yet to be tested and will require further empirical research.

[2] Duff's novels *Once were warriors* and *What became of the broken hearted* have been made into popular New Zealand films.

However, each of the arguments in the various chapters point to our need to see the enchanting aspects of these objects that are usually silently present amongst us.

THE MODE OF THINKING

The `mode of the thinking' that animates this thesis has been inspired by the work of Pierre Bourdieu. Two works have been particularly influential: Bourdieu's ethnography of French taste *Distinction; a social critique of the judgement of taste* (Bourdieu 1984) and the collaborative work on photography *Photography; a middle-brow art* (Bourdieu, et al. 1990b). It may not be transparent but the first provided the theoretical inspiration for this work. I have not tried to replicate Bourdieu's work in France in the New Zealand context: the thesis comes closest to the substantive concerns of that work only in Chapters 4 and 5 and even then only tangentially. The second was a model for the structure of this work. In *Photography* Bourdieu and his collaborators take a mundane, everyday practice and subject it to social scientific investigation. Taking a range of different perspectives on it they reveal the rich social life of photography and those who engage in it: types of photography; photographs and their uses; camera clubs; the practices of `art' photographers and professional photographers. The whole is prefaced by a theoretical and methodological prologue by Bourdieu. Similarly, in this work I take the book and look at what we can learn from its appearance in a range of different practices in our lives.

One of the most inspiring aspects of Bourdieu's work is that he finds, as William Blake has suggested we should, the general in the most minute of particulars. In this vision of the social scientist's craft nothing is too trivial for analytical attention.

"WRITING WELL ABOUT THE MEDIOCRE"

It has been a strange experience to write about books because they play such an important part in my life. I have come to appreciate their lives in ways which I never dreamt of before. Until I began the work for this thesis my focus had been on their contents and the uses this content may serve for my own everyday purposes. I had mined the contents of many books for ideas, including ideas for this study. I had read books but I had not observed them.

Observation of books and the way their lives are intertwined with ours has brought a whole new dimension to my understanding of them. Certainly, their content is a key feature of what they are but what they are is also tied up in the way they circulate amongst us. Thus it was through one of those common everyday events and experiences which brought to my attention a book that succeeds in `writing well about the mediocre' and whose subject matter is the same as mine but which is written in a different register.

Recently my family and I visited the home of my wife's sister. At the end of our visit my sister-in-law spontaneously offered a range of books which she thought my mother would like to read: fiction and biography. Amongst these books was a small collection of essays by Anne Fadiman *Ex Libris; Confessions of a Common Reader* published fairly recently (Fadiman 1998). In these essays Fadiman explores the secret life of books. The collection begins with a wonderful description of the marriage of her library with that of her husband's. At the beginning of Fadiman's marriage to George Colt their libraries remained separated, maintaining distinct lives from each other, organised in different ways. It took a full five years of cohabitation for them to come together and Fadiman describes in detail the problems that ensued:

> Promising to love each other for richer of for poorer, in sickness and in health - even promising to forsake all others - had been no problem, but it was a good thing the *Book of Common Prayer* didn't say anything about marrying our libraries and throwing out the duplicates. This would have been a far more solemn vow, one that would probably have caused the wedding to grind to a mortifying halt. (Fadiman 1998:3)

They encountered a number of difficulties: Fadiman was a splitter, Colt a lumper and so there were problems of order to be reckoned with; there were problems of which category of books should take pride of place:

> I had lived in the loft for nine years before George moved in, and English literature had always occupied the most public spot, the wall facing the door. (At the opposite end of the spectrum was a small bookshelf with

> a door behind which lurked *The Zipcode Directory* and *The Complete Scarsdale Diet*). George thought American literature deserved this place of honour instead. (Fadiman 1998:6)

And there were, of course, the aforementioned problems connected with duplicates. But they managed to get through these and other difficulties and, in the end, says Fadiman, "my books and his books had become our books. We were really married" (9).

The Fadiman book is of interest because it provides a wonderful `pretext' for this thesis. Its contents, the text itself, is an example of what Bourdieu, following Flaubert, calls writing well about the mediocre but the way the book itself appeared on the horizon of my experience is itself an illustration of the fact that books are deeply involved in our lives. Even, and perhaps especially, non-readers and non-owners of books are caught up in them (as I demonstrate in particular in Chapter 4 below).

On this occasion books twined the lives of my mother, myself, my wife and my sister-in-law together. It would be wrong to see events such as these as the glue or cement of relationships. Collectively, they *are* the relationships.[3]

[3] The idea of the relationships forged by different ways of engaging with books has recently received cinematic treatment. The films *Adapatation* and *The Hours* feature books as central characters. *Adaptation* is about a screenwriter, Charles Kaufmann, the actual screenwriter of the film itself, who has to adapt an actual book *The Orchid Thief* but who is finding it impossible to do so because the book is less about people than it is about things, the orchids themselves. He suffers from a massive case of writers block. The film follows the lives of people who are brought together because of two `things': firstly, the book *The Orchid Thief* - which brings together the screenwriter, the author of the book, the orchid thief of the book, the brother of the screenwriter who makes life miserable for Charles Kaufmann because he has writers diarrhoea as opposed to Charles Kaufmann's writers block and secondly, by orchids themselves. *The Hours* is centred on the novel *Mrs. Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf. The novel unites the lives of Woolf in the 1920s, with a woman living in the 1950s and another at present times.

CHAPTER 1 ALL THAT IS SOLID MELTS INTO AIR; A CRITIQUE OF THE ETHERIALISATION OF CULTURE

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I present a critical discussion of the concept of culture concluding with the suggestion that what we need is a reframed concept that includes a major theme of this thesis: the need to take a fetishistic and animistic approach to the life of things.[4] In other words, in this chapter, I develop a constructive critique of the concept of culture so as to carve out a space for an alternative framework for thinking about things. This is a necessary first stage in considering the life of books as things with actual and not just metaphorical lives. The elaboration of an alternative framework is found in Chapter 2.

In brief, I argue that culture theory has been bedevilled by idealism and that one consequence of this has been an emphasis on what divides human being from the phenomenal world. Recent trends to overcome the Cartesian split between mind and body go some way towards reconnecting human being to the life-world but are still too anthropocentric to serve as the basis of a way of allowing equal space to the wider world in which humans have their being. I want, in other words, to map out an approach to the concept of culture which makes room for serious consideration of everyday things and the phenomenal world. This goal is not original: it has been the goal of a number of other researchers. I will, however, only make reference to these other works in as much as that will assist in clarifying my own particular approach.[5]

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[4] I will leave the term "thing" undefined. A degree of creative ambiguity emerges from treating it this way. There is, of course, a whole field of philosophy devoted to the study of "thingness": ontology. As we will see thinking about things will have to be done within the context of the elaboration of habitat, the phenomenal world in which humans have their being. Ontological issues will be addressed at that time.

[5] The following can also be read as a contribution to the ongoing critique of Cartesian dualism which dominates the social and natural sciences (and implicit in that very distinction!). It focuses on this dualism in cultural anthropology and its conception of culture and the effects it has on both in relation to providing space for the non-human world (that very concept will be

In this mapping exercise I begin with a critique of other tendencies in the study of culture. I will be arguing that these tendencies have undermined the study of the world of everyday things around us by not taking them seriously as forms of existence. But this argument will be made in the context of the larger argument that the tendencies I identify are misguided in themselves and not just because of their effect on the study of material culture.

In recent years there seems to have been something of a reprise of a set of arguments made by social anthropologists in the 1950s in a debate with American cultural anthropology. Key figures on the British side were Evans-Pritchard and Raymond Firth. That debate was largely won by the Americans and there was a considerable silence from British social anthropology on theoretical and methodological issues over the next four decades - a whole generation in fact. The silence was broken occasionally - e.g. (Crick 1976) - but these exceptions proved the rule: they largely attempted to accommodate themselves to trends - outlined later in this chapter - the direction of which had been set in the United States. It is significant, for example, that a book produced in this period and dedicated to the work of one of the British protagonists of the original debate - Evans-Pritchard - should be titled *The translation of culture* (Beidelman 1971) signalling the acceptance of both the idea of culture and a method - translation - which is close to the interpretive methods of the Americans. In that period, the American Anthropological Holding Company, as Eric Wolf called it somewhere, had grown to become a dominant transnational corporation.

The silence has been broken more systematically recently by the following generation of British anthropologists who clearly reveal that the old quarrels have not gone away and that fundamental differences in conceiving the anthropological enterprise still exist. In particular, they challenge the centrality of the culture concept in this enterprise and argue again for the virtues of the concept of society or sociality. In this they are joined by a growing chorus of voices from within the

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problematised too). As Pálsson observes there is a "massive literature" on "the fragmenting of the medieval world and the othering of nature it entailed" during the Renaissance and the resulting Western attitude to knowledge and the environment (Pálsson 1999:S84). Mary Murray has recently addressed this issue in relation to the discipline of sociology (Murray n.d.).

American Corporation who draw on subterranean streams within American anthropology itself. The key figures on the British side are Tim Ingold (Aberdeen) (1986; 2000), Michael Carrithers (Durham) (1992), Kuper (Brunel) (1999) and Strathern (Cambridge) (1988). On the American side there are figures like the late Eric Wolf (1982:387ff.) and the late Roy Rappaport (1999). This is not to say that these arguments have won over even British anthropologists. It is interesting to compare the results for the votes at the end of the debates organised by the Group for Debates in Anthropological Theory in Manchester in 1989 and 1990. The subject of the moot for the first of these was "The concept of society is theoretically obsolete" and the vote went as follows: For 45, Against 40. The subject of the second moot was "Human worlds are culturally constructed" and the votes were: For 41, Against 26. This clearly demonstrates that even at this time for the small company of British social anthropologists "culture" was seen as a more tenable concept than "society". It is interesting to note, furthermore, that in the 1996 debate ("Cultural studies will be the death of anthropology") only one of the protagonists in the debate, John Gledhill, suggested that one way for anthropology to carve out a future for itself was to return to taking a notion of society more seriously and to take up a critical stance towards the culture concept. In the ensuing debate it was only Tim Ingold who expanded on this idea (Wade 1997).[6]

Sahlins, in the Huxley lecture of 1998 to the Royal Anthropological Institute, acknowledged the renewal of the debate:

> Two peoples divided by a common language: the transatlantic working misunderstandings of the culture concept are still about where they were nearly half a century ago when George Peter Murdock and Raymond Firth debated the issues in the pages of the *American Anthropologist*. (Sahlins 1999:399)

It would be interesting to know what his audience made of this lecture. A doyen of American cultural anthropology lecturing the British that they had learnt nothing from the previous half-century ("New whines in old bottles") and who himself then

[6] Cf. Ingold (1996).

proceeded to ignore the British contribution to anthropology and to lecture them on the virtues of the concept of culture, taking pot-shots at his compatriots who had bought into varieties of "afterological" studies. I say a little more on Sahlins below (See page 32 below).

THE KEYS UNDER THE LAMPPOST: A CRITIQUE OF THE CONCEPT OF CULTURE

> The light dove, cleaving the air in her free flight, might imagine that flight would be easier in empty space.
>
> Kant, Critique of pure reason

The culture concept has never been more fashionable. It has escaped the boundaries of anthropology and become a central concept in a number of new fields of study (Media Studies, Women's Studies, Cultural Studies, Development Studies, etc.) as well as becoming a central concern in more traditional or longstanding disciplinary domains such as sociology and history. It has also seen a revitalisation in that other domain - literary studies - in which it had already found a home outside of anthropology in the 19th century, even if its meaning there was quite distinct. More than this, the culture concept has escaped the boundaries of academia and is now a concept that plays an important role on the world stage (Kuper 1999:ix-xv).

It is ironic, therefore, that just when the fecundity of the concept should be so vividly demonstrated anthropologists have begun to express grave doubts about its utility. They are like parents of a troublesome, even delinquent, child that has now flown the coup and who is being feted by all the world. They know their child only too well and are aware of the damage s/he can do. Thus critiques of the culture concept by anthropologists are now fairly commonplace (Fox 1991; Sperber 1996; Kuper 1999; Lewis 1999; Carrithers 1992) as are defences (Brightman 1995; Kapferer 2000).

Some of the themes of my own critique of the culture concept and cultural anthropology will echo a number of the themes of these other critiques. These latter are extremely varied. Some adopt a purely critical role; they do not develop substantive alternatives to the approaches they criticise (Kuper 1999). Others develop a critique as a minor theme of a more substantive contribution towards an

alternative approach (Sperber 1996; Carrithers 1992). Any positive reference I make to ideas contained in these works should not be viewed as an endorsement of the general stance of their originators. In many, if not most cases, I may agree with certain key ideas of these critics but reject the general arguments that they adopt.

Recently Brightman has written a fairly comprehensive survey of such critiques up to 1995 in a somewhat unconvincing defence of the culture concept (Brightman 1995). Brightman's principal arguments are that the critiques rely on straw figures, that the culture concept has always been extremely labile and various and that the very innovations that the critics introduce have already been advanced by others long before - such as Sapir and Malinowski. Though the main targets of this critique of critiques are Lila Abu-Lughod, James Clifford and Pierre Bourdieu, he does provide a useful overview.

His defence is unconvincing because he fails to distinguish between the central tendencies of the ideas underlying the culture concept and what can only be seen as the marginal comments by those who he turns to to show that the innovative ideas are not so innovative. Brightman's interpretations of these comments are quite disputable. In the case of Bourdieu, Brightman fails to see that it is the very case he himself makes about the lability of the culture concept that leads Bourdieu to eschew it. Finally, like most American anthropologists Brightman fails to see that the culture concept is not central to the anthropologies of a number of other national traditions of anthropology. Once again, as so often, anthropology and American anthropology are equated *tout court.*

More recently still Bruce Kapferer has tried to defend the "distinctive" project of anthropology by defending the concept of culture from what he suggests are destructive critiques of it and, consequentially, anthropology's project itself (Kapferer 2000).[7] He denies that the concept as used by sophisticated cultural anthropologists like Sahlins is essentialist and he is particularly upset by the

[7] Actually he goes a long way beyond this suggesting that criticism of the culture concept has produced an anthropological world "verging on the psychotic" (Kapferer 2000:191). This is said in the context of Kapferer accusing critics of the anthropological concept of being immoderate in their criticisms!

suggestion that the *anthropological* idea has served as the basis for the ideologies of fascist regimes like that of the former South Africa.[8] He argues, like Brightman, that the culture concept is very labile and that we should not find cultural anthropology guilty by association simply because these sorts of regimes use an essentialist concept of culture. He insists that "the concept in its American anthropological usage especially, and which had major influence amongst anthropologists elsewhere, was relatively liberating and largely anti-essentialist" (Kapferer 2000:185).

He adds:

> The dismissal of the culture concept along the lines it is often represented threatens its important role in anthropology's cross-disciplinary contribution and its crucial significance for the understanding of the processes of being human. The charge is made that it is essentialist, and in so doing, I think, conflating the way that the concept has been critically developed in anthropology, on the one hand, with its deterministic and common-sense usage in popular nationalist political processes, on the other hand. On the contrary, anthropologists have refused such essentialist usage, stressing that the centrality of culture underlines human practice as constructive and creative. Culture as construction is a uniquely human phenomenon that accounts for the marvellous creative, always changing, and diverse worlds which human beings constantly generate around them. For anthropologists, human beings are at root cultural and it is their non-essentialist cultural creativity that breaks what others may see as the determinations of their biological being, their environmental being, their technological being, their psychological being and any other kind of being – even, paradoxically, their cultural being. (Kapferer 2000:185-86)

It is hard to know where to begin to point to the completely self-contradictory nature of these claims. To say that that "human beings are *at root* cultural" is not to make an essentialist claim? "Yeah, right!" as they would say in Aotearoa New

[8] He himself does not hesitate at accusing the critics of culture of being complicit in the "new colonialism and imperialism" (Kapferer 2000:195). Cf. Sahlins (1999:416 note 10).

Zealand. The whole passage reeks of the fragmentation of human practice into constituent elements given by Western modernity. The following critique could be read as an unpacking of the contradictions in Kapferer's position.

INTRODUCTION

> Culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language.
>
> Raymond Williams, *Keywords*

The critique below is "presentist" in its orientation: I do not attempt to do justice to the historical significance of the ideas I discuss, nor do I try and give a historicist account of the ideas, that is, one that tries to understand them in the context of their times. I am only interested in the substantive content of the ideas and the profit one can derive from an engagement with them. However, I will, as a result of this approach, occasionally come to different conclusions about the significance of the ideas from those usually articulated by others.

It is a sociocultural anthropological critique. I do not discuss the way the concept has developed in other disciplines. Nor do I trace its origins in various general national intellectual traditions.[9] Thus, though figures like Herder and Dilthey on the one hand, Arnold and Leavis on the other are important figures in the general development of the concept of culture, they are tangential to the anthropological tradition. Their contributions, in some cases, make their appearance through their influence on the conceptual work of anthropologists but it is the work of these anthropologists I will elaborate and not the work of those that have influenced them. The only exception I make to this is the discussion of the concept of culture in the material cultural studies moment towards the end. My own work comes close to this field.

THE TYLORIAN MOMENT

The anthropological discourse on culture is said to begin, famously, with the oft repeated[10] definition of Edward Tylor's (1832-1917) in 1871: "Culture, or

[9] For a recent discussion of these see "Part One: Genealogies" in Kuper (1999:23-772).

[10] See Hicks and Gwynne (1996:26) for a fairly typical textbook discussion of Tylor's definition.

Civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (Tylor 1871:1). This definition has been seen by many as inaugurating the beginning of *cultural* anthropology. In fact, Meyer Fortes was led to suggest that there is something of a paradox in the fact that it was an Englishman, Tylor, who inaugurated the form of anthropology characteristic of the United States (i.e. cultural anthropology) whilst it was the work of an American, Lewis Henry Morgan (1818-1881), whose deep interest in social organisation were at the root of the concerns of the British form of anthropology (i.e. social anthropology).

The most extended and detailed treatment of Tylor's concept of culture in recent years has been the work of the historian of anthropology, George Stocking (Stocking Jr. 1987:302ff) (See also Ingold (1986:29ff), Kuper (1999:56ff) and Yengoyan (1997)). Stocking argues against the prevailing view that Tylor should be seen as the founding father of cultural anthropology.[11] He argues that Tylor's concept of culture was so distant from the concept of culture that was to prevail in American anthropological circles[12] that it is wrong to see him as a lineage ancestor. Tylor's concept of culture, signalled even in his classic definition, is at great variance with the way cultural anthropologists were to construe it. Stocking says that "Tylor's actual usage of the term `culture' lacked a number of the features commonly associated with the modern anthropological concept: historicity, integration, behavioural determinism, relativity, and - most symptomatically – plurality" (Stocking Jr. 1987:302).

Rather, culture was - for Tylor - something one had in varying degrees. Thus peoples were either more or less cultured. Rather than a series of discontinuous cultures there was a continuum from the most cultured to the least cultured, the

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[11] This, for example, seems to be the view of Williams (1976:80) who says that the concept of culture as indicating "a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period or a group [was] decisively introduced into English by Tylor".

[12] Stocking prefers to call it "modern cultural anthropology" - thus equating cultural anthropology with American anthropology *tout court*. This is fairly typical of North American commentators. Williams made a similar complaint about Kroeber and Kluckhohn's discussion of the concept of culture in their 1952 review (1976:80).

latter being the closest to the animal origins of human beings. Another way the continuum was conceived was to see human societies as varying from the crudely cultured to the highly cultured (thus reflecting the parallels with the Arnoldian conception of culture - though there are significant differences as well which I elaborate below). Stocking draws attention to the fact that "culture" is placed in an interchangeable position with the word "civilisation" in the famous definition and Tylor could quite as easily have used the latter term than the former.[13]

Tylor's view of culture (civilisation) was a typically evolutionary one with "savages" being seen as being more crudely cultured than the "superior races". Culture could be seen as a kind of road along which different groups were moving, some in advance of others (Ingold 1986:33). There is only the one road and at its origins it merges with the roads of animal evolution. In other words, for Tylor, there was a continuity between biological and cultural evolution. There is not a radical Rubicon that marks the transition to a different mode of being but a steady development along a continuous unfolding path (Ingold 1986:33). It should be noted, however, that the concept of evolution that informed this view was a distinctly non-Darwinian one. It is teleological and progressive.

Thus, says Stocking, though Tylor can be credited with emphasising the study of culture - the study of "knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, etc." - and, in particular, for his contributions to the study of "belief", we cannot credit him with laying the foundations for the concept of culture that was to create for cultural anthropology a distinctive domain. It was too tied up with nineteenth century ideas about the singularity of culture and the advanced nature of Victorian society. For the true advance in the culture concept, according to Stocking, we had to wait for Franz Boas and his students.

I want, however, to note an interesting aspect of the image of culture as a road along which people are travelling. It is that people occupy culture rather than are

[13] I wonder if this is in fact true: it is the case that Tylor uses "culture" and "civilisation" as interchangeable terms in the classic definition but given that his most significant contribution was to a great expansion of the content of the concept of culture to include all the things he enumerates one wonders if the much narrower term "civilisation" could have been used as freely as one could the term "culture".

occupied by it; people are located in culture rather than culture being located in them (the latter being the view developed by the Boasians - in particular the Sapirian strand discussed below). Culture is the container, the task of science is to locate the place of people in it and to discover what they do with or in it.[14] What this does is to allow one to contemplate the possibility that culture exists beyond people, in the world, including the material world, that they inhabit. It may allow us to see "things" as related to "culture" in the same way that people are.

Furthermore, we owe to Tylor the idea that there is more to culture than high culture. Tylor explicitly developed his definition of culture in opposition to that of Matthew Arnold, and though Stocking has argued that the two are closer to each other (especially in their progressivism and elitism) than would appear on the surface we still owe to Tylor the extension of the idea of culture to things beyond art, literature and music. In this sense, he did make a significant contribution to the development of the anthropological concept of culture. In other words, it is a moot question whether the *expansion* of the content of culture is of greater significance than the *pluralisation* effected by Boas which Stocking puts so much weight on.

Stocking plays down the significance of this extension. Comparing Tylor's concept of culture with that of Matthew Arnold's he says:

> Taking into consideration Arnold's obvious concern for morality and manners (or customs), the remaining differences in enumerative content (even, I would suggest, Arnold's failure to mention language) can be explained better as by-products of Tylor's ethnographic focus, than of any fundamental differences in conceptual orientation. (Stocking Jr. 1968:84)

But this begs the question. It is precisely the extension of the concept of culture to the ethnographic that is a bold and innovative step. It allows one to contemplate the study of a range of materials alongside the study of the "higher arts" or even the

[14] Cf : "According to the culture theory, people do things because of their culture; on the sociality theory, people do things with, to, and in respect of each other, using means that we can describe, if we wish to, as cultural" (Carrithers 1992:34). In this respect Tylor was closer to "sociality theory" than to "cultural theory". Perhaps Fortes was too hasty in aligning him with American anthropology! Cf. Shotter: "Ask not what goes on `inside' people, but what people go on inside of". (As quoted by Oyama (2000:179)).

study of consciousness. Stocking himself, somewhat self-contradictorily, gives a good account of why Tylor was led to make this extension. He says that "Tylor's analytic evolutionary purpose forced him to place greater emphasis on the artefactual manifestations of culture, on...objects of `material culture'" (Stocking Jr. 1968:89).

It is because Stocking judges Tylor's contribution from an idealist position and from a positive valuation of an idealist conception of culture, a conception he repeatedly calls "the modern culture concept", that he undervalues the significance of the contribution of Tylor to the development of this concept.[15]

Ingold has also shown that Stocking's evaluation of Tylor as being an anti-relativist is not entirely accurate either. On the contrary Tylor subscribed to a form of humanist relativism, a relativism which speaks from a sense of common humanity, which challenges the objectivist relativism of Boasian cultural anthropology which presents itself as omniscient and detached. Thus Tylor said:

> The student of history must avoid that error which the proverb calls measuring other people's corn by one's own bushel. Not judging the customs of nations at other stages of culture by his own modern standard, he has to bring his knowledge to the help of his imagination, so as to see institutions where they belong and how they work. (Tylor 1881: 410 cited in Ingold 1986:104)

It should also be noted that Tylor placed culture in an evolutionary context. It is going to be one of my arguments later that anthropologists have distanced themselves too much from evolutionary discourse and that in, rightly, throwing out the racist, elitist, progressivist, teleological, sociobiological bath water of nineteenth century (and late twentieth) social evolutionism they have also thrown out the baby

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[15] Barnard and Spencer's recent discussion of the culture concept in their Encyclopedia reiterates the same kinds of judgements that Stocking makes about Tylor and Boas. They too accept the pluralisation of the concept of culture as the major advance towards a modern anthropological conception. However, they are conscious of the fact that this seemingly relativistic conception of culture also provides the foundation for the kind of ethnicist and essentialist interpretations which were to inform some modern political movements (Barnard and Spencer 1996:136-42).

of non-teleological, contingent, relativist evolutionism. There are significant elements of the way culture was conceived by nineteenth century thinkers such as Tylor that we could well pay greater attention to now. Briefly, we should recognise human history as part of natural history.[16] A discourse on culture that begins with this and keeps this idea in mind will not be subject to the more extreme forms of idealism that characterised subsequent approaches to culture, approaches which are still with us today in various forms.

THE BOASIAN MOMENT

There is an interesting account of the differences between the American and British approaches to the concept of culture.[17] In this account the reason for the differences between the American and the British approaches has to do with the fact that the Americans were confronted, in their ethnographic field sites, by societies - those of North American indigenous peoples - that had largely collapsed and all that remained were not fully working systems but memories of how things had been or ought to be.[18] Hence, the American emphasis on values and ideas. On the other hand, British anthropologists were confronted with fully working systems which had only superficial connections with larger systems. They could therefore concentrate on social systems as such.

There is something to this story. To it must also be added the observation that early North American, especially U.S., ethnography was also "reservation" anthropology. American anthropology had its major field site available within its national frontiers and, as someone observed, fieldwork could take on a piecemeal character, something one could do on "weekends".[19] The contrast here was with the British tradition where field-workers, once they had decided to engage with a single

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[16] "The history of mankind is part and parcel of the history of nature" (Tylor as quoted in Stocking Jr. (1968:79)).

[17] Thus, for example, Zygmunt Bauman introduced his work on culture as praxis with a discussion of the differences between these traditions of thought based on this account (Bauman 1973:1-2).

[18] Thus Evans-Pritchard spoke of the fact that American anthropologists studied "fractionised and disintegrated Indian societies" (Evans-Pritchard 1951:17). See also Kuper (1996:185).

[19] Stocking notes that for Boas mythology and folklore were useful sources of information because they were "easily collected...on `flying visits'" (Stocking Jr. 1968:223).

society, had to do their work intensively over a limited period of time (Evans-Pritchard 1951:18).

These are generalisations and one can think of many exceptions but the general trends are clear. It is as a consequence of these different traditions of fieldwork, it has been suggested, that one sees the difference between the emphasis on culture, as opposed to society, in the American and British traditions respectively.[20]

There is certainly an element of truth in these observations and analyses but most would also agree that to it must be added the influence of the intellectual traditions that the founding figures of American anthropology drew on in the development of anthropological thought.

Recent accounts of the vicissitudes of the culture concept in the American anthropological tradition have given increasing prominence to the role of Kroeber and his "agenda for anthropologists" (Boddy and Lambek 1997:4). Perhaps this is an inevitable function of the increasing distance between ourselves and the past: historical perspective inevitably diminishes the significance of more distant events as compared to more recent ones for present formations. Kuper's account of the development of the culture concept is a case in point: he gives scant regard to the importance of Boas and his other students (in particular Sapir and Radin) and concentrates instead on Kroeber and the Parsonian heritage. I think he is right to draw attention to the importance of the Parsonian programme in our understanding of the development of the culture concept in American anthropology but it should be realised that these developments could only take place because they fell on the already fertile soil tilled by all the Boasians.

Perhaps one reason why it is easier to skip the other Boasians in a discussion of the culture concept is because Boas himself was a reluctant definer of the concept. As Kuper notes, drawing on Kroeber and Kluckhohn, "no new definitions of culture

[20] To this must be added the idea that it was the development of fieldwork experience and the professionalisation of fieldwork in general that moved both American and British anthropology away from the evolutionary frameworks of the "arm chair" anthropologists of the nineteenth century (Stocking Jr. 1968:203-04).

appeared for thirty-two years" after Tylor's famous definition (Kuper 1999:56; Stocking Jr. 1968:200).

Yet, it would be a mistake to go past Boas and the concept of culture he eventually arrived at or worked with. It marks a significant departure from the then prevailing approaches to human life. As Stocking says, Boas created "the context in which the word [culture] acquired its characteristic anthropological meaning." (Stocking Jr. 1968:233).

Boas (1858-1942) begins his anthropological career in the 1880s working with a concept of culture which is barely distinguishable from that of Tylor.[21] Culture is singular; it is something which varies in quantity from peoples to peoples (Stocking Jr. 1968:203). Even towards the end of his career he never completely abandons this conception. In the last instance, to use an anachronistic phrase, for Boas the task of general anthropology would be to relate the study of cultures to the study of culture in a generic sense but this was a task which would be postponed indefinitely. However, by then the occasions on which this conception of culture appear have become increasingly rare and have been almost systematically replaced by a completely different conception of culture, one which emphasises "relativism, holism, behavioural determinism, and plurality". The context for this recontextualisation of the concept of culture is Boas's long battle with evolutionist and, in particular, racial theories of the determination of human behaviour.

His quarrel with evolutionist theories led him to a plural conception of culture. This quarrel developed out of the application of a historical approach or method to the study of social phenomena. Rather than attempting to subsume social phenomena into some grand evolutionary scheme he was more concerned to study the local and historical trajectories of the various elements of the societies he studied. As Stocking puts it, drawing on Boas's own words:

[21] Stocking (1968:195ff), once again, has given the most authoritative account on this subject and the following account, though differing from him in its evaluation of Boas, draws heavily on it.

> It was necessary to carry on "a detailed study of customs in their bearings to the total culture of the tribe" and "in connection within an investigation of their geographical distribution among neighbouring tribes' in order to determine the "environmental conditions", the "psychological factors" and the "historical connections" that had shaped them. (Stocking Jr. 1968:210)

In the event Boas showed little interest in "environmental conditions" and "psychological factors" and put all of his energy into the third shaping force - historical connections. He produced "histories of the cultures of diverse tribes" (1968:210). If, for Boas, the original aim of anthropology still remained - the aim to arrive at some grasp of the laws of the societal development - there was no easy short cut to this goal but through the painstaking study of particular histories. Boas's means became ends in themselves and the idea of the plurality of cultures had entered into anthropological discourse.

Another dimension of the modern anthropological concept of culture also shuffles its way into Boas's work: the idea of totality. Certainly at first, and even to the end, Boas was interested in particular traits but alongside this concern with tracing the trajectory of particular traits both temporally and spatially, he was interested in the relation of the traits to each other. He was concerned to link the various dimensions or elements of culture to the particular "genius of a people". Embodied in the concept of the "genius of a people" is the idea that each culture has its own distinctive configuration of cultural elements. Societies were not the accidental coming together of these elements but the elements were knitted together to form a particular totality.

Boas's concern with the "genius of a people" has a number of sources. There is the immediate source of his attempt to develop an anti-racist anthropology. Racists argued that the genius of a people lay literally in their racial inheritance, in their "genes" rather than their "genius" one would say if such a concept had been

available at that time.[22] To counter this Boas argued that the source of the genius of a people lay not in their racial inheritance but in the inheritance passed on through custom. In this notion we have the embryonic idea of the cultural determination of human behaviour. In place of "race" we have "culture" or custom, the idea being that replacing "race" with "culture" emphasises the lability of human beings. This idea - cultural determinism - has had a profound impact on the development of cultural anthropology.

Boas went one step further and seemed to suggest that it was in people's mythology or folklore that one found the ideas and values that permeated all that was distinctive about a people. Not only was the genius of a people not to be found in racial inheritance it was not to be found in the "total" situation of a people. Rather, it was particularly in the body of folklore that one found it. As Stocking puts it, once again drawing on Boas's own words:

> [F]olklore was defined as "the total mass of traditional matter present in the mind of a given people at any given time" [and] it was equated with the body of inherited material that determined their behaviour - or with their culture. (Stocking Jr. 1968:225)

Thus Boas, in effect, introduced a form of doubled idealism into anthropology: Firstly, behaviour was not determined by anything material ("environment" or "racial inheritance") but by an ethereal "tradition"; and, secondly, this "tradition" consisted not of a material world but a world of ideas, values and stories.

The source of this emphasis on ideas and values is, as Yengoyan says, Boas's grounding in German idealist philosophical traditions (Yengoyan 1997). The "romantic paradigm of society as a spiritual organism" which Boas introduced into American anthropology has in its own way permeated cultural anthropology ever

[22] The gene concept had only just arrived on the scene in the early years of the 20th century and was not a term utilised in the debate at this stage, though it was to play a greater role later.

since and, in particular, the work of some of its most significant practitioners such as Benedict, Kroeber and Geertz (Viveiros de Castro 1996:516).[23]

Boas's intellectual legacy took two slightly different directions in the American context: the mainstream "sociological" and "social scientific" (represented by Kroeber and Lowie) and the "maverick" "psychological" and "humanistic" (represented by Sapir and Radin) (Darnell 1997:43ff). Kroeber and Lowie emphasised the "holistic", "larger-than-the-sum-of-its-parts", and deterministic elements in Boas's concept of culture, whereas the direction taken by Sapir and Radin emphasised the idiosyncrasies of individuals as loci of culture, and the creative and the spiritual[24] aspects of culture. It is important to note, however, that it was in the work of these students of Boas that we see the origins of systematic cultural theory. Culture became the concept that defined the field in which anthropologists could play. It became the subject of definition and where Boas had remained silent his students - Lowie, Kroeber, Sapir, Radin, Goldenweiser, Benedict, Mead - now vigorously debated the concept, how it could be used and the nature of the field that it opened up for anthropological enquiry.

The doxic elements of this debate were that culture was something unique to human beings, that it was best expressed in the values and ideas of different peoples, that it was the element that allowed one to distinguish one people from another. These doxic elements have proved to be very durable and were carried forward in the developing anthropological tradition.

The Parsonian intervention

As I have already noted in recent years greater emphasis has begun to be placed on the formative effects of the debates surrounding the culture concept in the immediate post-war period. As the Boasian period recedes into the past the

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[23] Viveiros de Castro provides us with one of the best discussions of the genealogy and vicissitudes of the concept of society to be found in social scientific literature: the parallels, cross-overs and disjunctures with the concept of culture are very instructive (Viveiros de Castro 1996).

[24] Kuper seems to argue that it was Sapir who spiritualised the American concept of culture (Kuper 1999:65). Stocking has shown quite clearly I think that this was in fact the work of Boas himself (Stocking Jr. 1968:222ff).

importance of the post-war developments become clearer. In particular, the influence of Talcott Parsons and the debates generated by his attempt to define the social sciences are now considered to be equally influential to the evolution of the culture concept.[25]

Talcott Parsons (1902-1979), in his various magisterial works on the nature of the social sciences (Parsons 1967 (1937); Parsons 1951) argued that the proper object of study of these sciences was the study of social action. He demarcated three dimensions of social action that needed study: the social system, the personality system and the cultural system. He called for a rational division of labour in the social sciences to deal with these systems and assigned or invited anthropologists to take over the cultural as their particular domain. This is how Kuper, using Parsons's own words, describes Parsons's demarcation of the cultural domain:

> "Culture"... became an umbrella term for the realm of ideas and values. Its medium was the currency of symbols: "Cultural objects are symbolic elements of the cultural tradition, ideas or beliefs, expressive symbols or value patterns". Culture enters into action, but it also has a life of its own. "A cultural system does not `function' except as part of a concrete action system, it just `is' ". (Kuper 1999:53)

It is obvious that Parsons's conception of culture was very similar to the one that anthropologists had already arrived at themselves. This is not surprising as Parsons was influenced by the same German romantic tradition that had been so influential in the development of American anthropology (Kuper 1999:68).

The doyens of American anthropology of the time, Clyde Kluckhohn and Alfred Kroeber, responded to this invitation largely positively, though not without reservations:

> Our incomplete satisfaction with Parsons probably arises from the fact that his scheme is centred so completely upon "action". This leaves little place for certain traditional topics of anthropological enquiry: archaeology,

[25] I draw on the recent work of Kuper for this account (Kuper 1999).

historical anthropology in general, diffusion, certain aspects of culture change, and the like. (Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1963:136)[26]

In other words, though Kroeber and Kluckhohn accepted the emphasis on beliefs, values and ideas, vestiges of a Tylorian concern with the material, "artefactual", world and other elements of what they conceived as being parts of culture restrained them from giving complete and unconditional support to Parsons's definition of the appropriate domain of anthropology.

Some six years later Parson and Kroeber jointly produced a manifesto which represented something of a compromise between the two positions.[27] They say:

> We suggest that it is useful to define the concept *culture* for most usages more narrowly than has been generally the case in the American anthropological tradition, restricting its reference to transmitted and created content and patterns of values, ideas, and other symbolic-meaningful systems as factors in the shaping of human behaviour *and the artefacts produced through human behaviour*. (As quoted in Kuper (1999:69) emphases added)

Whereas in Parsons's original formulations there was no room for the material, artefactual, world, Kroeber had succeeded in wringing this concession from the grand theorist.

What the Parsonian intervention had succeeded in doing, however, was to put anthropological cultural theory on to a surer theoretical footing and to map out a programme of research for it. All it needed now was someone to carry out the programme and to give it some intellectual vigour and to champion it further. If

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[26] cf. (Kuper 1999:55).

[27] Kuper argues that it was a capitulation by the anthropologists in order that they not be shut out of what he has termed the emerging "brave new world of interdisciplinary social science" that Parsons was in the process of constructing (Kuper 1999:69). I think this is not quite accurate. It is clear that the Parsonian conception of culture and the one that had already gained currency in American anthropological circles were very close indeed and were already in the process of convergence. And there is sufficient evidence, as we will see shortly, in their joint statement to see that Kroeber had had some influence on Parsons in terms of what should be included in the cultural domain.

Parsons and Kroeber were a kind of combined John the Baptist, Clifford Geertz was the Messiah. Geertz was baptised into the discipline of Anthropology in Parsons's interdisciplinary Department of Social Relations at Harvard University in 1949.[28]

GEERTZ AND THE TRIUMPH OF CULTURAL IDEALISM

> The real is as imagined as the imaginary
>
> Clifford Geertz, *Negara*

Geertz's most significant contributions to the development of the culture concept were threefold: Firstly, to argue the case for the culture concept in graceful language replete with quotable quotes and felicitous phrasings of complex ideas; secondly, to expand the concept of culture so that it becomes totalising and all encompassing; and, thirdly, to recommend a particular methodology- hermeneutics - for the study of culture and the understanding of cultures, one which he derived from the humanities.

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[28] I might have been expected to have chosen Marshall Sahlins as the central figure for the next section. The notorious Sahlins-Obeyesekere debate gave him some prominence and some claim to being representative of the apotheosis of cultural determinism and idealism. However, I do not think Sahlins is as significant a figure as Geertz for a number of reasons: Firstly, Sahlins's *theoretical* position is confused. At one level he seems to be a vulgar cultural determinist in his theoretical pronouncements (see especially Sahlins 1976) yet I believe that in the final analysis he is not because what Sahlins is actually talking about, in spite of the culture rhetoric, is structure and not culture (Sahlins 1999; Sahlins 2000). This is a complex distinction and one which I cannot elaborate here and it requires a degree of generosity in interpreting Sahlin's theoretical statements. Suffice it to say that what Sahlins is saying is that any historical phenomenon or event will be incorporated into a life-world in terms of pre-existing structures. He is much more of a structuralist than a culturalist (Geertz, himself, makes a distinction between the two (Geertz 1973:449)). Even if the structures he tends to focus on are cognitive ones or cultural ones, these are not the only ones. His cultural determinism is hugely and significantly tempered by concessions to what he calls empirical reason. (Paradoxically, Obeyesekere may find that his best advocate is Sahlins himself: the Sahlins who gets off his theoretical high horse to deal with the nitty-gritty of empirical materials).

Secondly, and relatedly, I think in hindsight the debate will be seen as being of only local interest rather than *theoretical* interest, for the following reason: We would be perplexed indeed if physicists had decided that they would argue the toss about the laws of gravity and motion on the basis of the thin evidence, both observational and experimental, of what happens on Mars rather than on the basis of the far richer evidence available on Earth. Similarly, it seems absurd to try and settle an argument about the role of culture in social life on the basis of the fragmentary facts of events that occurred 200 or more years ago in Hawaii when we have far richer materials closer to hand. Obeyesekere made the mistake of taking on a regional specialist on his own, richly ambiguous, historical turf. Rather, he should have invited Sahlins to use his theoretical apparatus in the interpretation of South Asian materials. Instead of exploring how natives think about Captain Cook for example, a more appropriate example might have been how natives think about Roop Kanwar for example, the sati of Deorala – another, equally exotic, death in interesting circumstances. It would have been interesting to see if the deployment of the complex apparatus of "structures of conjuncture", "mythopraxis", etc would have helped in the interpretation of this death in its context. I very much doubt it.

I won't say anything about the first contribution except that Geertz's arguments are very persuasive on first reading. It is only when one reads between the lines (as he undoubtedly demands of us) that we begin to see the problems. Needless to say, because it is a reading between the lines the readings can be easily disowned as being figments of the imagination of the reader and not something inherent to the argument.

Geertz's gave this, now famous, definition of culture:

> The concept of culture I espouse...is essentially a semiotic one. Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning. (Geertz 1973:4-5)

Where Kroeber and Kluckhohn had gone for a narrower definition of culture seeing it as a domain of the social and slotting it into the Parsonian paradigm, a more totalising conception is taking its place in Geertz's thought. Geertz is not prepared to concede anything to the social. One could say, somewhat anachronistically, that the "web" is a world wide web. It is in fact the world itself.

> The confinement of interpretive analysis in most contemporary anthropology to the supposedly more "symbolic" aspects of culture is a mere prejudice, born out of the notion ... that "symbolic" opposes to "real" as fanciful to sober, figurative to literal, obscure to plain, aesthetic to practical, mystical to mundane, and decorative to substantial.... (Geertz 1980b:135-36)

On the contrary, according to Geertz absolutely everything is symbolic, absolutely everything is "text" to be read, including "irrigation or village organization or landscape or taxation equally with ... myth, iconography, ceremony, or divine kingship", "treaties [or] temples", "trade [or] priestcraft", "the structure of genealogies, clientship, courtyards, and cremations" (Geertz 1980b:135). There is nothing that falls out of the dominion of culture. "Arguments, melodies, formulas,

maps, and pictures are not idealities to be stared at but texts to be read; so are rituals, palaces, technologies, and social formations" (Geertz 1980b:134). There is no world outside of the symbolic. Even the real is imagined.

Harnessed to this totalising vision of culture is a new methodology for understanding it – hermeneutical or interpretive analysis. All these texts are "saying something of something" (Geertz 1973:448) and the task of the anthropologist is to read them, to find out what this "something" is. And, almost invariably, what the anthropologist discovers is that the people are displaying the first signs of madness: they are talking to themselves, telling themselves about themselves:[29]

> What sets the cockfight apart from the ordinary course of life, lifts it from the realm of everyday practical affairs, and surrounds it with an aura of enlarged importance is not, as functionalist sociology would have it, that it reinforces status discriminations (such reinforcement is hardly necessary in a society where every act proclaims them), but that it provides a metasocial commentary upon the whole matter of assorting human beings into fixed hierarchical ranks and then organizing the major part of collective existence around that assortment. Its function, if you want to call it that, is interpretive: *it is a Balinese reading of Balinese experience, a story they tell themselves about themselves.* (Geertz 1973:448 emphasis added)

What the anthropologist discovers is that by treating human action in the world as text and reading it, she will discover what the people themselves say about themselves. "The dramas of the theatre state [are] mimetic of themselves" (Geertz 1980b:136).

> It has been the central argument of this work, displayed in the very divisions of its content and directive through the whole of its unfolding, that the life that swirled around the punggawas, perbekels, puris, and jeros

[29] The popular notion that talking to oneself is the first sign of madness, it seems, derives from the tendency of some mentally ill patients to conduct dialogues with invisible interlocutors. Here it would seem that the invisible interlocutor is the anthropologist!! It may be that Obeyeskere felt that in Sahlins's account of mythopraxis that Sahlins was suggesting that the Hawaiians were putting on a performance for the benefit of late 20th century interpretive anthropologists.

> of classical Bali *comprised ... an alternate conception of what politics is about and what power comes to.* A structure of action, now bloody, now ceremonious, *the negara was also, and as such, a structure of thought. To describe it is to describe a constellation of enshrined ideas.* (Geertz 1980b:135 emphases added)

Geertz seems to be unaware of the sleight of hand he is practicing in these statements. On the one hand social action in culture can be viewed as text; anthropologists should learn to read them and decode them. On the other hand, social action is text even for the people themselves and they read about themselves through their engagement in this action. Geertz provides no *evidence* for the latter beyond the mere assertion of it. He even suggests that they may not be conscious of it themselves when he says that "other traditions of interpretation" are "usually less self-conscious" (Geertz 1980b:135).

Cultural idealism reaches its apotheosis in this scheme. The whole world is imaginary and all that one can do is read it. The world is what it is and it is symbolic. We return, then, to that seemingly innocent definition: "...man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs" (Geertz 1973:4). It is seemingly innocent because between the lines we are being told that we are suspended in nothing else but the symbolic.

Just as Boas before him gave lip service to the idea that, in the last instance, the study of cultures would be related to the study of culture, so Geertz gave lip service to the idea that the study of culture was a study which would form part of a greater enterprise which would integrate itself into the study of social action as a whole alongside the study of society and personality. But, as Kuper says, "that end point...tended to recede from view. In Geertz's writing it is a sophisticated but hermetic notion of culture that works itself out" (Kuper 1999:83).

In this version of culture theory, the material world becomes part of the symbolic world; it is, in fact, nothing apart from the symbolic. The extended phenotype of sociobiology has now become the symbolic woof and weft that the spider-like human casts from within itself out into the void to bear its own weight.

A THEORY OF CULTURE AND MATERIAL CULTURE

The most sustained attempt to link a theory of material culture to a theory of culture has been the work of Daniel Miller (Miller 1987). Recently he announced that "the point that things matter can now be argued to have been made" and listed his own work as one of the three "key theories" that had "demonstrated that social worlds were as much constituted by materiality as the other way around" (Miller 1998a:3). The other two theories he refers to are the work of Bourdieu and Appadurai. Given that Appadurai's theory consists of nothing more than a long essay introducing a collection of essays on the social life of things and that Bourdieu's work only tangentially addresses the issue of material culture or things, it is clear that what Miller is saying is that he himself has made the argument which has become the bedrock on which the field of material culture studies has developed. It is certainly the case that his work has been very influential and it is also certainly the case that Miller's work is widely regarded as the most sustained attempt in anthropology to give new prominence to the place of things in human life.

Miller argues that it "seems most reasonable to take [material culture] as a subset of culture, so that a theory of artefacts as material culture would be derived from a more general theory of culture" (Miller 1994:399). Miller's approach to the development of a theory of culture is, however, quite different at one level from that which has informed the development of such a theory in the American tradition discussed above. Rather than constructing his framework in relation to other anthropological approaches Miller's point of departure is the abstract philosophical anthropology of Hegel and a robust defence of Hegel's ideas against the critiques of Marx and later Marxists. However, given this origin and given the account of the development of the culture concept in the American tradition critiqued above, it should not come as a surprise that Miller's theory of culture converges with the American tradition in its idealism.

Miller develops his theory of culture around the concept or "tenet" (Miller 1987:30) of "objectification" which he abstracts from Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit. He describes objectification thus:

> The term objectification will be used to describe a dual process by means of which a subject externalises itself in a creative act of differentiation, and in turn reappropriates this externalization through an act which Hegel terms sublation...This act eliminates the separation of the subject from its creation but does not eliminate the creation itself; instead, the creation is used to enrich and develop the subject, which then transcends its earlier state. (Miller 1987:28)

For Miller the process of objectification is positive. It is something to be celebrated. He vigorously defends it against assimilation to the concept of alienation. He equates it with the process of cultural formation, arguing that cultural formation is identical with the processes of objectification and sublation and that culture creates the subjects of its own process as it is simultaneously created by the subject. He believes this leads to a "non-reductionist and dynamic" concept of culture. He says that "if the term objectification is used to describe [the] relationship within which the subject and object are created, it establishes first that this relationship is always a process, and secondly that the process is always progressive" (Miller 1987:29).

Miller is highly critical of Marx whom he accuses of narrowly reinterpreting the concept of objectification as alienation on the basis of the experience of the worker in capitalist society - where the products of the workers objectification are alienated from the worker - generalising the process underlying this experience to all processes of objectification. Miller's criticism, a criticism which aligns Miller with Sahlins and Baudrillard, argues that Marx's focus on material production as the only creative process has blinded him to consumption as a creative process and an equally critical moment in the dynamic of culture.

> The labour theory of value and the concept of use value are jointly responsible for a conservative attitude to the place of work and utilitarian practices as the "proper" sites of human self-creation, and a concomitant failure to examine cultural and consumption activities as creative of social relations. (48)

Miller praises Marx for his intentions ("..the holistic understanding of history [and] the regrounding of consciousness and culture in their larger historical context" (48-49)). However, he says that Marx failed in his attempt at integration because rather than integrating the two dimensions he "submerged" the former in the latter.

Miller goes on to add, in relation to his own work:

> When taken as a redressing of a balance, the emphasis on material culture and mass consumption in the present work need not therefore contribute to a new autonomy or fetishism, but may serve the continued aim of this [the Marxist] tradition in academic analysis which attempts to refuse the tendency towards autonomy of both subject and object. (Miller 1987:49)

But therein lies the problem. We *need* a new fetishism or a new animism. What Miller fails to realise is that in his attempt to refuse the tendency towards asserting the autonomy of either the subject or the object he overlooks the tendency towards autonomy of the totality represented by the subject/object. If the subject is not autonomous and the object is not either, *together* they are: culture (which is both subject and object linked through the processes of objectification and sublation) is autonomous – a free floating world above nature. In the final analysis, Miller still gives priority to the subjective moment in the process of objectification. The very term itself carries this connotation: it is the creation of the subject that is at the core of this process and it is the subject which, through a kind of magic, creates itself by projecting an object outward – objectification – into a world which it simultaneously creates.[30] The real material world is given no role except a

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[30] Bourdieu makes the same point against Sartre:

> One must refuse to replace God the creator of "eternal verities and values", as Descartes put it, with the creative Subject, and give back to history and to society what was given to a transcendence or transcendent subject. More precisely, it means abandoning the mythology of the uncreated "creator", of which Sartre provided the exemplary formulation, with the self-destructive notion of the "original project", an expression of the dream of being *causa sui* which goes hand in hand with a horror of genetic thought, and accepting that the true "subject" of the most accomplished human works is none other than the field in which they are accomplished. (Bourdieu 2000:115)

If we replace "field" by "habitat" or even "form of life" (as Bourdieu would more willingly do) we will be coming close to the kind of anthropology that I advocate in the next chapter.

subservient one in this scheme. It offers no resistance to human dominion. Certainly, this world, once created, comes back to haunt its creator but the initial creative act is still located in human action.

Conclusion

The purpose of the negative critique above has been to identify some of the major weaknesses of previous and some current tendencies in the study of culture in order to clear a space for a different approach, one which – as a by-product - will give more scope for dealing with the world of things.[31] The fundamental problem with earlier approaches can be briefly summarised. They are idealist, essentialist, reductionist, determinist and often all of these simultaneously.[32] They share three of these weaknesses – essentialism, reductionism, and determinism - with the very tendency - racist materialism - many of them were developed to counter. These approaches and the concept of culture that they have advanced have been the foundation for a range of problems that have bedevilled social theory, problems embedded in dichotomies - such as the structure/agency problem or the problem of the universal and the particular - which are a result of the conceptual framework itself rather than any real problem amenable to scientific resolution. Deterministic frameworks have to contend with, firstly, the experience of freedom and secondly, with diversity. And the answer proffered for them both is that human freedom consist of freedom from necessity and that in achieving this freedom diversity will become the order of the day as human beings become true to themselves through acts of existential good faith. Having replaced racial determinism and essentialism with cultural determinism and essentialism, human freedom is now conceived as an escape from the latter. Like Kant's light dove it is imagined that flight would be easier in empty space.

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[31] My critique should not be seen as lending support to the anti-culturalist tendencies that have been apparent in recent years where any attempt to generalise is seen as suspect (Abu-Lughod 1991) or with the anti-culturalism of an earlier period where various formalists and marxisante theoretical perspectives in anthropology tried to remove the cultural from social analysis and to give renewed emphasis to the purely economic or political economy respectively (Ferguson 1988:489-90).

[32] I am fully aware of the irony or paradox in making a statement like that. The elaboration of an alternative framework below will, I hope, make the statement seem less paradoxical.

This framework for understanding human life has now lost its theoretical vitality. This is not to say that it was not the basis for some remarkable work in the history of the human sciences, from Sahlin's studies of the Hawaiians to the studies of the life of the Balinese by Geertz. It is a tradition with a rich heritage of empirical materials and theoretical argument.

A new framework is particularly urgent at present because the hubris implicit in the kinds of conceptions of culture (and its relation to nature) that characterise the mainstream trends in the discipline participate in a general ideology that informs modern social life and which has led to substantial destruction of our social and physical environment. The various forms of culturalism - Geertzian, Post-Modernism, Constructivism, etc - are accomplices in this act of alienating human life from life in general.[33] Anthropology, in its very title, is a hubristic discipline, selecting one living organism for special attention.[34] It does not need to have that hubris augmented by the forms of theory that currently inform its thinking about the nature of its object. There is a profound irony in Sahlins's accusation that in Vayda and Rappaport's ecological functionalism "anthropology loses its object" (Sahlins 1976:89). In actual fact it is culturalism that destroys the object of anthropology (humanity in nature and the human condition) in favour of a science of culture, a disembodied ethereal world floating like a veil[35] "*between* man and nature" (Sahlins 1976:105 my emphasis) which, thus conceived, is a figment of alienated scholastic reason, one which of course, lends itself to nice packaging and selling.

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[33] Laura Nader, in a harsh judgement, has suggested that Geertz and his followers have engaged in "conscious erasure of anthropology as a discipline" (Nader 1995:427). D'Andrade generally supports her in this assessment and adds: "It is true that many of the most `cultural' anthropologists want nothing to do with biological anthropology or archaeology. I think this is based more on a wish to take over anthropology and reformulate it as `cultural studies' than a wish to erase the field, but in the end it may come down to the same thing" (D'Andrade 1995:434).

[34] One could almost go so far as to say that Anthropology is a last desperate attempt by those of the human species who seek to dominate the planet to see human beings as the centre of the universe in spite of the assaults this idea has received from the various revolutions – Copernican, Newtonian, Darwinian, and Einsteinian.

[35] The word is from Leslie White who Sahlins quotes approvingly (Sahlins 1976:105). Sahlins illustrates how easy it is to forget one's own work. In Kuper's account of the debate between Sahlins and Friedman Sahlins asks: "Does Friedman really think I am Leslie White reincarnated as Lévi-Strauss?" (Kuper 1999:198) Yet that is almost precisely what he claimed for himself when he juxtaposed White and Lévi-Strauss some fifteen years before (Sahlins 1976:105).

In fact I would go so far as to say that culturalism provides the ultimate justification for the alienated ideology.[36] Whereas general ideology is largely atheoretical and constructed in the practice of modern social life, culturalism in its various guises provides the theoretical grounds for the latter's relativistic nihilism.[37] Thus, not only is an approach to human history that re-embeds it in nature good science, it is good politics too.[38] In the following chapter I present the outlines of the alternative framework I have called for.

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[36] cf. "The parallel that we have noted between the capitalist's appropriation of the executive capacity of the producers, and the construction and appropriation of an objectivist anthropology of `other cultures' is by no means accidental. Both involve a kind of alienation, by which practices are divorced from the intentionality of those who carry them out. The anthropologist, like the capitalist, is an `alien will' (Marx 1930[1867]:347) who, so long as he remains a spectator rather than engaging as a participant, can grasp by observation only the plan and its execution" (Ingold 1986:328). See also Bourdieu (1990a:33ff).

[37] The political conservatism of culturalism is also demonstrated by the easy recourse that conservatives make use of it to advance their arguments. Samuel Huntington's clash-of-civilizations thesis would not have got much traction if the ground work had not been done by essentialist culturalism. And the whole debate about welfare dependency, a revisit to the "culture of poverty" thesis, drew on the undeclared support of culturalist formulations of human action.

[38] As Griffins says:

> Yet even the alienation between different `races' on the basis of their alleged contribution or cost to humanity as a whole is less catastrophic in its consequences than the ultimate alienation of all: the man-made line which anthropocentrism draws between the human species and all the other life forms and organic processes which together make up the ecosystem. Arguably every religious cosmology or political ideology (even those on the left) which has taken for granted the existence of the planet and regarded it as a "given" realm of human dominion and exploitation is, at a global, species level, a form of ethnocracy. Bio-politically, in other words as far as the long-term consequences for the survival not just of our kind but so many millions of other organisms, this "anthropocracy" is a form of radical right on a planetary scale, and constitutes the ultimate form of identificatory as opposed to integrative belonging. (Griffin 1999)

CHAPTER 2 WHY THINGS REALLY MATTER

> Old ideas give way slowly. They are habits, predispositions, deeply engrained attitudes of aversion and preference. Moreover, the conviction persists, though history shows it to be a hallucination, that all the questions that the human mind has asked are questions that can be answered in terms of the alternatives that the questions themselves present. But in fact, intellectual progress usually occurs through the sheer abandonment of questions together with both of the alternatives they assume, an abandonment that results from their decreasing vitalism and a change of urgent interest. We do not solve them, we get over them.
>
> John Dewey, *Influence of Darwin on Philosophy*

INTRODUCTION

It will be clear from the preceding critique that I consider the attempt to develop a theory of culture which does not have a significant connection with organic life as seriously misguided. We must "seek an understanding that will re-embed human history within the overall continuum of organic life" (Ingold 1998:83).[39]

CULTURE AS A DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESS: `BEING-IN-THE-WORLD'

> The anthropological mission is to study and describe, in all its richness, the work of life.
>
> Robert Murphy, *The dialectics of deeds and words*

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[39] cf. "`History itself is a *real* part of *natural history* - of nature developing into man' (Marx 1964:143)" (Ingold 1986:220). More recently Keith Hart has said:

> The only thing which can truly distinguish anthropology from the rest of social science is that it addresses human nature *plus* culture *plus* society. The fragmentation of nature, culture and society in the British version of the anthropological endeavour is at the root of the problem. (Hart, et al. 1996:42-43)

The American version has been guilty of it too. Hart's restraint is based on his appreciation of the work of American anthropologists like Roy Rappaport and others who took the idea of integrating the `four fields' seriously. Recent British versions, in the very different approaches of Kuper, Ingold and Carrithers have gone some way towards a less fragmented approach (see above page 15).

> Only one activity is genuinely wise, understanding how everything in the world is part of the unified whole. This understanding is radically different from other forms of cleverness, and only through it can humans assimilate themselves to the ordered whole of which they are parts.
>
> Roy Rappaport, *Humanity's evolution and anthropology's future*

The critique above has, in passing, pointed to the outlines of an alternative approach to the concept of culture. What I would like to do now is to, briefly, sketch this theory a little more. The goal is to delineate enough of the framework to allow me to elaborate on the place of material goods in social life, a framework which allows the world in which human beings grow a greater place than that available in current theories. This approach, framework or perspective[40] is under construction. Our habits of thought are so Cartesian that a non-dualistic approach to problems of culture, consciousness and mind is very difficult to develop.

This theory draws on the work of Oyama and Ingold[41] for its largest frame of reference – the life world and on the work of Bourdieu and his theory of habitus/habitat.[42] Having made a case for taking "habitat" as a site of "being"

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[40] See Oyama on these terms (2000:1-2).

[41] And behind them an `alternative' general framework for understanding biological processes and the very idea of `biology'. This includes leading figures in the biological sciences such as Lynn Marguilis, Richard Lewontin, F. J. Odling-Smee, Brian Goodwin. As Ingold has noted, a different notion of `biology' will be required.

[42] Searle's theory of the 'Background' is also relevant but will not be used here (1995:127-48). Marcoulatos has given a very interesting, detailed, thoughtful comparative account of Searle's concept of the `Background' and Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*. Macrcoulatos argues for modifying Searle's account of the `Background' to allow that it, too, can be intentional:

> "Reviewing some instances of Searle's analysis that can be read as referring to the intentional side of the Background, will be an instructive exercise, since the Background may be regarded as closely related to the habitus precisely to the extent that it exists as Searle assumes it not to, i.e., intentionally." (2003:82)

Bourdieu's habitat is Searle's intentional Background. The intentional Background constitutes a "kind of significance beyond semantic contents, an unformulated way of maintaining a perspective towards the world, which opens up the issue of the world actually verifying the practical expectations of this perspective" (2003:84). See also Marcoulatos (2001).

Marcoulatos does not directly address the issue of two forms of being that Bourdieu articulates. It would be interesting, and useful, to see how he would deal with this dimension of Bourdieu's work.

Further elaboration of the theory would also draw on the work in ecological psychology and the theory of "affordances" of James Gibson and his followers. See, in particular, Reed (1996) and Costall (1995). Costall, for example, argues that "the natural and the social constitute a `non-disjunctive division'. They are not in opposition. Rather, humanized nature is (part of) what nature has *become*" (478).

seriously (formulated in an underdeveloped form by Bourdieu) the argument then turns to challenging the somewhat narrow conception of being that informs most social theory drawing on recent work by anthropologists such as Nurit Birt-David, Eduardo Viverios de Castro, Phillippe Descola and Gísli Pálsson. These anthropologists, on the basis of fieldwork in varied sites, are challenging received notions of being and critiquing the ethnocentric use of concepts like "animism" and "fetishism" that informs much sociological and anthropological writing. The argument, at this stage, concludes that we need to develop a view of an ***animated*** habitat and its properties and to accept the idea that, in the human developmental-process, things can have lives in a literal sense and that such a conception is not – theoretically speaking – "fetishistic", as suggested by Appadurai.

Humanity and the life world

Human beings are an inextricable part of the larger development of life on earth. This development is contingent and historical but subject to uniform processes, as applicable to humans as to any other species.[43] In this view, there is no essential human nature defined by a unique set of characteristics, the discovery or revelation of which is the task of some form of "natural social science" (the view of sociobiology) or some "Humanity" (the view of culturalism). Rather the term human is a label for a portion of that larger developmental process known as life, a portion whose boundaries are both synchronically and diachronically fuzzy and which consists of an organismic-environment developmental process, a form of "being-in-the-world", which developed and is continuing to develop some distinctive processes which we could refer to collectively as hominization. These processes allow us to distinguish it - the continual process of "becoming human" - in the larger developmental process of which it is a part (and not apart). It is this becoming that I call culture.[44] The label "culture" does not refer to some terminus

[43] In the framework being proposed here even the term `species' would be deeply problematic. Like the concept of `culture' it suffers from a tradition of essentialist discourse and connotes a world of neatly bounded and separated organisms. See Wilson (1999) and Dupré (2002).

[44] Bourdieu first used the word `habitus' as a substitute for the word `culture' because he was concerned to distance himself from all the baggage (`overdetermination') that the word `culture' carried. I, too, was tempted to abandon it but resisted because, confused as the picture is around this word, the use of it does help to sustain dialogue around it. A phrase which would refer much more closely to what I am trying to articulate here would be Wittgenstein's "forms of life" (Das 1998:179ff).

at which this organismic-environmental process has arrived - the view of the many varieties of both sociobiology and culturalism, the former looking back from the terminus, the other looking forward.[45] Rather it refers to this whole with fuzzy boundaries which is continuing to develop alongside the ongoing development of life itself. Murphy is absolutely right to claim, then, that Anthropology's mission is to "study and describe the work of life" (Murphy 1994).

This developmental process produces (amongst other things) and is the product of (amongst other things) the activity of *homo sapiens*, a somewhat arbitrary but defensible chronological label for the key organisms in this developmental process. It is only "key" methodologically rather than ontologically because it is the central focus for an understanding of that process. Other organisms are also a part of the developmental process. This key organism brings, like all organisms in the larger developmental process known as life, certain more or less unique properties to the whole. More or less unique because it is becoming widely recognised that our uniqueness is a rather unusual contingent fact of history. As Tattersall rightly says: "Once we were not alone", and our present twig-like isolation for the last 30,000-40,000 years or so (from the first appearance of *Homo sapiens* some 200,000 years ago) on that branch of the bush of life, the hominids, that has separated us from our nearest contemporary species kin - the Great Apes - is a matter for explanation.[46] This is not just a matter of *homo sapiens* cohabitation of the planet with *homo neanderthalensis*, though this is interesting in itself, but the emerging picture which

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[45] These orientations give these two perspectives their characteristic `moods' - the pessimism of the former and the optimism of the latter.

[46] " Our species, far from being the pinnacle of the hominid evolutionary tree, is simply one of its many terminal twigs" (Tattersall 2000:43). "Terminal", yes, but not yet we hope! Gould, in his magnum opus completed just before his death, speaks of the "astonishing conclusion...that three human species still inhabited [simultaneously] the globe as recently as 40,000 years ago – *Homo neanderthalensis* as the descendant of *Homo erectus* in Europe, persisting *Homo erectus* in Asia, and modern *Homo sapiens*, continuing its relentless spread across the habitable world" (Gould 2002:910). This conclusion has very serious implications for Anthropology as a discipline, and especially for Cultural and Social Anthropology. The latter sub-disciplines have been built on a very narrow base of assumptions about "human uniqueness". They need to rethink their fundamental assumptions so as to be equally applicable to these other, equally human, species. Perhaps this could be achieved by renaming our species something along the lines of *Homo africanus* - on the model of naming a species on the basis of the location of the site of its earliest forms - and dropping the arrogant and self-serving *sapiens*. As feminists have shown reform of the language can go a long way towards reforming thinking.

sees a range of species within the recent genus *homo*[47] existing contemporaneously and not just the earlier genus of *australopithecines*. This is the broad perspective in relation to which the following discussion needs to be seen.

Organism: "Habitus" or the "first state of being-in-the-world"

> Habitus, the organism as appropriated by the group.
>
> Pierre Bourdieu, *The logic of practice*

In the last two decades new developments in social theory have marked out ways of conceiving culture which abandon culturalism. Ortner, in a conspectus essay on the state of anthropological theory (1984), pointed to the development of practice theories. She was not aware of it at the time but perhaps the most important dimension of these theories was a new focus on the body and on embodiment.[48] This new focus provided an antidote to the idealism of culturalism but also an antidote to the alternative: the disembodied objectivism of various structuralisms and marxisms, which seemed – ironically – to be as idealist as culturalism!

It is the turn to the body that has provided the most fruitful new developments in anthropological theory. The reason why it is the body that has found so much favour with social theorists is that it moves the discussion away from the mind-brain problem in philosophy. The body connotes something encompassing both mind and brain and a lot else. Practical human engagement with the world is mediated through the body as a whole and not just some ethereal consciousness.

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[47] It is relevant to this issue to note that this genus (consisting of *homo sapiens*, *homo neaderthelensis*, *homo habilis*, *homo ergaster*, *homo rudolfensis*, *homo erectus*, *homo antecessor*, *homo heidelbergensis*, etc.) is largely distinguished from the other hominid genii by the presence of a `material culture' in the form of tools. They are all variations, if you like, on *homo faber*. However, it is obvious that these would have developed out of an(?) antecedent species of the genus *australopithecus* which would have been a tool-maker as well.

[48] This lack of awareness of the importance of embodiment was excusable in 1984. However, in a more recent piece Dirks, Ortner and Elley completely ignore these developments. Obsessed with Geertzian interpretivism (culturalism gone wild), even if disguised behind a heavy veneer of supposed concern with `power', `resistance' and `discourse', they seem to be oblivious to the turn to the body and to the spreading disenchantment with culturalist approaches (1994:3-45).

In this turn to the body and embodiment the concept of *habitus* as developed by Bourdieu has played a central role and provides a useful point of entry for developing the idea of culture as an organism-environment developmental process.

The theory of habitus is highly developed. *Habitus* is defined by Bourdieu as follows:

> [The] system of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. Objectively "regulated" and "regular" without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor. (1990a:53).

What is the relation between *habitus* and the human organism? Bourdieu's answer to this is that *habitus* is socialised, "durably installed", into the organism (p.57). The organism is habituated into the *habitus* and this is a never-ending process. However, like an oil-painting, the layers first installed are the most durable and are more often than not embedded in place by the layers that come later. In fact the layering process is such that subsequent layers are constrained by the textures of previous ones, thus privileging the earlier layers.

The theory of socialisation that underlies Bourdieu's theory of habitus is underdeveloped in its place of origin. However, it is clear that Bourdieu has a very complex process in mind and one in which the environment (natural, material and social) plays a very important part. It is to this I now turn.

Environment: Habitat - the second state of `being-in-the-world`[49]

The central theme of the new approach I am outlining to human culture is that the life-world consists of methodologically identifiable developmental processes and it is the developmental process that we - anthropologists - are interested in to which the label `culture' has to be applied. This is not the "extended phenotype" of Dawkins fame. Dawkins had the right problem but the wrong solution in that he recognised, in spite of his earlier arguments which equated genes with essences, that the boundaries of an organism presented a problem. Rather we are talking about a habitat, a `world-in-being' (a dwelling place), for a habitus, `being-in-the-world'.

> [By] adopting a dwelling perspective - that is, by taking the animal-in-its-environment rather than the self-contained individual as our point of departure - it is possible to dissolve the orthodox dichotomies between evolution and history, and between biology and culture. For if history be understood as the process wherein people, through their own intentional and creative activities, shape the conditions of development for their successors, then it is but a specific instance of a process that is going on throughout the organic world. And if by cultural variation we mean those differences of embodied knowledge that stem from the diversity of local developmental contexts, then far from superimposed upon a substrate of evolved human universals, such variation is part and parcel of the variation of all living things, which has its source in their involvement within a

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[49] The following section on habitat has importance to an understanding of Bourdieu's work and to advancing the conception of culture. However, I also feel it has implications for other fields. Thus, for example, Bourdieu's work has been assimilated in a large way into the field of educational studies. The concept of *habitus* in particular has been taken over by sociologists of education and applied extensively to research in the field. `Habitat', on the other hand, has not been taken over to quite the same extent. This is not surprising because Bourdieu himself doesn't draw attention to it much. Rather, only a sub-space of `habitat', the space of `positions' or `social space' receives extended attention. However, there are occasional forays into other dimensions of `habitat' in the field of education such as Bourdieu and Passerons' discussion of the utopian forms of the lecture space constructed by the students they researched (Bourdieu, Passeron and De Saint-Martin 1994:12ff). The irony is that even the concept of `social space' is very topological and the instruments that Bourdieu uses to reveal its structures are maps of correspondences.

What I am suggesting is that there is considerable scope for applying the habitus/habitat approach to research in the educational field, rather than simply focussing on *habitus*. In such a study the `things' that make up the phenomenal world would play an important role. Though this study of the life of books does not specifically explore the life of these things in this particular setting, the findings of this study do have implications for it.

> continuous field of relations ... Once we come to recognise that history is but the continuation of an evolutionary process by another name, the point of origin constituted by the intersection of evolutionary and historical continua disappears, and the search ... for the beginnings of ...history and true humanity becomes a quest after an illusion. (Ingold 2000:186-87)

In this perspective, then, the inhabited world becomes as important to the understanding of *humanity* as the being, *homo sapiens*, that inhabits it. The light dove cannot fly in a vacuum and in order to understand flight one needs to incorporate an understanding of air as much as the dynamic properties of wings, muscles etc. Meaning is not constructed by actors imposing a human structure on a recalcitrant nature or world but inheres in the world itself which contains human beings but also a myriad other things.

In advancing this idea the metatheoretical framework[50] developed by Bourdieu becomes very important. He says:

> The principle of action is therefore neither a subject confronting the world as an object in a relation of pure knowledge nor a `milieu' exerting a form of mechanical causality on the agent; it is neither in the material or symbolic end of the action nor the constraints of the field. It lies in the complicity between two states of the social, between history in bodies and history in things, ...between the history objectified in ...instruments, monuments, works, techniques, etc[51]... and history incarnated in bodies in the form of habitus, a complicity which is the basis of a relation of quasi-

[50] I adopt this concept from Swartz's useful meta-metatheoretical discussion of Bourdieu's work (Swartz 1997:11).

[51] Bourdieu occasionally restricts this second form of history to the structures and mechanisms of fields. Fields have a somewhat narrower meaning in the Bourdieuian conceptual apparatus than the list of elements that are incorporated in this definition. One of the problems of Bourdieu's conceptual apparatus is that it tends to privilege fields over other elements of the social space. Occasionally social space is also narrowly defined as the sum of a variety of interlocking fields, each of which is made up of social positions - nodes of accumulated capital with incorporated trajectories. Bourdieu has a tendency towards sociologism in his own use of his concepts. This varies from study to study - most evident in his work on cultural production and least evident in his work on the physical structures of the space of the peasants of Kabyle. This is more of a failing of application than theory.

> magical participation between these two realizations. (Bourdieu 2000:150-51)

By calling 'history objectified in ... instruments, monuments, works, techniques, etc" (150) `habitat' we can see that what Oyama and Ingold call the human development process – the `organism-in-its-environment' process known as culture – is, in Bourdieuian terms, the mutually imbricated habitus-habitat. Ingold expresses the same ideas as follows:

> The cultural process... builds itself on the one hand into the social forms of persons and groups, and on the other into the material forms of objects and features in the landscape. (Ingold 1994:334)

With the concept of *habitus* Bourdieu overcomes the duality of mind/body or mind/brain. In doing this he draws on Mearleau-Ponty's phenomenology. However, by focussing on *habitus*, he neglects theorising habitat and unpacking its true theoretical innovations. Yet, even in his cursory treatment of habitat Bourdieu overcomes a duality. This time it is the duality found in Durkheim's *conscience collective*. Whereas for Durkheim collective consciousness existed in a kind of abstract superorganic world, Bourdieu materialises it: he says that it is not something ethereal but real. One is tempted to use the word `incarnated' or even `transubstantiated' (as one uses the word `embodied' in relation to habitus) but this gives rise to an unfortunate connotation: one of spirit being made flesh, as if there were a prior spirit which had to be housed or realised. What is being argued here is that consciousness is part of the organic process and inheres in the world.[52]

It is from this perspective that we can begin to see that "things" matter and though they may appear, from a perspective of alienated science, as part of a lifeless, "dead", world they never-the-less, in Bourdieu's memorable phrase, "seize the living". And in Ingold's argument things, far from being `dead', are living precisely because they are taken up into, embedded in, living developmental

[52] Perhaps this is what is also meant by Michael Jackson's enigmatic comment that "in shared bodily needs, in patterns of attachment and loss, in the imperatives of reciprocity, in the *habitus* of the planet, we are involved in a common heritage" (Jackson 1995:118).

processes.[53] We inherit neither our genes, as the various, recently rampant, sociobiologies - what Bourdieu calls physicalisms, tendencies that "aspire to turn the science of `man' into the science of nature" (Bourdieu:132) - argue, nor "culture" as some kind of disembodied world of ideas, values and symbols but a whole world which in the process of being inherited also inherits us. "Being", as Bourdieu says, exists not only in the embodied state as habitus but also "in the objectified state", in the world and the things of the world around us, in habitat.

Thinking about habitat (including material culture)

Bourdieu

As I indicated earlier, *habitus* has been very substantially theorised both by Bourdieu and those who have adopted his approach. It has also been the subject of

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[53] The approach advocated here is more in tune with the way the relation of human beings to the world in which they are embedded is conceived of in other societies:

> This is the case, for instance, of the Achuar Jivaro of the Upper Amazon who, according to Descola, consider most plants and animals as persons, living in societies of their own, entering into relations with humans according to strict rules of social behaviour: game animals are treated as affines by men, while cultivated plants are treated as kin by women. A similar situation prevails among the Makuna, another people of the Upper Amazon; for them humankind represents a particular form of life, participating in a wider community of living beings regulated by a single and totalising set of rules of conduct ... the Chewong of the Malay rainforest do not set humans apart from other beings: plants, animals, and spirits are said to be endowed with consciousness, i.e. language, reason, intellect and a moral code. Ontological distinctions between different classes of beings are all the more difficult to establish among the Chewong as humans and many non-humans are reputedly able to change their appearance at will, so that their real identity is almost impossible to ascertain at first sight ... the native inhabitants of the Marovo Lagoon in the Solomon Islands do not see organisms and non-living components of their environment as constituting a distinct realm of nature separated from human society ... the categories they use to describe their environment function as analogic codes rather than binary oppositions, and these categories are strongly dependant upon the ways in which people seem themselves to be engaging with components of their ecosystem. (Descola and Pálsson 1996:7)

Michael Jackson makes a similar point:

> Another fundamental assumption in the Kuranko world view is that Being is not necessarily limited to human being. (Jackson 1989:106).

I am not trying to suggest that these conceptions are directly equivalent to the framework being developed here. The latter is a scientific construction, the former are not. More than this, all the examples above are based on an extension of the human world to areas which we normally distinguish as being non-human i.e. various forms of what we would, ethnocentrically, call anthropomorphisms. I would argue that the framework being developed here attempts to go beyond anthropomorphism or zoomorphism. Still, it seems clear that in order for progress to be made in this area we will need to abandon the dualism that has bedevilled our attempts to think about culture and in this task we may learn from the ways in which `nature' is thought about in other societies.

extensive critique.[54] The dimension I am calling `habitat', on the other hand, has been relatively under-theorised,[55] even by Bourdieu himself. He rarely uses the term itself. Thus, for example, he mentions it in passing:

> [The] indisputable charm of stable and relatively undifferentiated societies...arises from the quasi-perfect coincidence between *habitus* and habitat, between the schemes of mythic vision of the world and the structure of domestic space, for example, organized according to the same oppositions. (Bourdieu 2000:147)

and again:

> When the same history pervades both habitus and habitat...history communicates in a sense to itself. (152)[56]

But apart from a few cases like this the term is rarely used.

Perhaps the reason for this neglect is deliberate. The early work in which `habitat' is most thoroughly explored is his study of the space of the Kabyle house. Bourdieu refers to this study on a number of occasions as the product of a stage of his own thinking when he was still working "within the limits of structuralist thought" (Bourdieu:307) and as a "blissful structuralist" (Bourdieu:9). In other words, he seems to be suggesting that he has moved on – theoretically at least – from the position that informed his analysis at that time. Yet, the fact that he has himself chosen to publish and reprint the French version of it, almost unamended, on a number of occasions - more than any of his other works (Bourdieu 1970; Bourdieu 1972; Bourdieu 1977a; Bourdieu 1980) - is itself some indication,

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[54] A simple search of the SSCI gives nearly 900 references to this term.

[55] Readers will be disappointed with Celia Lury's discussion of `Habitus and Habitat' in her book *Consumer culture* (Lury 1996:79-117). The `Habitat' that Lury writes about is exactly that: Habitat with a capital `H' – the furniture and furbishings store!

[56] Strangely enough the field in which the terms habitus and habitat are paired quite unselfconsciously is entomology. Thus:

> The similarity in **habitus** and other characters between Crinodessus and Boongurrus Larson is hypothesized to be a result of homoplasy due to similar behaviour and common adaptation to a similar **habitat.** (Miller 1997:483 emphases in original)

Maybe Lévi-Strauss was right and we should begin to study human beings as if they were ants!

perhaps, of a recognition that in his concentration on developing a theory of *habitus* he does not address the issue of habitat, of history embodied or embedded in the world.[57] There may, however, be other reasons for this neglect.

Bourdieu, in spite of what I have said, has a tendency to privilege the human agent, the organismic dimension of the organism-environment developmental process. The greater emphasis on the theoretical development of the concept of `habitus', the first `state of the social', rather than the concept of `social space', the second, is one indication of this. It is also demonstrated in such statements as these:

> Habitus, the product of a historical acquisition, is what **enables** the legacy of history to be appropriated. Just as the letter escapes from the state of a dead letter only through the act of reading which presupposes an acquired aptitude for reading and deciphering, so the history objectified in instruments, monuments, works, techniques, etc. can become activated and active history only if it is taken in hand by agents who, because of their previous investments, are inclined to be interested in it and endowed with the aptitudes needed to reactivate it. (Bourdieu:151, emphasis added)

In this surprising move, Bourdieu reverts to the language of subjectivism, granting an autonomous *habitus* the power to give life to dead history. This tension remains

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[57] I think that Bourdieu drew his inspiration for this structural study of the Kabyle house from Lévi-Strauss's exemplary study of the structure of the Bororo habitat (Lévi-Strauss 1973d:278-320). I can't help feeling that Bourdieu's subsequent development of the concept of *habitus* owes a lot to the following observations by Lévi-Strauss on the Bororo. In these observations Lévi-Strauss allocates habitat a very important role:

> The circular arrangement of the huts around the men's house is so important a factor in [Bororo] social and religious life that the Salesian missionaries were quick to realize that the surest way to convert the Bororo was to make them abandon their village in favour of one with houses set out in parallel rows. Once they had been deprived of their bearings and were without the plan which acted as confirmation of their native lore, the Indians soon lost any feeling for tradition; it was as if their social and religious systems were too complex to exist without this pattern which was embodied in the plan of the village and of which their awareness was constantly refreshed by their everyday activities. (Lévi-Strauss 1973d:286)

What is this but a recognition of, in so-called undifferentiated societies, the complicity between habitus and habitat? The appalling strategy of the Salesians, who are recognised by Lévi-Strauss as being quite good anthropologists(!), shows that they too had a sense of this connection, the connection between the two states of being-in-the-world.

unresolved in his writing because very shortly he reverts once again to a more consistent formulation:

> When the same history pervades both habitus and habitat...history communicates in a sense to itself, gives back to itself its own reflection. The doxic relation to the native world is a relationship of belonging and possession in which the body possessed by history appropriates immediately the things inhabited by the same history. Only when the heritage **has taken over** the inheritor can the inheritor take over the heritage. (Bourdieu:152, emphasis added)

In other words he grants agency not just to the inheritor but also the heritage. In fact, in this particular formulation, priority is given to the heritage!! It is the heritage that has agency through the actions of "possession" and "taking over" the habituated organism.

The most extended statement on this goes as follows:

> The world of objects, a kind of book in which each thing speaks metaphorically of all others and from which children learn to read the world, is read with the whole body, in and through the movements and displacements which define the space of objects as much as they are defined by it. The structures that help to construct the world of objects are constructed in the practice of a world of objects constructed in accordance with the same structures. The `subject' born of the world of objects does not arise as a subjectivity facing an objectivity: the objective universe is made up of objects which are the product of objectifying operations structured according to the same structures that the *habitus* applies to them. The *habitus* is a metaphor of the world of objects, which is itself an endless circle of metaphors that mirror each other *ad infinitum.* (Bourdieu 1990a:76-77)

How we are meant to interpret Bourdieu's concept of `metaphor' here is uncertain. Jackson says:

> In my view, metaphor reveals unities; it is not a figurative way of denying dualities. Metaphor reveals, not the `thisness of a that' but rather that `this ***is*** that'. (Jackson 1989:142)[58]

It seems to me that this is what Bourdieu is suggesting; that "the world of physical things is continuous with the animate and articulate world" (Jackson:141). In other words habitus is habitat.[59]

`Habitat', `world' are terms that make brief appearances in Bourdieu's overall framework. Clearly, when he is thinking about the larger frame, these are the complements to the concept of *habitus*. But Bourdieu, despite appearances, is not given to abstract theory and his approach to conceptual development is rooted in the needs of the analysis of particular studies. Given this the terms most theorised in his work that most closely approximate the idea of habitat are `field' and `social space'. `Field' is defined by Bourdieu as follows:

> In analytic terms, a field may be defined as a network, or configuration, of objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present or potential situation (*situs*) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.). (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:97)

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[58] The reference here is to Kenneth Burke's comment that metaphor "brings out the thisness of a that, or the thatness of a this". See Sapir and Crocker (1977:I).

[59] Jackson, it seems to me, uses the concept of *habitus* in exactly this sense:

> We live in built-up environments. Our habitual patterns of movement in the everyday world are constrained by the parameters of houses, buildings, rooms, and thoroughfares. Ours is a *habitus* of walls and enclosures, of well-marked exits and entrances, paths and roads. This material *habitus* determines a particular sensibility which sees boundaries as a precondition of meaning. (Jackson 1995:85)

In this account, the `material *habitus*' determines the `sensible *habitus*'. I prefer, following Bourdieu, to speak of habitat rather than material *habitus*.

This definition clearly shows that what Bourdieu is thinking of when he talks of `field' is far less than what we are suggesting by the term `habitat'. `Fields' are a **part** of habitat rather than habitat itself. Habitat rather, is "the practical world that is constituted in the relationship with the *habitus*...a world of already realized ends – procedures to follow, paths to take - and of objects endowed with a "permanent teleological character", in Husserl's phrase, tools or institutions" (Bourdieu 1990a:53).

In fact Bourdieu's `field' has an even more limited range of applicability because it is a concept that is, according to Bourdieu himself, mostly applicable to what he calls "highly differentiated societies" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:97). In other words, though fields are a part of habitat, of the "practical world", they are only a part of that world for a particular kind of society – our own. It is in differentiated societies that one finds fields of cultural production, the economic field, the field of education, the field of power and so on. They are part of the habitat constituted in relation to the kind of habitus operational in "differentiated" societies.

In less differentiated societies, however, it is the whole habitat that operates in relation to habitus in a "quasi-perfect coincidence". There are no fields: just a total and totalising habitat. The schemes of habitus constantly merge with the structures of habitat.[60] In conclusion, though there are some very intriguing thoughts about habitat in Bourdieu's work these are *theoretically* underdeveloped and take second place to the development of the concept of habitus.[61]

Appadurai

Bourdieu's perspective reanimates things by including them as part of habitat, itself conceived of in an animate form. The scholar most famous for reanimating objects and things is Appadurai. In his influential introduction to the collection of essays

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[60] Some would suggest that Bourdieu reveals another aspect of his Durkheimianism in this contrast between differentiated and less differentiated societies which echoes Durkheim's distinction between organic and mechanical solidarity (Wacquant 2000b). However, there is an important difference: Bourdieu actually theorises the relation of agents and structures in more and less differentiated societies whereas Durkheim does not.

[61] Bourdieu is not entirely consistent on this matter. Thus, on at least one occasion, he equates `field' with a `form of life', an equation consistent with my larger argument (Bourdieu 2000:115)

on *The social life of things*, Appadurai suggests "no social analysis of things can avoid a minimum level of what might be called methodological fetishism" (Appadurai 1986:5). From this point of view the meanings of things are "inscribed in their forms, in their uses, in their trajectories" (Appadurai:5).

Appadurai, in other words, comes to a similar conclusion to Bourdieu's though he arrives at it from a different direction or `approach'. Yet, Appadurai's position is subtly different from Bourdieu's. A careful analysis of his argument shows that he has arrived at the right conclusion but because he has arrived at it from a different direction he has framed it in such a way that it loses its potency:

> Even if our own approach to things is conditioned necessarily by the view that things have no meanings apart from those that human transactions, attributions, and motivations endow them with, the anthropological problem is that this formal truth does not illuminate the concrete, historical circulation of things. For that we have to follow the things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories. It is only through the analysis of these trajectories that we can interpret the human transactions and calculations that enliven things. Thus, even though from a *theoretical* point of view human actors encode things with significance, from a *methodological* point of view it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context. No social analysis of things ...can avoid a minimum level of what might be called methodological fetishism. (1986:5 emphases in orginal)

Appadurai's formulation is culturalist. It is based on the idea of the autonomous creative human weaving or constructing significance and then imposing it on a passive nature. It argues that from a *methodological* point of view it is useful to think of things having lives of their own though from a *theoretical* point of view the God-like human breathes life into them. This is the typical hubris of all culturalist approaches. Far from the methodology advocated by Appadurai being fetishistic it is his theoretical stance which is hubristic, abrogating magical powers to a fetishised human being. In terms of a developmental process perspective it is from a *methodological* point of view that we have to see things as being enlivened by

human transactions whereas from a *theoretical* point of view they are already part of living processes.

The irony is that in the paragraph preceding his observations on fetishism, Appadurai skims over those very observations that might have led him to challenge his own trajectory into this issue. He points out that Marcel Mauss had observed "the powerful *contemporary* tendency to regard the world of things as inert and mute, set in motion and animated, indeed knowable, only by persons and their words. Yet, in many *historical* societies, things have not been so divorced from the capacity of persons to act and the power of words to communicate" (Appadurai:4 emphases added).

What would be the lesson an anthropologist draws from this? Surely not to doubly reinforce the ontological predilections of her own society and deny the realities of these historical societies by repeating the mantra of the need to distinguish between persons and things!! Yet, this is precisely what Appadurai goes on to do.[62]

However, there is a real resistance to even methodological fetishism in anthropology. As Ferguson observes in his review of the Appadurai collection:

> Unfortunately, and perhaps inevitably, the contributed articles fail to follow through on the expectations raised in the introduction. The promise seems to be of something very new and different; an approach at once political, processual, and interpretive, founded on the methodological premise that economic objects are social beings whose `lives' and `careers' must be explored...One goes into the body of the book expecting experimental approaches to commodity `biographies'... Instead, the book is made up of mostly quite conventional articles in the sociology of exchange and consumption, and on the social histories of particular industries...In fact, most of the pieces do not make use of the concept of

[62] Appadurai seems quite confused on this issue. He refers approvingly to Alfred Schmidt's criticism of Marx's own idealism which "reduces all economic categories to relationships between human beings, the world composed of relations and processes and not of bodily material things" (58). In other words, Marx's observations on "commodity fetishism" demonstrate his idealism and not his materialism.

> `social lives' at all, and there is very little that could be described as `cultural biography' of objects. (Ferguson 1988:497-98)

The reasons for this failure to take up Appadurai's challenge can, ironically, be found in Ferguson's own article. Ferguson's largely positive evaluation of Appadurai's own programmatic theoretical essay is based on the assessment that Appadurai has reintroduced cultural questions into economic anthropology and political economic questions into cultural anthropology.

> In all, Appadurai has sketched a promising and exciting outline of a theory of `regimes of value'. He challenges economic assumptions by revealing the cultural aspect of `utility' and `market exchange'; at the same time he politicizes old cultural questions of exchange and consumption. In drawing out simultaneously the political *and* the meaningful dimensions of demand, exchange, and consumption, Appadurai's approach promises to connect economic life with both culture and power in illuminating new ways. (497)

But it is precisely this culturalist *theoretical* bias that prevents Appadurai from pushing through with the insight that is embodied in his methodological fetishism. Ferguson praises Appadurai for the cultural dimensions of his theory whereas it is this very dimension of his theory that prevents Appadurai (and the contributors to the collection) from taking up the radical perspective embodied in Appadurai's methodological proclamations because culturalism inevitably privileges human agency and devalues the agency of the world inhabited by humans.[63]

This radical perspective would suggest that in order to advance the perspective being outlined here we need to take a `fetishistic', even `animistic', approach to theorising `habitat'.

[63] This is implied in Bourdieu's idea of "being in the objectified state".

An animate habitat

Anthropology's Cartesian dilemma

I have used the word `irony' a number of times through this essay. The biggest irony, perhaps, is the attempt being made here to achieve a theoretical space for a way of thinking and being in the world which, as I have already indicated, is taken for granted by many of the societies anthropologists study. In other words, even before we can begin to understand these societies we have to do battle with our own. And even the expression `our own' is not accurate enough because what is referred to by that phrase is the "scholastic point of view". Bourdieu alludes to this irony:

> [The] inclination to adopt a magical attitude towards the world, which was much more improbable for a French philosopher of the 1950s like Jean-Paul Sartre, who evokes such an experience in his *Sketch for a theory of the emotions*, than for a Trobriand Islander in the 1930s as described by Malinowski. Whereas in the former case this way of seeing the world only arises exceptionally, as an accident provoked by a critical situation, in the latter case it is constantly encouraged and favoured both by the extreme uncertainty and unpredictability of existence and by the socially approved responses to those conditions, foremost amongst which is called magic, a practical relation to the world which is instituted in collective rites and thereby constituted as a normal element of normal human behaviour in that society. (Bourdieu 2000:16)

In other words there is a scholastic point of view which is immanent in a set of dispositions, of a particular way of being-in-the-world. This point of view is almost inherently idealistic, inherently `impractical'. And yet it is this very `impractical' point of view which is engaged in trying to understand ways of being-in-the-world which have more in common with each other than with it. Even Bourdieu succumbs to scholastic reductionism by seeming to suggest that the magical way of `world-making' is tied up with the "uncertainty and unpredictability of the conditions of existence" which results in "socially approved responses to those

conditions, foremost among which is what is called magic." (Bourdieu:16).[64] Viveiros de Castro refers to this as "the theory of magic as a counter-anxiety device" (Viveiros de Castro 1999:S80). This is exactly the kind of modernist understanding, with its own peculiar idea of the relation between mind-body, that we need to get away from.[65]

Forms of being-in-the-world

In the 1980s there developed an interest in the concept of the person and personhood as a subject for cross-cultural study. Drawing inspiration from Marcel Mauss's essay on the notion of the person (Mauss 1979) and on Geertz's essay on the notion of the person in Bali, a number of studies explored the concept of the person in different cultures. These studies filled the vacuum left by the decline in studies of kinship and coincided with a rise in studies of gender classification. At the same time there were a number of related developments. I have already alluded to the increasing number of studies of the body and embodiment. The cross-cultural study of the emotions also became a focus of interest at this time.

All of these developments took place within the framework of an understanding of *human* personhood, emotion, selfhood, body, etc. There was little questioning of the divide between humanity and nature. This was not surprising, as the broad theoretical framework within which these developments took place was still largely culturalist, as I have outlined in the previous chapter. The key theme was `cultural construction' - of the person, of the emotions, of the self. What those engaged in these developments did not realise was that they imported a whole metaphysics with their culturalist and constructivist perspective which was at odds with the materials they were engaging with. This metaphysics posited a radical and clear ontological distinction between the human and the non-human which was consistent with the taken for granted distinctions which formed part of the common sense, the foundations of `truth' of Western societies. In this `common sense', personhood was restricted to human beings and could not be extended beyond.

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[64] Bourdieu's actual formulation is circular: he suggest that magical attitude towards the world is encouraged and favoured by a magical relation to the world! (2000:16)

[65] Laura Rival seems to suggest that the mind-body problem is an "exclusively human" rather than exclusively Western problem (1999:S85).

We are getting close to the heart of the metaphysical issues that this argument is leading towards.[66] How can we do an `anthropology' (and here the very name for the discipline is problematised) in a context where the distinction which we - a particular constellation of habitus/habitat - make between human and non-human is simply not present. If, for example, "our" non-humans – jaguars, vultures, peccaries – are in fact people too or see themselves as persons,[67] what becomes of our *anthro*pology? In other words, in parts of Amazonia `humanity' does not coincide with the human species as defined by us but includes jaguars, vultures, peccaries. This is not to say that there are no differences between them but this simply attaches to their bodily forms! As Viveiros de Castro observes there is an interesting reversal here: whereas, for us, there is a continuity between humans and animals at the physical level we see ourselves as radically distinct at the level of `spirit'- we are the *cultural* animal. In parts of Amazonia, on the other hand, there is continuity at the level of spirit i.e. jaguars, vultures, etc. are `humans' as well, it is just that their bodily forms differ. Thus, the ontological distinctions we make are not universal. `Being' takes a variety of forms in different parts of the world and we need to develop an approach that allows space for these forms without the superimposition of our `common sense'. Bourdieu's attribution of agency and being to the objectified state of the world alludes this idea.

Nurit Bird-David has recently opened a debate about `animism' (Bird-David 1999). Drawing on ethnographic materials from research in South India with Nayaka gatherer-hunters she shows how they work with a relational epistemology which contrasts markedly with the objectivist epistemology that marks modern relations with the environment. Objectivist epistemology "involves acquiring knowledge *of* things through the separation of knower and known and often, furthermore, by breaking the known down into its parts in order to know" (Bird-David:S77).

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[66] These are dangerous waters. Edith Turner's experience with her account of having observed the *ihamba* spirit come out of the back of a patient at a ritual amongst eh Ndembu is an object lesson. It has been greeted with incredulity. These are her words of what she observed:

> Suddenly Meru raised her arm, stretched it in liberation, and I *saw* with my own eyes a giant thing emerging out of the flesh of her back. This thing was a large gray blob about six inches across, a deep grey opaque thing emerging as a sphere. (1992:149)

[67] Viveiros de Castro says: "In sum, animals are people, or see themselves as persons" (1998:470).

Relational epistemology, on the other hand, involves "attentiveness to variances and invariances in behaviour and response of things in states of relatedness and for getting to know such things as they change through the vicissitudes over time of the engagement with them" (S77). She uses the example of trees: "If `cutting trees into parts' epitomizes the modernist epistemology, `talking with trees' epitomizes Nayaka animistic epistemology. `Talking' is short-hand for a two-way responsive relatedness with a tree – rather than `speaking' one-way to it, as if it could listen and understand" (S77).[68] This epistemology leads to behaviour which we ethnocentrically label `animist' because we do not understand its logic.[69]

She argues that both kinds of epistemology can be found in both worlds but that in the modern world objectivist epistemology has authority and relational epistemology is relegated to the background. By contrast, in the Nayaka world relational epistemology has authority though objectivist epistemology also plays some part:

> Framing the environment relationally does not constitute Nayaka's only way of knowing their environment, though in my understanding they regard it as authoritative among their other ways. Nor is it unique to Nayaka. ...Relational epistemologies function in diverse contexts where other epistemologies enjoy authority, including Western contexts (to a much greater extent that the authoritative status of science permits). When we animate the computers we use, the plants we grow, and the cars we drive, we relationally frame them. We learn what they do in relation to what we do, how they respond to our behaviour, how they act towards us, what their situational and emergent behaviour (rather than their constitute matter) is. (Bird-David 1999:S78)

In other words we need to acknowledge that in trying to understand the animated world we have a lot to learn from encounters with other worlds (I would go beyond

[68] Speaking trees have a long history in India (Lannoy 1971:xxv).

[69] Part of our problems are related to the very word `epistemology' itself, because implicit in it is a particular conception of which evinces a division between the knower and the known.

Bird-David and resile from the expression `we animate' because it, once again, lets the Cartesian devil through the back door).

What I want to argue, then, is that, in order to overcome the inherent Cartesianism of existing approaches to reality we should demote the objectivist epistemology that underlies our scholastic theory and promote a relational epistemology as the bedrock on which we built an anthropological understanding of the processes of the material world and our presence in it. We should take seriously the idea that non-human things can act, have lives and `be'. We should encourage what Ferguson calls "experimental approaches to `commodity biographies'" (Ferguson 1988:497) so that we can begin to build an understanding of our world that allows space for non-objectivist ontologies and epistemologies and to take `things' seriously as part of our life-worlds and those of others. In other words, we should develop an anthropology that allows the alternative ontologies and epistemologies space without retreating to the comfort of objectivist and scholastic ontology and epistemology.[70] Rather than using Geertz's dialectic of `experience near' and `experience far' concepts we would do better to find the experience far *in* the experience near.

A particularly privileged site for developing this form of anthropology is our `own' form of life. If we can restore some authority to relational forms of engagement

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[70] Sharma has recently written:

> Re-reading what I have written, I find the terms I have used in no way escape the dualism which was defined as problematic in the first place...I am not optimistic that it will be possible to overcome the dualisms embedded in western culture and still produce a language for understanding the integration of corporeal, mental and cultural life which fits into the paradigm we call academic anthropology. (Sharma 1996:261-62)

Clearly what is called for, then, is paradigmatic change, something she seems to be extremely reluctant to engage in because of her somewhat casual dismissal of Ingold's approach to the problems:

> Ingold's suggestions have not been adopted by other anthropologists, probably because they require too great a paradigm shift. On the whole anthropologists are clinging more rather than less strongly to the programme of demonstrating the primacy of culture over biology (and sociologists to the programme of social constructionism), seeking ways of resolving the `problem' of the body within it. (253-54)

This is rather an odd approach. It reminds one of the story of the drunk who had lost his keys and when asked why it was that he kept looking for them under the lamppost rather than where he had dropped them replied because it was brighter there!

with the world at the very heart of that form of life in which these relational forms are subordinated we will have begun to counter Cartesian dualism. And if we can do this from within the scholastic frame of reference, it would be even better. In the following chapters I take a biographical[71] to a particular kind of object which is at the heart of the scholastic world of Cartesianism – the book. I try to show how it acts in the world - as a totemic operator, as a charismatic thing, and as the centre of new ritual forms. These are only some of its characteristics that a relational epistemology reveals. Rather than being a communication device linking minds, it is an object with its own presence in the world and to which there are myriad ways of relating other than just `reading'. I try, in other words, an exercise in the understanding of the life of this enchanting object which speaks to us and in more ways than simply the words that are inscribed in its pages.

It may be the case that our present forms of engagement with reality do not permit a complete understanding along the lines I have suggested above. Barthes makes the following point:

> It seems that this is a difficulty pertaining to our times: there is as yet only one possible choice, and this choice can bear only on two equally extreme methods: either to posit a reality which is entirely permeable to history, and ideologize; or, conversely,to posit a reality which is ultimately impenetrable, irreducible, and, in this case, poetize. In a word, I do not yet see a synthesis between ideology and poetry (by poetry I understand, in a very general way, *the search for the inalienable meaning of things*). The fact that we cannot manage to achieve more than an unstable grasp of reality doubtless gives the measure of our present alienation: we constantly drift between the object and its demystification, powerless to render its wholeness. For if we penetrate the object, we liberate it but we destroy it; and if we acknowledge its *full weight*, we respect it, but we restore it to a state which is still mystified. It would seem that we are condemned for some time yet to speak *excessively* about reality. This is probably because ideologism and its opposite are

[71] This term itself should by now be problematised in that, if we concede alternative ontologies, then that which has life is not restricted to those things which *we* designate as having life from within our `scientific' ontologies.

> types of behaviour which are still magical, terrorized, blinded and fascinated by the split in the social world. And yet, this is what we must seek: a reconciliation between reality and men, between description and explanation, between object and knowledge. (1973:159 emphases added)[72]

Barthes makes the choices rather stark. I would argue it differently. Someone has referred to the kind of analysis done by some ethnographers of other religious traditions as `onion analysis'. Religious traditions and practices are taken apart, layer by layer so that nothing is left at the end and they are effectively explained away. What we should be doing in relation to our own world is `growing the onion'. Layer by layer we should grow that which we observe so that it becomes denser than we had ever imagined before. Whereas in relation to other traditions we seek a form of translation which allows us to understand, commune with already existing mysteries, with our own we are seeking ways of recovering the wholeness of things, re-enchanting them.

CODA

Stephen Jay Gould draws attention to the work of Merton on "multiple discoveries in science". Gould says that Merton demonstrates that it is not at all uncommon for a number of scholars to have the same ideas simultaneously and quite independently of each other. The most famous of these, of course, and the one which is the occasion for Gould's reflections, is the case of Alfred Wallace and Charles Darwin who quite independently of each other elaborated the theory of evolution through natural selection. Darwin's discovery was, of course, prior but Wallace put him in something of a bind by writing to him and giving him an outline of his version of the theory. Quite sensibly both versions of the theory were presented and published simultaneously (Gould 1980:43ff). In explanation of this phenomenon, Gould says "Most great ideas are `in the air', and several scholars simultaneously wave their nets" (43).

It was not, then, entirely surprising to me to discover, after I had finished writing this section of the thesis, a number of works, some very recent indeed and others

[72] Cf. Attfield (2000:34).

only slightly less recent, which canvassed the same range of ideas, arriving at very similar conclusions even if from quite different trajectories.[73] One, in particular, comes so close to the perspective developed here that I would like to describe it briefly. Amiria Salmond in her *Thinking through things; museums, anthropology and imperial exchange*, a University of Cambridge Thesis, develops a critique which encompasses British and French social anthropology and arrives at very complementary conclusions to those offered here. Salmond identifies the turn towards the "social and the psychological" and the raising of `language' as "a form of evidence, a technology for expressing ideas, and as a metaphor for understanding every cultural form and detail of society" as the problematic development which has led us away from direct encounters with things. She ascribes these developments to W. H. R. Rivers. Lévi-Strauss took this even further in the "second linguistic turn" and his demotion of "thinking through things", the thinking of the *bricoleur*, as a second rate activity. She argues for a return to object-based epistemologies (Salmond 2001:367ff):

> Objects, in other words, make us as much as we make them. While there may be dangers in the "the essentialist notion that the identity of material things is fixed in their structure and form" (Thomas 1991:28), it is also necessary to appreciate how those "structures" and "forms" can act to constrain or enhance social lives. Marx demonstrated that commodities can accrue value far beyond the cost of the time, labour and materials required to make them, but he was also acutely aware (like the functionalists) that people need things to get by. It is not enough, therefore, to indulge in "sign substitution in a play of signification" if the goal is to reach some deeper understanding of social life. In studying and analysing the different ways in which people live, it is useful, if not essential, to examine the social, practical, and political efficacy of material things, as well as their "symbolic" or semiotic meanings. (Salmond 2001:409)

[73] They include Alfred Gell's *Art and agency; an anthropological theory* (Gell 1998) and his *The art of anthropology* (Gell 1999).

And in a fascinating analysis of the differences in approach to the care of the Maori and Pakeha collections at Te Papa Tongarewa Museum of New Zealand (The National Museum of Aotearoa New Zealand), she demonstrates in a vivid way the different ontological assumptions that underlie the relation of Maori care-takers, *kaitiaki*, to the collections in their care and management as compared to that of their Pakeha colleagues:

> The Maori collections at Te Papa are cared for and managed mainly by Maori staff, according to specific protocols which respect the nature of *taonga* as embodiments of ancestral power as well as the usual conservation regulations observed by most metropolitan museums. This special regard for the artefacts in their care is reflected in the displays of the *Mana Whenua* gallery, which are reverential and object-focussed in contrast to those representing *`pakeha'* or settler history, where artefacts are somewhat overshadowed by the design of colourful graphics and text panels, dramatic lighting, reconstructed environments and interactive displays.

In other words, the artefacts in the care of Maori are seen as being alive, as animate and more than just things in the world without any being. They are not used to tell stories, the way objects are used in the narrative, language based epistemologies underlying the pakeha exhibitions but are presented as beings in their own right that speak directly to those who encounter them. The epistemology that underlies *kaitiaki* guardianship of their *taonga* is, to use Bird-David's terms, relational and not objectivist.[74]

[74] Yet another irony: the epistemology that devalues objects is called "objectivist" whereas that which values them is called "relational".

CHAPTER 3 BOOKS AND THINGS; WHY BOOKS MATTER

The proper study of mankind is books.

Aldous Huxley, *Chrome Yellow*

To paraphrase Miller this chapter represents a second stage in the development of the argument that I have initiated "inasmuch as the point that things matter can now be argued to have been made" (Miller 1998b). They matter because they are part of habitats, forms of being-in-the-world. These habitats, far from being mute, passive domains are active fields of growth occupied by a myriad of varieties of being, including human beings. In this chapter I do not attempt to develop a general theory of objects in habitats because I agree with Miller that no such theory is possible. Both Miller and Bourdieu criticise semio-logical analysis, of the kind that Barthes initiated, because of its failure to recognise the specificity of different object domains. Barthes, following Lévi-Strauss, seemed to argue that one could analyse almost any set of objects as signs systems, as if they were a kind of language. Miller and Bourdieu point out that such an approach is unrealistic and does not take into account the differences between different domains.

What I want to do in this chapter is to begin showing how and why books matter in our time and place, in our habitat. In other words, to focus on what Miller would call the "specificity of their materiality" (1998b:8) and also, more speculatively, to try and answer the question why they matter the way they do. Miller has argued that to explore an object from the point of view of why it "matters" is different from exploring it from the point of view why it may be "important" or "significant". He says:

> These alternative terms tend to imply a criterion derived solely from analytical enquiry, as in the idea that "I demonstrate an important relationship between social dimension A and artefact form B". The term "matter", by contrast, tends to a more diffused, almost sentimental association that is more likely to lead us to the concerns of those being

> studied than those doing the studying. It puts the burden of mattering clearly on *evidence of concern to those being discussed.* (Miller 1998b:11 emphases added)

Later in this chapter I will begin to present this evidence. But we need to be careful here and note that this "evidence of concern" need not be conscious statements of the sort "X matters to me" articulated by informants. "Evidence of concern" may take inarticulate forms and may never reach conscious expression. We need, as Miller says, to find a solution to the problem of "mere reportage of the voice of experience" on the one hand, and "merely formalistic application of schema of analysis" on the other, between the relativism of post-modernism and the objectivism of various structuralisms. My experimental solution, as a first step, is to evoke or "intensify" - in the sense defined by Kathleen Stewart and discussed in the next chapter - the sense of the ways in which books matter and, more particularly, have a life (Stewart 1996).[75] I will begin, however, by looking at *other* domains that have been subjected to anthropological "understanding". Some interesting patterns are revealed in this exploration.

THE WORLD OF GOODS IN GENERAL

> Scully was like his father that way. No matter what the Salvos said, the old fella thought certain objects were godly. Briggs and Stratton motors, the McCulloch chainsaw, the ancient spirit level that lived in the work-shed beside the dairy, the same bubbly level that caused Scully junior to have ideas of drawing and building. Ah, those *things*. The old girl thought it was idolatry, but she had a brass thimble she treasured more than her wedding ring. It wasn't getting things and having them that Scully learnt; it was simply admiring them, getting a charge out of their strange presence. (Winton 1995:66)

One of the characteristics of the world we live in at the beginning of the 21st century in New Zealand is that it is, in the words of Mary Douglas, a "world of

[75] One could see it as a discursive analogue of the kind that James Agee said he was forced to use when confronted with the task of writing an ethnography of tenant farmers. I discuss this briefly in the next chapter.

goods" (Douglas and Isherwood 1979). If one were to try and catalogue the artefactual and object world around us - even in the space of something as seemingly simple as the study in which I write this - one would begin to be exhausted by the task. In front of me I have a computer (itself made of some discrete elements: monitor, keyboard, mouse, etc), a stapler, staple remover, hole-puncher, calculator, watch, numerous biros and pencils, floppy disks, a CD-ROM container, desk, table lamp, reams of paper, envelopes, telephone, cassette tapes, my glasses, books by the hundred, archive boxes, cycle helmet, and so on. This brief inventory does not begin to scratch the surface of the burden that creating a full inventory imposes. And this cornucopia of things is a world which we inhabit without the slightest problem. Not only do we inhabit a natural world of trees, earth and sky but we also inhabit this world of material goods. More than this, we inhabit it as one world not two. John Searle has commented on what he calls the "metaphysical burden of social reality". We can bear it, he says, because it is "weightless and invisible". We simply take it for granted because "we learn to perceive and use cars, bathtubs, houses, money, restaurants, and schools...They seem as natural to us as stones and water and trees" (Searle 1995:4).

Miller, too, draws attention to the sheer weight of the world of goods we live in by outlining the problems we would be confronted with if we should want to create a museum of contemporary artefacts:

> Imagine we decide to establish a museum of contemporary material culture in order to preserve for posterity the artefacts of today. A comprehensive collecting policy is intended. It will not be long before the farcical nature of this scheme become apparent. Some things, such as houses and ships, are too big, some things, such as candy floss and daisy chains, too ephemeral. Is a softwood plantation a natural or an artefactual form? Do we start with industrially produced goods and, if so, do we include every brand of car door, mirrors and shampoo, and if a company proclaims a change in the product is this a new artefact or not? What about self-made artefacts, those that children have made at school, or that individuals have knitted on the bus? Clearly we cannot create such a

> museum, although we may observe the extraordinary variety of exhibitions that might be put on, featuring collections of anything from matchboxes to garden gnomes. (1994:396)

We can contrast this with, say, the world of an Indian peasant. An inventory of the goods that make up her world would come up with a very limited list indeed and, furthermore, for the most part this list would be typical in that the list composed for one individual would be much the same as that for another.[76] It would consist of, for an entire household, a few pots and pans, a limited range of clothes, a few furnishings - possibly a bed or two, a bicycle, some clothes, and so on. And even this, the world of goods that an Indian peasant inhabits, represents, in the history of humanity, a considerable increase in "weight" as compared with the worlds of goods that have encompassed or informed most human societies during human history.

The question then arises, for a study such as this one and for the argument made in the previous chapter, given the sheer weight or extension of the world of goods in the world that we inhabit in the West, how then do we identify those material goods that *matter*, that have a *particular* significance in social space? Of all those things around me in my room that I described earlier why should we single out books for special attention? That question is deliberately ambiguous. The "we" referred to is the both the anthropological "we" and the native "we".

In order to get to grips with this issue I begin by looking at what the anthropological "we" has indicated as mattering by focussing on that to which it has already turned its analytical gaze.

FOOD, CLOTHING AND SHELTER

Some objects of the material world already matter because they have received a considerable amount of attention from social scientists. In particular, food (in a variety of forms) and cloth, textiles, and goods made from them (clothes, carpets,

[76] A certain form of Indian ethnography is given to tabulating such inventories. Perusal of the list of goods that make up these inventories dramatically demonstrates the much smaller world of goods that such peasants inhabit (Sachchidananda 1964).

etc), have long been of interest to anthropologists.[77] This is not altogether surprising. "Food, clothing and shelter" has been a mantra referring, in a kind of commonsensical way, to the supposedly "fundamental needs" of human beings. An early functionalism, elaborated by Malinowski, made such needs the centre of a teleological theory of human society where various dimensions of social life were seen as responses to those basic needs. However, even when this kind of functionalist theory had long been abandoned the object domains that it had carved out for prominence were passed on to otherwise quite different forms of theory and interpretation. Thus a theory such as structuralism, which was entirely incompatible with teleological functionalism, nevertheless still engaged with object domains as delineated by it. One can even see, perhaps, in the grandest work of the kind of cerebral structuralism propounded by Lévi-Strauss hints of these earlier, functionalist, preoccupations: thus in the long series on the science of mythology, from *The raw and the cooked,* through *From honey to ashes* and *The origin of table manners* to *The naked man* Lévi-Strauss's focus seems to have been on food and "clothing" (taken in its widest sense).

We should not, then, be surprised that in a variety of field sites these objects - food and clothing - are the goods that matter for the investigating anthropologist. Thus, for example, in his study of a rural Indian village Adrian Mayer discusses at length transactions in food and cloth which constitute the fabric of relationships in the social life of its inhabitants (Mayer 1960:33ff and 202ff). Food transactions are a powerful indicator of status. The discourse of caste is partly written in the lexicon of food and the discourse of affinal and consanguinial relations is partly written in the lexicon of cloth. Who eats what with whom is a sure indicator of status and who gives cloth and clothing to whom and how much are indicators of kinship relationships.

Worlds away, Annette Weiner, in her re-study of the social life of the Trobriand Islands made famous by Malinowski's studies, also analyses social life through a

[77] For food see (Mintz and Du Bois 2002); For cloth see (Schneider 1987; Weiner and Schneider 1989). Food has a whole Commission of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences devoted to it.

study of transactions in food - principally yams and pigs - and transactions in clothing - skirts made from banana leaves - to illuminate the dynamics of gender and kin relationships amongst the islanders (Weiner 1976). And even that perennial of anthropological reference, *The Nuer*, focuses on the cow, the major source of sustenance amongst the Nath (Evans-Pritchard 1940).

Food and textile goods have also received considerable attention from anthropologists in their studies of "Western" societies. In his study of "Western society as culture" Sahlins uses an analysis of both of these object domains as the road to an understanding of "Western" culture (1976:166ff). Yet, he seems to be quite unconscious of the fact that he is treading very traditional paths in selecting these two domains.

The collection of essays edited by Riggins titled *The socialness of things* devotes its two substantive parts to "The built environment" and "Clothing and adornment" - shelter and clothing again (Riggins 1994). And even in such a path-breaking work as Appadurai's collection of essays on the social life of things we find that of the six substantive essays devoted to particular kinds of object, three are devoted to textile products (carpets and cloth) and one to a food substance (Appadurai 1986). And of the remaining two, in the end it is only the study of medieval relics that breaks new ground because the last, by an archaeologist, focuses on a very traditional archaeological topic, metallurgy.

Miller is wrong, then, when he suggests that analysts have not selected any domains of materiality as being of particular significance:

> In formal analysis the major technique was to reveal the homologies between distinctions drawn in one sphere with those of another. So, for example, a dimension already regarded as important such as class or gender could be shown to be reproduced in part through a host of material taxonomies as in *clothing, building* or systems for the classification of time, which may not at first have appeared to be based upon the same structural order but through analysis were revealed to be part of what Bourdieu called the same "habitus". The problem with such analysis is that it could apply to

> almost any area of cultural life, or material form, and although it pointed to the significance of domains of difference in general it did not specify, or single out, *any particular artefacts as being of special significance* (Miller 1998b:10 emphases added)

Yet his own words betray him because it is clear, in his choice of examples, that some domains constantly reappear in the repertoire of analysts ("clothing, building") and it is this very repetition that accentuates their significance.

Miller also writes:

> I want to suggest that the generality of materiality, that is any attempt to construct general theories of the material quality of artefacts, commodities, aesthetic forms and so forth, must be complemented by another strategy that looks at the specificity of material domains and the way form itself is employed to become the fabric of cultural worlds. To a degree this has arisen by default. We have already constructed in academia specific journals and academies concerned with the study *of food, of clothing, or architecture* and so forth. Each of these takes as axiomatic the particular character of their domain. (Miller 1998b:6 emphasis added)

Miller seems unaware that he is, once again, reiterating the mantra of "food, clothing and shelter". He does not seem to notice that in relation to the world of goods analysts have already selected these for particular attention.

It is clear, then, that there is a scholarly unconscious at work in anthropological studies[78] of the material world which privileges objects drawn from the domains of "food, clothing and shelter" for analysis.[79] Other types of good have been neglected. Rather than letting the natives (in this case "things") speak for themselves, a tendentious selection based on the taken-for-granted categories of a

[78] Of course, there has been a thriving industry in museum anthropology. But this has had no impact at all on general anthropology.

[79] There are exceptions of course to this general neglect. The most famous of these is the study, initiated by Malinowski but subsequently developed by a number of other anthropologists, of the ceremonial objects used in the Kula exchange system amongst the islands of the archipelago off the coast of south-east Papua New Guinea.

teleological functionalism is allowed free reign to define what is considered important or worthy of observation.

OTHER LIVES

The scene has begun to change as a result of the influence of the work of Appadurai, Bourdieu, Douglas, and Miller. Recently a number of anthropological studies have focussed on objects outside the canonical domains. Daniel Miller has been a leading figure in the reinvigoration of anthropological studies of material culture in the last decade and he and his students have produced a range of such studies (Miller 1998a). To these must be added the work of Thomas (1991), Hoskins (1998), and MacKenzie (1991). For this study of the lives of books, however, the following works are of particular interest.

The social life of trees

A collection of essays was recently published under the rubric *The Social Life of Trees.* Given its title and given that its disciplinary orientation is largely an anthropological one would have expected that this collection would have been an instantiation of the inspirational introduction by Appadurai to his collection on the social life of things. It is surprising to discover, therefore, that none of the contributors to this collection makes any reference to the collection on the social life of things nor do they link their work in any way with the developing field of material culture studies.[80] Rather, as Ingold rightly points out, in a review of the collection, the contributors largely address the issues implied in the sub-title of the collection *Anthropological Perspectives on Tree Symbolism* (Ingold 1999). In other words, the contributors for the most part do not take the idea of trees having a life seriously and focus rather, in a fairly traditional way for anthropology, on the way trees are used symbolically (in the context of their "practical" non-symbolic uses) and draw their tools from the sub-disciplines of symbolic and cognitive anthropology. The most significant exception is a study of the intertwined lives of trees/wood and human beings in the Kii Peninsula of Japan by Knight. Knight says:

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[80] There is a passing reference to Milers theoretical work on subject/object relations. The editors would have been more faithful to the content of the book if they had given it the same title as the conference from which it was drawn - *Trees and woods as social symbols.*

> The continuity, overlap, and even identity between trees and wood forms the basis of the importance of timber forests to local families. The two phases of the life of *ki* - as tree and then as timber wood - are associated with the phases of dependency and then independent nurturance among family members in the context of the enduring house. First, tree-growing is anthropomorphically defined. Tree-growing is imagined in terms of raising children (indeed as an ideal form of child-rearing). The growth of trees is mediated both by the actual human labour applied to them and by (anthropomorphic) ideas about their normative growth that inform this labour process. Secondly, the growth of trees in turn forms a medium through which the human-life course is imagined, but in a way that exceeds the biological lives of family members in favour of a more enduring sense of the family. This is materially expressed, on the one hand, in advanced growth forests and, on the other, in durable wooden houses. There is, therefore, a symbiosis (anthropocentrically defined) between human lives and the lives of trees. Human beings enable trees to grow straight and to live a second life as wooden houses. The trees both enrich their growers and shelter them. (1998:214)

Knight goes on to show how with the coming of ferroconcrete housing both trees and human beings now neglect each other and, just as parents whose children have left for the city have become redundant as parents, so forests which are no longer transformed into wood for houses cease to live their lives as nurturers of human beings.[81]

It is interesting to note that Knight hangs on to the ontological and epistemological framework of his own society by recasting the understandings of the inhabitants of the Kii Peninsula under the rubric of anthropomorphism. This is another example of how undialectical the supposed dialectic of "experience near" and "experience far" concepts is. In the final analysis, it is the unmodified "experience far" frames

[81] The relationship between the inhabitants of the Kii Peninsula and trees could be compared to that of the Mbuti with the forest (Turnbull 1961).

of reference that dominate the interpretation: the anthropologist remains within the comfort zone of his own ontological presuppositions.

Still, through Knight's work, we can see the life of trees in a different habitat and in a different configuration of relationships with human beings. For human beings in this habitat, trees matter in ways that they do not in the habitats inhabited by us.

The Thai Buddhist cult of amulets

> If you confronted a prosperous man in the streets of Bangkok - well dressed in suit and tie, or imposing in military uniform - and asked him to open his shirt collar, you would see a number of amulets encased in gold, silver, or bronze hanging on his gold necklace... Businessmen, military men, ordinary folk, the man or woman in the street - all openly talk of their interest in these amulets and readily show them to you, explicating their virtues and history. The scholars, university students, and teachers are more discreet, though no less credulous. Even the most "liberal" or "progressive" of them, espousing "modern science" and holding against superstitions, and even proclaiming left-wing or at least antimilitary sentiments, wear them or keep them at home. (Tambiah 1984:197)

With these words, Tambiah describes the "cult" of amulets in Thailand. The amulets themselves consist of images of the Buddha or of ascetic monks stamped on tiny tablets. Tambiah describes what he calls the "two social loops" connecting these monks and the lay public and within which the amulets take on a form of life. The first social loop sees the monks connected to the lay public in terms of conventional Buddhist soteriology: to gain salvation ordinary people have to renounce the world and detach themselves from it and become monks. Having adopted this path, their actions become more powerful because these actions now emanate from positions of detachment. As in many Eastern soteriologies actions motivated by an absence of desire or orientation to the material world are considered to be more powerful than ones which are motivated by the pursuit of the fruits of the action itself. The more detached a monk is the more powerful their actions.

In this system, those left behind in the social world can still gain merit by giving support to monks. The monks create fields of merit from which lay people profit by their attention to the monks. According to this ideology amulets are given by monks to lay people as "reminders" of the virtues of the monks (Tambiah 1984:335). In this "loop", then amulets act as symbols, as things that are consciously seen as standing for something else.

But there is a different set of practices, another social loop, within which amulets have a different life. In this praxeological formation amulets have intrinsic and real power as a result of their connection with the ascetics whom they are supposed to be reminders of. They have power (*saksit* - cognate with the Sanskritic *shakti*) in themselves and can be used to fulfil the mundane desires of ordinary people. These "objects" are powerfully animate in terms of the relational epistemology that underlies Thai practices. It is because of this power that they are ubiquitous in the form of life inhabited by Thai. If the first regime of value or social loop resonates with our objectivist epistemology, and if it is authoritative in its own way, it is the second social loop that allows us to understand what is, for us, its strange presence in Thai life.

I will be arguing below that books also lead a double life and have meanings in different "regimes of value": the most obvious, instrumentally defined, regime or loop is the one in which books are seen simply as means of communication to be used for conveying narratives or information, connecting authors with readers. This is the ostensive or canonical ideology which explains the existence of books as part of a communication system just as amulets in the official Thai Buddhist soteriology connect monks and laypeople. It is the way in which books are conceived to exist, simply as dead objects, for an authoritative objectivist epistemology that underlies the exploration of books as part of a print culture which I elaborate shortly. However, there is another, less obvious, but equally important, regime in which they are seen as charismatic objects, to be cherished and housed and treated as quasi-sacred objects. It is this loop or regime which is the subject of this thesis.

BOOKS IN THE WORLD OF GOODS

BOOKS IN REGIMES OF COMMUNICATION: A NOTE ON THE "PRINT REVOLUTION"

It would be absurd to claim that books have been a neglected topic of scholarly investigation. As I have already indicated books, like Thai amulets, lead lives in two intersecting regimes of value. Their lives in the regime of value which see them as instruments of communication have been hugely documented and analysed. I want to digress momentarily and address this regime of value in order to establish what this thesis is *not* about. This will provide a background against which the true focus of the work will become clearer.

Firstly, there is now a very large body of historiographical work, including works of social and cultural history, devoted to the book. Under the rubric "Print culture" the study of the history of the book has become very popular. Some thirty years ago, Eisenstein in her magisterial study of the revolution wrought by the printing press observed:

> There is...a large and ever growing literature devoted to the history of printing and related topics. Although much of it seems to be written by and for specialists - custodians of rare books and other librarians; experts on typography or bibliography, literary scholars concerned with press-variants, and the like - this literature does contain material of more wide-ranging interest. Historians working in neighbouring fields - such as economic history, comparative literature, or Renaissance studies - have also contributed useful treatments of special aspects. The field of social history has probably yielded the richest harvest. There one finds a bewildering abundance of studies on topics such as investment in early presses and the book trade in various regions; labor conditions and social agitation among journeymen typographers; scholar-printer dynasties and publication policies; censorship, privileges, and regulation of the trade; special aspects of pamphleteering, propaganda and journalism; professional authors, patrons and publics; the sociology of reading and the sociology of literature. The list could be extended indefinitely. (1979:4-5)

In other words, even by the time of her own work, there was an extensive literature on a range of matters connected with books. In fact some of this literature constituted entire sub-disciplines and there was, and is, a thriving industry producing ever more studies along the lines listed by Eisenstein. She, however, sees her own work as exploring new ground. It was directed at the question of the "unacknowledged revolution" brought about by printing and first raised by Marshall McLuhan in his famous book *The Gutenburg Galaxy* (1962). She sees her work as breaking with McLuhan's interpretations because her own work is empirically based whilst McLuhan's consists of a smorgasbord of speculations based on a selective engagement with secondary literature. She integrates the study of the minutiae of printing, publishing and reading with larger historical questions. She says:

> There are few interpretations of the exact nature of the impact which the invention and spread of printing had on Western civilisation. The effects produced by printing have aroused little controversy, not because views on the topic coincide, but because almost none have been set forth in an explicit and systematic form. Indeed those who seem to agree that momentous changes were entailed always seem to stop short of telling us just what they were. (Eisenstein 1979:6)

Eisenstein addresses the question of the effects of "the shift from script to print in Western Europe", which she calls the "early modern printing revolution". She develops an argument which sees this shift as a "communications" revolution and links this communications revolution to other contemporary revolutions: the Renaissance, the Reformation and the Scientific revolution. She shows how the new communications revolution was not just used in new fields of human activity, such as science, but also taken up into traditional domains, a move that the anthropologist Milton Singer in a different context referred to as the modernisation of tradition (Singer 1972). That said, however, it is the scientific revolution that most interests her and she demonstrates the vital role printing, with its accompanying standardisation and fixation of texts, played in making scientific communication possible and, hence, the scientific revolution itself. Just as Max

Weber argued that Calvinist Protestantism did not cause Capitalism but gave rise to an ethic which provided the soil from which capitalism could develop, so Eisenstein does not crudely argue that the printing press caused science but rather that the way it changed the properties of texts created the conditions in which there could be a significant increase in the reliability of scientific communication.

Her work closes with observations on the connection between this communications revolution and the one we are currently living in.

From a social anthropological point of view, Eisenstein's work is deficient in a number of ways. Firstly, it neglects or marginalises important questions connected with literacy. Thus, she says, "when considering the initial transformations wrought by print, at all events, changes undergone by groups who were already literate ought to receive priority over the undeniably fascinating problems of how rapidly such groups were enlarged" (1983:30).

But this is methodologically inadequate because "changes undergone by already literate groups" cannot be studied outside of the relationship such groups had with non-literate groups. And surely some of the most interesting questions concerning the so-called communications revolution are connected with the way this revolution entered into the relationships of power and domination that constituted the relationships between these "groups".

Recently, Eisenstein's work has been the subject of criticism in terms of its own limited goals of exploring the "changes undergone by groups who were already literate". Her lack of attention to the dialectics of power *within* these groups and its consequences for the "fixity" of the printed text, one of the trio of traits she identifies as being characteristic of print culture,[82] have led some to challenge the whole notion of a print culture (Johns 1998:19). Adrian Johns, in an equally substantial work, shows how mundane politics were crucial in determining not only who got printed but also how things were printed. Thus, for example, the Astronomer Royal John Flamsteed's *Historia Coelistis* was published in a form that

[82] The other two are "standardisation" and "dissemination" (Johns 1998:10).

went against his own wishes and one which favoured the position of his detractors, including Newton. Johns speculates on how we would be viewing the history of science if the networks of power had resulted in the reverse. Johns is sceptical about the role printing played in the scientific revolution preferring to see that revolution as a more autonomous development.

However, it is the lack of attention to the historical sociology of literacy and illiteracy which would concern the sociologist or anthropologist most. But this lacuna was soon rectified and this is yet another dimension of the study of the book that has received considerable attention in the past few decades. In particular anthropologists (and educationalists with an anthropological background) have addressed the question of the impact of literacy and the introduction of literate forms of communication into social formations which hitherto had not had them. The transition from social formations based entirely on orality to ones which include literacy has been the object of a number of studies (see for example Harker and McConochie (1985)) and the field now has a long and substantial inventory.

I draw attention to these bodies of work in order to say that my own work here is ***not*** a contribution to them. It is not a contribution to the study of print culture or the study of "literacy/illiteracy" nor even to the recently created field of the "the anthropology and sociology of reading".[83] To put it crudely, these traditions of investigation depend on a relation to books which focuses on their consumption[84] by individualised readers or the uses that books are put as a result of their technical properties or on the technical processes that go towards the making of them. The focus of my interests is in the relation of individuals and groups to books beyond the mere fact of their consumption or "making" in a direct way. What I am arguing is that books have a life even when they are not being read or being made and that we can begin to understand them in different and interesting ways by focussing on their "strange presence" amongst us beyond their readings. Books enter into relationships with us and into our social relationships in a number of other ways as

[83] See Boyarin (1993) and Svenbro (1993).

[84] Or, in the case of illiteracy, their non-consumption.

well. They have a spirit or charisma of their own and it is to this issue that I now turn as a way of introducing the substantive or empirical element of my study.

BOOKS IN REGIMES OF SANCTITY

> Even bad books are books and therefore sacred.
>
> Gunter Grass, *The tin drum*

> Probably all societies have their versions of "fetishism" of objects.
>
> Stanley Tambiah, *Buddhist Saints of the Forests and the Cult of Amulets*

> "Le livre, instrument spirituel"
>
> Stéphane Mallarmé, *Divagations*

I began this chapter by asking the question why we should select books from amongst all the other objects that occupy the same habitat for special attention. Recently, Richard Abel described the "book world" as "an economic dwarf being jostled on all sides by substantially larger and economically more powerful commercial sectors, and national economies that make the entire world of books a matter of very small potatoes indeed" (Abel 2000:77). He asked "in what sense" could the book world "be seen in the light of behaving like a high roller?" (77). He answered his own question in the following way:

> [The] book is a cultural artifact of the highest order and value. [Books] have a place in the public square unequalled by any of the other artifacts or products introduced into it by any other, and economically more substantial sectors of the larger economy, however necessary these other products may be to the living of a good and decent life. (77-78)

In other words books have a value beyond instrumental and commercial values and these values are, for this indigenous observer, of the highest order. What Abel is referring to is the fact that books are seen to connect with a different regime of value, one in which we can tentatively describe them as being "sacred".

The charisma of books

> The tourist who comes to New Zealand will see in every city large buildings dedicated to the housing of books. If she goes to the national

> capital she will find there a particularly large institution devoted to the them – the national library. And if she goes into a private house, she may find special spaces set aside for books where they will receive, on a smaller scale, the same sort of care that they receive in libraries.[85]

With these words, I parody the words of Griswold, a source Tambiah uses to establish the popularity of amulets amongst the Thai. I am not saying that New Zealanders or Westerners approach books with the same fervour or passion as Thai's approach amulets. On the contrary, it seems, on the basis of Tambiah's account, that there is a greater degree of variation amongst New Zealanders about their relation to these objects than there is amongst Thai in relation to amulets.[86] But it is the practices surrounding them that attract one's comparative attention. There are many parallels between the way books are related to in our society and amulets in Thai society at the time Tambiah was doing his fieldwork.

In the rest of this chapter, I will, firstly, seek to establish this centrality of books, presenting indigenous commentary that draws attention to the special place of books in the lives of the commentators. The second section will present some visual materials and an analysis of their content which once again highlight, in an almost literal sense, the *place* of books in the habitats we occupy. The final section will reflect on an extraordinary practice which intensifies our sense of our relation to books – book burning. Exploring this practice and reactions to it contribute towards our growing understanding of the strange presence of books in our midst. I do this by briefly discussing both fictional and factual accounts of book burning. In the former case, I explore the themes that emerge from the film made by Francois Truffaut based on the famous work of Ray Bradbury *Fahrenheit 451*. In the latter we will look at the book burnings that occurred in Germany n the early 1930s.

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[85] See Tambiah (1984:195)

[86] Tambiah account, however, on this issue is a little unconvincing. It does seem to be rather unshaded, as if there was no variation amongst Thai at all.

Indigenous views

Southey and Wordsworth

Colin Haynes describes the differing attitudes to the book as an object by the two Lake Poets, Richard Southey and William Wordsworth:

> Southey tended to be rather prim and proper about the sanctity of books as objects, but Wordsworth was more concerned with the content than the packaging of literature. He horrified Southey by cutting the pages of a new book with a dirty butter knife in his hurry to get to the words, while Southey was a dedicated bibliophile who guarded his library and would not allow Wordsworth into it.
>
> "How dead Southey is become to all but books," Wordsworth commented sadly. That is a scathing indictment of the attitude that values books as objects distinct from the creativity that resulted in the compilation of the words they contain. (Haynes 1994:288)

Wordsworth's relation to the book as an object is like the Thai Buddhist monks to an amulet. As a thing it is a mere symbol: what is important is the relationship it constitutes between an author and a reader, just as the amulet is a reminder of the relationship of the monk to the person wearing it. Southey, on the other hand, like Thai laypersons, has a strong sense of the sacredness of the thing itself and wants to protect and possess them. Haynes clearly sides with Wordsworth on this. But then he would as he is trying to make a case for "paperless publishing".[87] However, it seems to me that Haynes misreads Wordsworth. It is not that Wordsworth does not value books. One cannot deduce from the casualness of the relationship to the object that the object as an object is necessarily not valued in itself. What Wordsworth is doing is portraying the fact that he treats books with familiarity not that he does not value them. And Southey, on the other hand, cannot be seen as only interested in the form and not the content just because his veneration for the form requires care of thing itself. In other words, as with any sacred object, the way books are handled and made use of can vary greatly between individuals and

[87] I discuss these variations in attitude later in this chapter (See page 106 below).

we cannot read off from these variations, as Haynes seems to, that the objects are not considered sacred.

Fadiman

Fadiman (1998) describes her brother's experience at the age of thirteen of returning to his hotel bedroom whilst on holiday in Copenhagen to discover a note from the chambermaid reprimanding him for leaving a book facedown on his table. "SIR, YOU MUST NEVER DO THAT TO A BOOK", the chambermaid wrote (31). This story is the basis of an exploration of peoples relations to books and she suggests, as I do below, that there is more than one way to relate to them:

> There is more than one way to love a book. The chambermaid believed in courtly love. A book's physical self was sacrosanct to her, its form inseparable from its content; her duty as a lover was Platonic adoration, a noble but doomed attempt to conserve forever the state of perfect chastity in which it had left the bookseller. The Fadiman family believed in carnal love. To us, a book's *words* were holy, but the paper, cloth, cardboard, glue, thread, and ink that contained them were a mere vessel, and it was no sacrilege to treat them as wantonly as desire and pragmatism dictated. Hard use was a sign not of disrespect but of intimacy. (32).

Fadiman probably underestimates the degree to which the book as a physical object is sacred to her and her other essays (including the one describing the marriage of her and her husband's libraries) demonstrate that she too treats them as sacred or charismatic objects. The problem is that, in the West, we have a very protestant notion of sacredness which emphasises seriousness and solemnity. It is easy to forget that the "serious" way in which we approach the sacred is a fairly recent phenomena and that the sacred can be engaged with both platonically as well as carnally (In Hindu religiosity, for example, this distinction is embodied in the distinction between right hand and left hand forms of religiosity).

Sir Michael Hardie Boys

The Governor-General of New Zealand contributed the following to a news magazine published by the Book Council of New Zeland:

A BOOK IS A FRIEND FOR LIFE

The age of the written word is coming to an end - this claim has been made by a recent visitor to New Zealand, an academic in the field of computer science, said Governor-General Sir Michael Hardie Boys. Speaking to a recent gathering of book people, he said that particular person suggested that literacy would be, and even should be, replaced by a "resurgent" oral culture. This is to be made possible, he explained, because of computers into which we are going to be able to talk, and with which we are going to be able to hold conversations, and which will read out to us, or show us on video, all that we will want or need to see and hear. And so, with no pressing need for reading and writing, those skills can be allowed to atrophy: the technologies that surround the written word have reached their limits, he said."

"That's one point of view," said Sir Michael. "Let me share another, from an article in a recent Harper's magazine:

'We shall not understand what a book is ... if we forget how important to it is its body, the building that has been built to hold its lines of language safely together through many adventures and a long time. Words on a screen have visual qualities ... Off the screen they do not exist as words. They do not wait to be reseen, reread; they only remain to be remade, relit. I cannot carry them beneath a tree or onto a side porch; I cannot argue in their margins; I cannot enjoy the memory of my dismay, when, perhaps after years, I return to my treasured copy of Treasure Island to find the jam I inadvertently smeared there still spotting the page precisely at the place where Billy Bones chases Black Dog out of the Admiral Benbow with a volley of oaths ... That book and I loved each other.'

> That says it all, I think. For if people who once would have been readers, instead shut down their minds to stare at a screen, if people who once would have been readers confide only to computers and never to paper, they will surrender so much of their imagination, of their skill in reasoning, even some control of their lives. And they will lose the potential for making lifelong friends.... A book, as we all know, is a friend for life, as no other medium of communication can ever be..." Governor-General Sir Michael Hardie Boys, Booknotes, Number 131, Spring 2000

These comments pull in the direction of both social loops: the book as an instrument or medium of communication but also, simultaneously, as something which has a life beyond that. Simply as a medium of communication, it would appear it could be replaced by a computer screen. However, for the Governor-General, and the unnamed author of the article in *Harper's*, a book is also more than just words on a flat surface. It is a thing that one handles sensuously, something which – in terms of a relational epistemology – can become our "friend for life", a phrase which indicates a sense of the personhood of books.

This kind of tension, between different ways of relating to books, will be particularly apparent in the conscious, rationalising statements made by informants in the Western world. This is because objectivist epistemology has authority and is appealed to even when a major way of relating to something draws on a relational epistemology.

Margaret Mahy

> The Harry Potter books have become not only stories to be read, but objects that it is desirable to possess and display. I remember watching two boys some years ago discussing the Goosebumps books they owned, studying the numbered lists on the back of the books they were holding and pointing out those they already had and those they still had to get. Those books were enjoying a double life, being not only stories to be read, but collector's items as well. The Harry Potter books, too, seem to have achieved this double function. (Margaret Mahy. "Just wild about Harry; the double life of the Harry Potter books astonishes". *Listener* July 15,2000.)

Mahy recognises amongst the young, too, a propensity towards relating to books in terms of a relational epistemology. She says that for these youngsters books have developed "a double life" (2000:42) echoing Tambiah's account of Thai amulets. They are objects of "possession" and "display" along with "reading". Like Wordsworth in relation to Southey, she is astonished by this form of relationship and she assimilates it to the practice of "collecting", a label which is astonishing in its own right because, at the time of writing, there were only four books in the Harry Potter series. Clearly, then these comments by indigenous observers point to a relationship between books and human beings which indicates that these objects have a life beyond that which could be understood in terms of an objectivist epistemology.

Enshrined Books

A room without books is like a body without a soul.

Cicero[88]

Bourdieu, in his study of the Kabyle of Algeria, and many other anthropologists since have demonstrated the way in which the social is incarnated in the floor plan of domestic dwellings in many societies. In our own society, dwelling spaces are no less socially marked.

[88] Cicero's statement is typical class racism: it gives expression to the view of the literate classes of those without education.

The interior of the house in New Zealand is divided into a number of parts: living room, dining room, bedrooms, kitchen, bathroom, laundry. There is, of course, considerable variation between houses with many houses with fewer elements than these, many with mixed elements and many with many more elements. Variation in the presence/absence and hybridity of the elements is and can be linked to social status and ethnicity.[89]

There is, however, a grammar to the structure of this space: living rooms are at the front of the house whilst bedrooms and laundries are at the back. The living room is the space that is the threshold between the domestic and public domains of house. It is the space that is encountered by visitors and strangers if they are let into the house and it is space which is most laboured over although perhaps not the one most laboured in.

It is here that one encounters in many houses the silent presence of books, in serried ranks on bookshelves. Bourdieu, speaking of the objects both in a unattributed picture as well as a picture of the bedroom in Jean-Jacques Servan-Screiber's home, as described in the *Maison et Jardin,* says:

> The objects are not there to fulfil a technical or even aesthetic function, but quite simply to symbolise that function and to solemnise it by their age, to which their patina bears witness. Being defined as the instruments of a ritual, they are never questioned as to their function or convenience. They are part of the "taken for granted" necessity to which their users must adapt themselves. (1984:313)

[89] For a montage of images which evokes this variety in a different context see the photographs of domestic spaces in Bourdieu's *Distinction* (1984:313, 373, 377, 385).

The objects are not there to fulfil a technical or even aesthetic function, but quite simply to symbolize that function and to solemnize it by their age, to which their patina bears witness. Being defined as the instruments of a ritual, they are never questioned as to their function or convenience. They are part of the 'taken for granted' necessity to which their users must adapt themselves.

Figure 1 From *Distinction* (Bourdieu, 1984) pg. 313

Bourdieu's account appears to be reductive. The technical and "even aesthetic" functions seem to be sidelined in favour of a symbolic function. I would rather say that many of the objects in these illustrations are there, as Bourdieu quite rightly points out, because they are ritual instruments, sacred objects. They have a charisma which exceeds their technical and aesthetic functions. It is this very charisma to which users must adapt – and the users are those who variously inhabit this space.

The very "'taken for granted' necessity" is part of what makes books sacred. These objects – whose technical function is to be read and used as a means of communication – are not being used in this way in the situations portrayed in the following illustrations. Nor are they likely to be: we cannot resort to notions of "potential" to account for their presence in these scenes. They are there for themselves, because of the kinds of objects they are, set apart from the ordinary which are relegated to less public spaces or hidden behind cupboard doors.

Bourdieu's observations based on the French magazine can be replicated using the New Zealand equivalent *NZ House and Garden*. If we look at the section of the magazine devoted to "Houses" we begin to see the way books live alongside human beings. In this particular issue, there are six illustrated articles devoted to houses all of which have some connection with New Zealanders. One of the houses is located in the United States. Every single article features books as elements of the interior of these houses.

If we begin with the cover itself we see, silently present in the foreground, a set of coffee table books alongside a range of other things. This picture is reproduced in smaller scale in the relevant article in the magazine. In this house, books clearly occupy a gendered space. The two rooms that are illustrated as having books in them are the male public spaces – the smoking room – and the "office…the hub of farm operations".

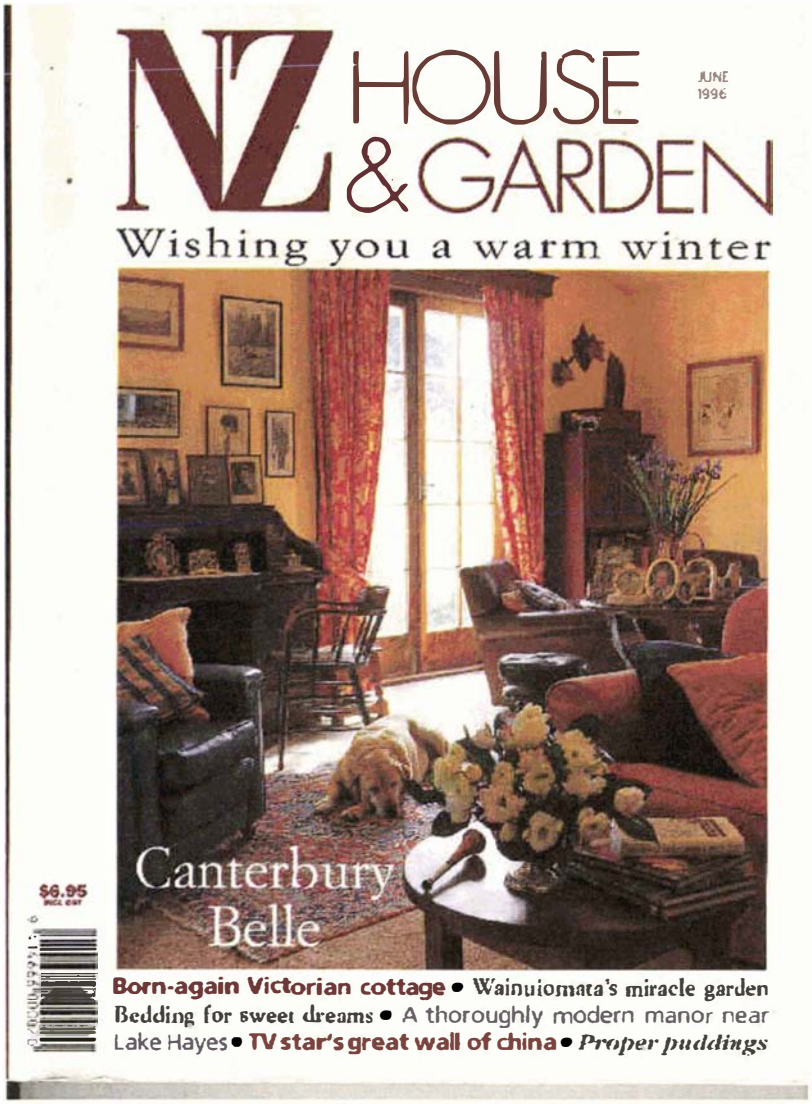


Figure 2 NZ House and Garden, June 1996. Cover.

Figure 3 Family values: "The top book on the table is *An industrious People – A Celebration of the Bethell Family* by David Bethell which features the family's coat of arms on the cover". NZ House and Garden, June 1996, pg. 95

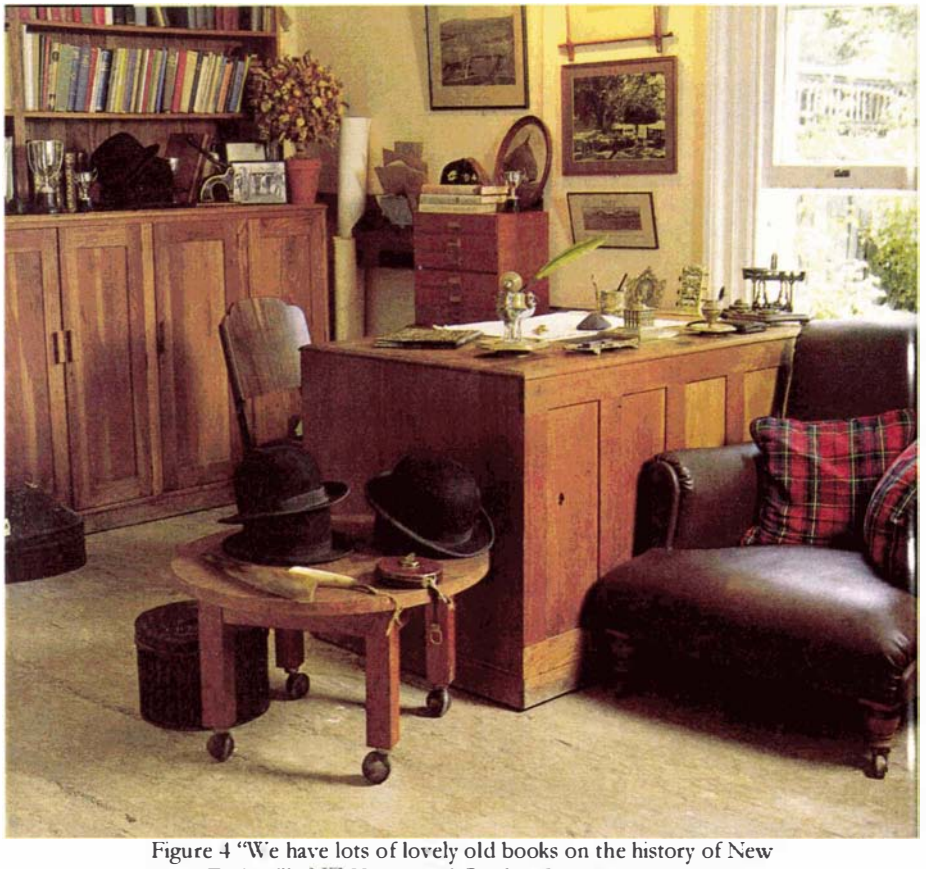


Figure 4 "We have lots of lovely old books on the history of New Zealand". NZ House and Garden, June 1996, pg. 100

The first of the articles on houses is devoted to a dwelling whose chief characteristic, "the jewel" in its "particular crown" is the library set on a mezzanine floor above the sitting room. In this space, then, the books look down on the visitors.

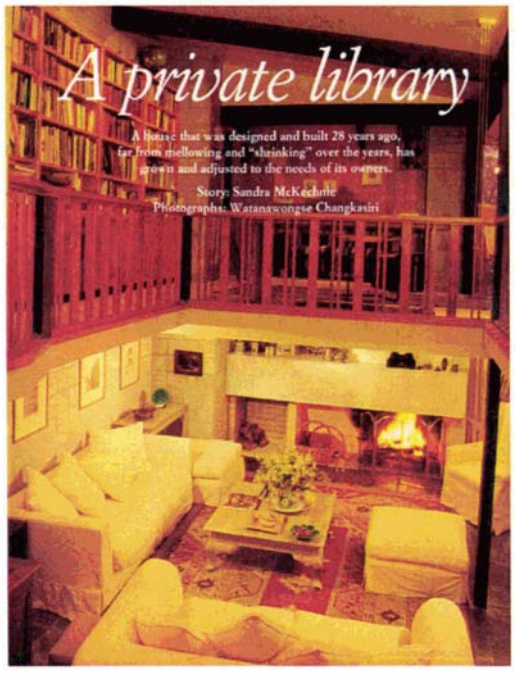


Figure 5 "A private library". NZ House and Garden, June 1996, pg. 20

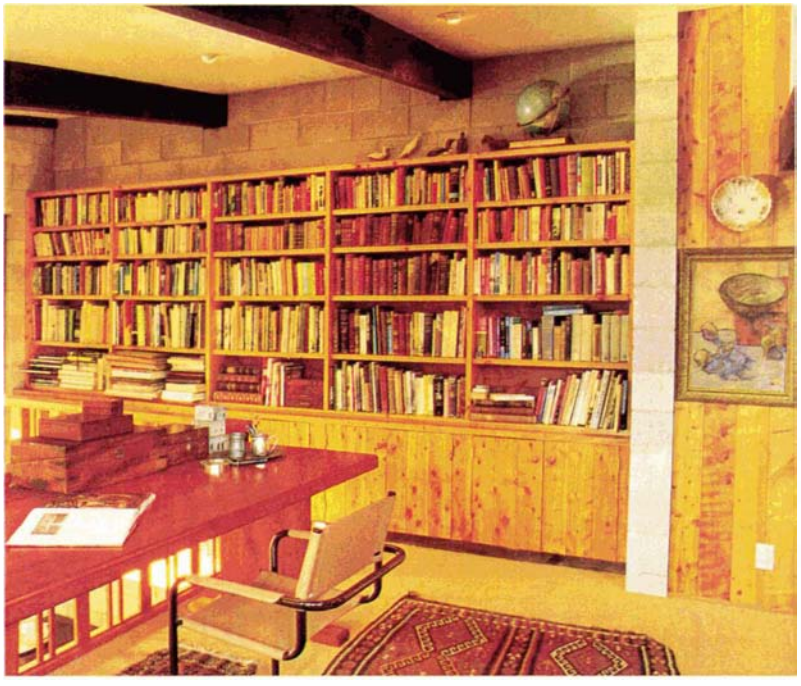


Figure 6 "A private library (continued): The kauri slab table in a previous life was a counter in a grocery store". NZ House and Garden, June 1996, pg. 21

Each of the subsequent articles on houses features books in some way or other as elements of the space to which "users must adapt themselves".

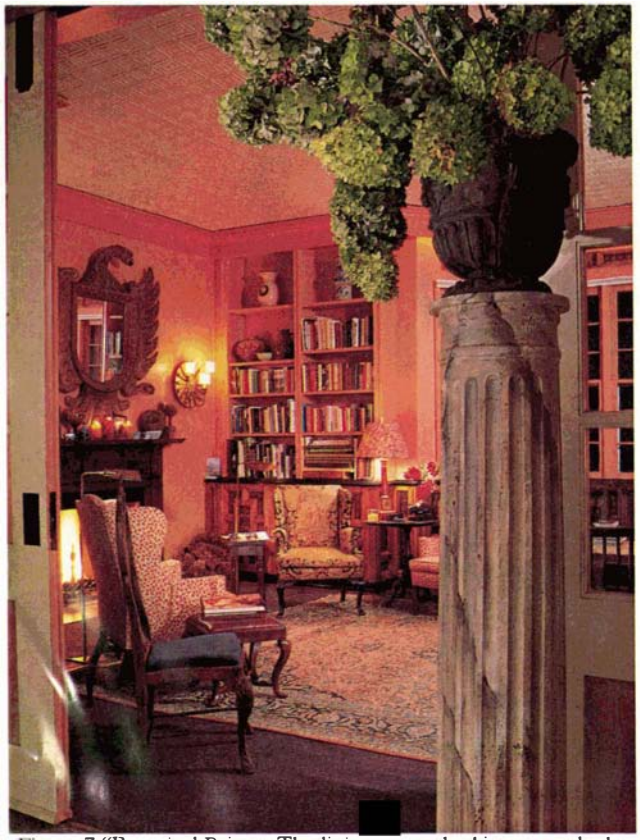


Figure 7 "Botanical Prince: The living room, looking towards the entrance". NZ House and Garden, June 1996, pg. 28

Figure 8 "Starting over: The lounge has a magnificent timber ceiling". NZ House and Garden, July 1996, pg. 59

Figure 9 "Lasting pleasures: The sitting room opens onto a large private terrace". NZ House and Garden, June 1996, pg. 68

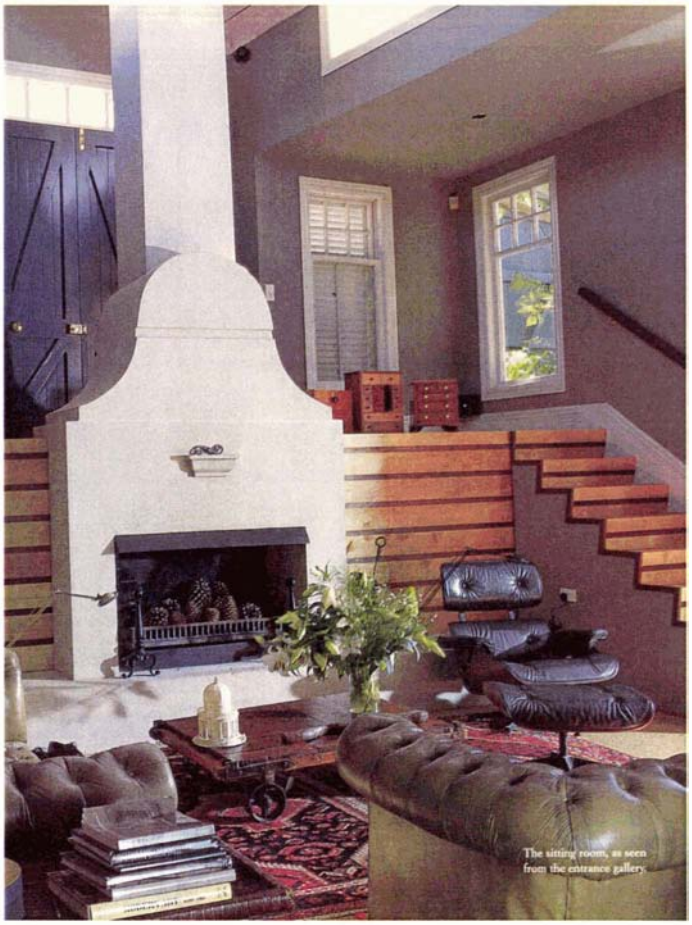


Figure 10 "A tale of two centuries: The sitting room, as seen from the entrance gallery". NZ House and Garden, June 1996, pg. 123.

Clearly, the very seriality of the presence of books in such scenes should alert us to the fact that we are in the presence of ritual elements of ritual spaces, there not for their "technical or aesthetic function" but for the solemnity they bestow on the spaces they occupy.

Bourdieu's observations on the way photographs are used echo the way books are used in the homes illustrated above:

> In most peasant households, photographs are "locked away" in a box, apart from wedding photographs and certain portraits. It is considered indecent or ostentatious to show pictures of members of the family to just anyone. The large communal room, the kitchen, has an impersonal decoration that is the same in all cases, with a calendar from the Post office or the Fire Brigade and postcards brought back from a journey to Lourdes or bought in Pau. Ceremonial photographs are too solemn or too intimate to be shown in the space where everyday life goes on; they can only be displayed in the dining room, the drawing room or, in the case of more personal pictures, such as photographs of deceased parents, in the bedroom, along with the religious pictures, the crucifix and the *buis béneit* (wood blessed on Palm Sunday). The amateur photographs are locked away in drawers. In contrast, among the *petits bourgeois* of the village, they take on a decorative or sentimental value: enlarged and framed, they adorn the walls of the communal room, along with the holiday souvenirs. They even invade that shrine of family values, the drawing-room mantelpiece, replacing the medals, the honorific distinctions and academic certificates which were previously seen there, and which the young village wife has discreetly relegated, on the grounds that they are slightly ridiculous, to the darkest corner behind the door, so as not to offend "the old people". (Bourdieu, et al. 1990b:24-25)

It is very relevant that all of the illustrations are of the "living room" of the house. Speaking of the American house, Irwin Altman says "the living room is as close to being a sacred place as any area in the home, although it rarely contains altars, religious objects, or shrines" (Altman and Chemers 1980:198). I would only

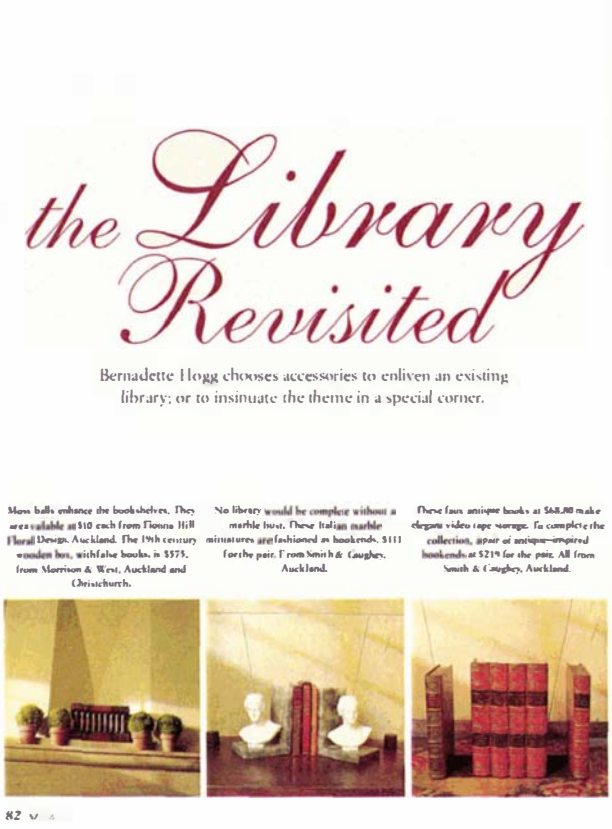
disagree with their secondary characterisation of these spaces. Altman and Chemers are right about the sacredness of the living wrong but wrong about the absence of shrines. As Bourdieu has pointed out, and my argument thus far would suggest, they do not, perhaps, recognise the shrines that do exist as shrines.

Auden, in his series of poems *About the House* which poetically analyse the space of the house, describes the living room as the space which "confronts each visitor with a style, a secular faith". It is a space in which the second personal pronoun is not "you" but "thou, rather". It is the space in which the visitor compares "its dogmas with his" (Auden 1966:46). The things that are part of this sacred space both sanctify it and draw some of their charisma from their location in it. In the case of books, they are there to ritualise the space, to mark it as the pre-eminent sacred space of the house.

Faux Books

The same source, this particular issue of *NZ House & Garden*, affords yet another piece of evidence of the centrality of books in our life world. *Faux* books are fake books, literally objects which simulate books. Bourdieu's observations about the fact that the objects in the spaces described above are not there to fulfil a "technical or even aesthetic function" but to act as instruments in a ritual is confirmed particularly strongly by the presence of these kinds of objects in the sacred spaces of homes.

If one examines the books on the shelves in the illustrations that follow, clearly we can see that the *faux* books are there to ensure that the collection as a whole is sanctified because the "real" books on the shelves are from the lesser orders of the sacred order of books.


HOT SHOPPING

the Library Revisited

Bernadette Hogg chooses accessories to enliven an existing library; or to insinuate the theme in a special corner.

Moss balls enhance the bookshelves. They are available at $10 each from Fiona Hill Floral Design, Auckland. The 19th century wooden box, with false books, is $575, from Morrison & West, Auckland and Christchurch.

No library would be complete without a marble bust. These Italian marble miniatures are fashioned as bookends. $111 for the pair. From Smith & Caughey, Auckland.

These faux antique books at $68.80 make elegant video tape storage. To complete the collection, a pair of antique-inspired bookends at $219 for the pair. All from Smith & Caughey, Auckland.

82

Figure 11 "The library revisited: These faux antique books at $68.80 make elegant video tape storage". NZ House and Garden, June 1996, pg. 82

Figure 12 NZ House and Garden, June 1996, pg. 83

"Each society", says Mark Jones "each generation, fakes the thing it covets most" (Jones, Craddock and Barker 1990:13). These objects, manufactured to look like books and inserted in the "special corners" of homes, point to a field of desire which it is hard to ignore. Like the models of statues that are used to create altars and shrines in niches in the living rooms of some Christian households, these models of books vividly mark the fact that real books serve the same function. If the objects are not going to be used for their technical function, what does it matter if they are complete or not so long as they have enough of those properties required to fulfil their true function?

Fahrenheit 451[90]

> Wherever they burn books they will end up burning people.
>
> Heinrich Heine, Almansor; a tragedy, 1823
>
> (Used as inscription on memorial at Dachau concentration camp)

> What progress we are making. In the Middle Ages they would have burned me. Now they are content with burning my books.
>
> Sigmund Freud

> It followed then that when Hitler burned a book I [a lover of libraries] felt it as keenly, please forgive me, as his killing a human, for in the long sum of history they are one and the same flesh. Mind or body, put to the oven, is a sinful practice, and I carried that with me.
>
> Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451*

In May 1933, students at a university in Berlin transported books from various places in Berlin, including their own university library to Franz Joseph Platz. In reality the books were chosen quite at random though ostensively they were supposed to be anti-German.[91] They were thrown together into a huge pile and set alight. The photographs below illustrate the scene. Stern describes it as follows:

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[90] Dr. Fernando Baez of the Andes University is about to publish a history of the destruction of books (Báez In press:1). See this reference for a comprehensive bibliography of the subject.

[91] Some book burnings were more discriminating and only the works of proscribed authors were burnt. Anthropologists should note that the work of Franz Boas was on the list of proscribed authors.

> Accompanying their actions with declaimed denunciations of the authors, they proceeded to toss thousands of titles, by writers famous and obscure, foreign and native, into the flames of an already ignited bonfire. The egregiously primitive act lasted for hours, interrupted only by the incantation of Nazi songs and a speech by Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels. (Stern 1997:1)

This was not a spontaneous act but one which had been in the planning for weeks. Similar acts took place all over Germany in the following weeks and, in fact, in the following years. Stern's words echo the horror that was aroused in many people by these events. Stern calls it "a remarkable act of barbarism, a prelude to the many worse ones that followed" (1).

The American reaction and preaction (protests occurred before as well as after the events) shows that these events "broke through our usual apathy to the unfolding terror in Germany" (2). These events were clearly seen in religious terms: *Newsweek* referred to the events as "a holocaust of books"[92] and *Time* coined the term "bibliocaust" (2). The burning of the books was assimilated to an evil ritual and, even at that time, with considerable prescience, Heinrich Heine's observation that "wherever they burn books they will end up burning people" was invoked.

[92] This may well be the first time the word "holocaust" was used in relation to Nazi activities.

Figure 13 Bibliocaust, Berlin 1933

These events clearly demonstrated the descent into violence of the German state with its newly elected fascist government. From the point of view of the argument being made here, however, the fact that books were chosen for this ritualised burning is significant. It, more than almost any other evidence, shows the way in which books are conceived of as being condensed with power for both the book-burners and those reacting to the events. A hundred thousand people marched for six hours in New York on the following day (Stern 1997:2).

More recently, the book-burnings occasioned by Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* led the anthropologists Carol Breckenridge to the following observations and questions:

> Book-burning is at least as powerful an image in the logocentric West as the burning of widows in India. So while we in the Euro-American axis fight over the burning of books, whole nations (like India) brought up on other ideas of civility, liberation and representation battle over the rights of communities to burn their women. Is it conceivable that there are those who condemn the one without condemning the other? Or are they both equally deadly acts? Have we come to think of works as lives? And is their protection equally a matter of human rights? Or is the case of book-

burning a case of human rights whereas the case of bride-burning is a matter of the right to be human? (Appadurai and Breckenridge 1989:ii)[93]

Figure 14 Bibliocaust

Here, the anthropologist becomes informant on her own society. Her rhetorical and not-so rhetorical questions point to the way books are seen to have lives and power.

Why are books *sacred?*

The question remains: Is there something about the book and its content, written text, that makes it particularly susceptible to being selected or marked out for special significance from the general world of goods that we inhabit in our form of life? Is there something about these particular goods, some intrinsic property which makes them stand out from the run-of-the-mill? If Evans-Pritchard can say of the Nuer that in order to understand their social activities "*cherchez la vache*" can we

[93] As this thesis was coming to its end news came of the destruction of the National Library of Baghdad. Robert Fisk, who witnessed the event, wrote of it on the following day: "Genghis Khan's grandson burnt Baghdad in the 13th century and, so it was said, the Tigris river ran black with the ink of books. Yesterday, the black ashes of thousands of ancient documents filled the skies of Iraq. Why?" (Fisk 2003:2). The language used clearly demonstrates the assimilation of the life of books to human life.

say of ourselves "*cherchez le livre*" (Evans-Pritchard 1940:16)? Probably not because our material culture is far more complex and variegated than that of the Nuer but nevertheless I will argue that books are extraordinary and are in fact more valued that other objects.

The question as I have phrased it is even more challenging. Am I asking whether books are actually universally valued? This would, on the surface, seem to be particularly fatuous: books have not existed in any form in the vast majority of human habitats so how could they have possibly have been valued in them?

Briefly, my argument is that books, the things themselves, in "all class-divided social formations" (Bourdieu 1984:470) are considered to be sacred objects. The ways they are treated - as evidenced in some of the materials I present in this and other chapters - show that in practical classifications, ones which are not necessarily consciously articulated but rather manifested in practice, books partake of the realm of the sacred. I present evidence which supports this idea in different ways in the following chapters. In Chapter 5 I show that books participate as markers in hierarchical relationships, hierarchy[94] being linked to its etymological meanings of religious rank. I show that books can be used as evidence that the social order in which we live is still conceived to be a sacred one. In Chapter 6, I argue this against those post-modernist analysts who argue that we live in a social order in which hierarchies of value have ceased to exist and that we live in a kind of relativistic universe in which the social order no longer relies on notions of sacred cultural capital and I use evidence from a survey which demonstrates this in relation

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[94] The use of the word "hierarchy" in its religious sense should not be seen as being ironic or satirical. Bourdieu, speaking of education says:

> The common representation of pedagogic action, which reduces it to its technical function, is so powerfully asserted that it is difficult to cast doubt on it. At the risk of seeming to be overdoing it ... we must "turn the tables" and, contrary to the dominant representation that is only interested in the technical consequences of pedagogic action, ask whether any pedagogic action meant to prepare students to hold dominant positions is not in part - even in its most specifically technical dimension - an act of consecration, a *rite of institution* aimed at producing a separate, sacred group. (Bourdieu 1998:73 emphasis in original)

In other words, education is a ritual system which contributes to the maintenance of a sacred order. From an anthropological point of view seeing it this way (an "uncommon representation") should not be seen as detracting from it, just as no anthropologist would mean to detract from any practice they label ritualistic or religious in other cultures.

to the major institution that cares for books, the public library. And finally, in Chapter 7, I discuss at length a modern ritual form in which the book is the central ritual instrument.

In this chapter, however, I want to argue, in a somewhat essentialist manner, that there is something intrinsically sacred about books. And although with the mass production of paperbacks there has been a degree of desacralisation[95] of books nevertheless books continue to have a quasi-sacred aura about them.

This is not to say that all books are equally sacred. On the contrary, just as there is a hierarchy of persons there is a hierarchy of books and, to paraphrase George Orwell, while most books, perhaps, are sacred some are more sacred than others. In fact some books are so low in the order of sacredness that they are considered to be quite profane.

Nor is it the case that everyone regards books as sacred. As Kopytoff remarks about objects in general:

> The public culture offers discriminating classifications in our society no less than it does in small-scale societies. But these must constantly compete with classifications by individuals and by small networks, whose members also belong to other networks, expounding yet other value systems. The discriminating criteria each individual or network can bring to the task of classification are extremely varied. Not only is every individual's or network's version of exchange spheres idiosyncratic and different from those of others, but it also shifts contextually and biographically as the originators' perspectives, affiliations and interests shift... In a commercialised, heterogenous, and liberal society, the public culture defers most of the time to pluralism and relativism and provides no firm guidance. (1986:78-79)

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[95] Sanctification connotes a conscious process of making something sacred (see for example Tambiah's discussion of the process of sacralizing images and amulets in Thailand (1984:243ff)); I reserve the world sacralisation to refer to the process of something becoming sacred without conscious intervention. The term is used in this sense by Kopytoff (1986).

I will be arguing later against taking this too far and against emphasizing "pluralism and relativism" too much.

But these observations do not explain why *books* should be set apart as sacred. After all, the craftsmanship that goes towards making shoes is of no lesser order than that which goes into the making of books and yet we do not display them in shelves in our living room (perhaps with the exception of Amelda Marcos)! I want to address this question head on and I begin with an account of two scenes from the field work of anthropologists. The first is very well known and is described by Lévi-Strauss and the second is an account of an incident during a period of my own fieldwork in a central Indian village.

A famous cartoon makes reference to an equally famous incident in Lévi-Strauss's *Tristes Tropiques.* It shows a South American Indian reading Lévi-Strauss's book *The Savage Mind.*[96] Lévi-Strauss describes the incident on which the cartoon is based as follows:

> Towards evening, there were seventy-five persons representing seventeen families, all grouped together under thirteen shelters hardly more substantial that those to be found in native camps. It was explained to me that, during the rainy season, all these people would be housed in five round huts built to last for some months. Several of the natives appeared never to have seen a white man before and their surly attitude and the chief's edginess suggested that he had persuaded them to come rather against their will. We did not feel safe, nor did the Indians. The night promised to be cold, and as there were no trees on the terrace, we had to lie down like the Nambikwara on the bare earth. Nobody slept: the hours were spent keeping a close but polite watch on each other.
>
> It would have been unwise to prolong such a dangerous situation, so I urged the chief to proceed without further delay to the exchange of gifts. It

[96] The incident to which the cartoon makes reference is one which has been the subject of a great deal of commentary, including an extended meditation by Jacques Derrida on the role of writing in social life.

was at this point that there occurred an extraordinary incident that I can only explain by going back a little. It is unnecessary to point out that the Nambikwara have no written language, but they do not know how to draw either, apart from making a few dotted lines or zigzags on their gourds. Nevertheless, as I have done with the Caduveo, I handed out sheets of papers and pencils. At first they did nothing with them, then one day I saw that they were all busy drawing wavy, horizontal lines. I wondered what they were trying to do, then it was suddenly borne upon me that they were writing or, to be more accurate, were trying to use their pencils in the same way as I did mine, which was the only way they could conceive of, because I had not yet tried to amuse them with my drawings. The majority did this and no more, but the chief had further ambitions. No doubt he was the only the one who had grasped the purpose of writing. So he called me for a writing-pad, and when we both had one, and were working together, if I asked for information on a given point, he did not supply it verbally but drew wavy lines on his paper and presented them to me, as if I could read his reply. He was half taken in by his own make-believe; each time he completed a line, he examined it anxiously as if expecting the meaning to leap from the page, and the same look of disappointment came over his face. But he never admitted this, and there was a tacit understanding between us to the effect that his unintelligible scribbling had a meaning which I pretended to decipher; his verbal commentary followed almost at once, relieving me of the need to ask for explanation.

As soon as he had got the company together, he took from a basket a piece of paper covered with wavy lines and made a show of reading it, pretending to hesitate as he checked on it the list of objects I was to give in exchange for the presents offered me: so-and-so was to have a chopper in exchange for a bow and arrows, someone else beads in exchange his necklace... This farce went on for two hours. Was he hoping to delude himself? More probably he wanted to astonish his companions, to convince them that he was acting as an intermediary agent for the exchange

of the goods, that he was in alliance with the white man and shared his secrets. (1973d:387-89)

Lévi-Strauss ruminates on this incident:

> Writing had, on that occasion, made its appearance among the Nambikwara but not, as one might have imagined, as a result of long and laborious training. It had been borrowed as a symbol, and for a sociological rather than an intellectual purpose, while its reality remained unknown. It had not been a question of acquiring knowledge, of remembering or understanding, but rather of *increasing the authority and prestige* of one individual - or function - at the expense of others. A native still living in the Stone Age had guessed that this great means towards understanding, even if he was unable to understand it, could be made to serve other purposes. (1973d:390 emphasis added)

Lévi-Strauss then discusses what the functions of writing could be. He rejects the hypothesis that it is an instrument for technical advancement arguing that one of the greatest leaps in technology, the Neolithic revolution, occurred without the aid of writing and that, in fact, in the presence of writing "the historic civilizations of the West stagnated for a long time." Rather, he opts for an explanation which emphasises writing's political function:

> The only phenomenon with which writing has always been concomitant is the creation of cities and empires, that is the integration of large numbers of individuals into a political system, and their grading into castes and classes... It seems to have favoured the exploitation of human beings rather than their enlightenment... My hypothesis... would oblige us to recognise the fact that the primary function of written communication is to facilitate slavery.. The use of writing for disinterested purposes, and as a source of intellectual and aesthetic pleasure, is a secondary result, and more often than not it may be turned into a means of strengthening, justifying or concealing the other. (1973d:393)

Certainly there are exceptions to this rule: the Incas, for example. But the exceptions prove the rule because those hierarchical civilisations without writing collapsed in the face of challenges from those with it.

A remarkably similar incident to the one above occurred during the course of fieldwork in a village in central India a number of years ago. My wife and I used photography as a way of repaying the many kindnesses that the peasants of this village showed towards us. For most, photography was a luxury they could never afford and yet one which they were very keen on, to the extent that they even engaged me for the what was for me somewhat ghoulish task of taking photographs of relatives who had just recently died. My wife, too, was often called upon to take photographs because of the need to observe a kind of purdah amongst the women.

On one occasion, she had arranged to take the photograph of a good friend and neighbour. This person had taken it on herself to take my wife under her wing and to introduce her to the various circles of women in the village and to show her the ways of the peasant world. My wife said that often, in our neighbour's company, she felt like a handicapped child because of both her own linguistic and practical incompetence in the areas in which the other women were so clearly enormously skilled.

In any event, on the day in question, our neighbour dressed herself in her finest clothes and came to our dwelling to be photographed. And it was at this point that an incident occurred which echoes that which Lévi-Strauss experienced. Our neighbour, who was illiterate, insisted on having her photographed taken with a book in hand, posing in such a way as to give the impression that she was reading it. The book, in English, was from our shelves and she sat with it initially holding the book upside down until my wife corrected it.

One can draw various lessons from these observations and commentaries on them. Somewhat unusually, given that he was a structuralist, Lévi-Strauss comments on the functions of writing rather than focussing on its form. In other words, he does not ask or answer the question how something seemingly innocuous as "wavy lines on a piece of paper" can accomplish the defeat of civilisations? What is it about the

thing itself that enables it to have this function? It is as if someone were to describe the functions of the heart without pointing out that it was a pump. Lévi-Strauss does not have a theory of why it is that *writing* is able to accomplish this almost magical feat.

In brief my argument is this: the most mysterious technology that human beings have access to is symbolic communication of which language is the most efficient form. The anthropologists Terence Deacon and Roy Rappaport[97] have recently pointed out the connection between language, trust and religion. For Deacon, symbolic communication arose out of the need to find some way to communicate the trust that is required in order to have marriage relationships, relationships which prescribe future behaviour, a prescription required for the kind of ecological niche that humans began to occupy. And the earliest form in which this promissory symbolic communication took place was ritual because it was the form of behaviour which most easily allowed the development of non-indexical forms of communication. Deacon asks:

> The first hominids to use symbolic communication were entirely on their own, with very little in the way of external supports. How then could they have succeeded with their chimpanzee-like brains in achieving this difficult result [symbolic communication]? How could a social environment have arisen spontaneously, which possessed the necessary supports for overcoming the immensely difficult and complicated task of teaching

---

[97] Both these books belong to a genre that is somewhat out of fashion these days. As Keith Hart observes in his moving introduction to Rappaport work:

> The universals of nineteenth-century anthropology have been discredited in our own century. And this was not difficult, since they were founded on Western imperialism's ability to unify the world as an unequal association of races governed by what was taken at the time to be the last word in rationality. Since then, another vision of world society has taken hold, a fragmented world of self-sufficient nation-states reflected in an ideology of cultural relativism which insists that people everywhere have a right to their own way of life, however barbarous. This vision has become so central to the academic anthropology of our day that Rappaport's treatise will seem to be anomalous. Of late it has come to be held that big, closely argued books on universal themes are out-of-date. Minor essays on elusive topics, ethnography for its own sake and evasion of matters of general public concern are the norm. (Rappaport 1999:xvii-xviii)

Deacon's work, like Rappaport's, addresses big universal issues and is also a "big, closely argued book".

> symbolic relationships to individuals whose brains were not only unprepared but resistant to learning them? The transition to nascent symbolic culture probably began in fits and starts, with innumerable evolutionary trials and errors, before some semblance of stability was achieved. Some intense social evolution must have been responsible for creating such a context. But what sort of context was it? Are the requirements for support of symbol transmission in an ape society so unusual that their spontaneous evolution will stretch credulity? [Early] hominids were forced to learn a set of associations between signs and objects, repeat them over and over, and eventually unlearn the concrete association in favour of a more abstract one. This process had to be kept up until the complete system of combinatorial relationships between the symbols was discovered. What could have possibly provided comparable support for these needs in the first symbol-learning societies? (1997:402)

Deacon announces the answer in the next sentence:

> In a word, the answer is ritual. Indeed, ritual is still a central component of symbolic "education" in modern human societies, though we are seldom aware of its modern role because of the way it is woven into the fabric of society. The problem for symbol discovery is to shift attention from the concrete to the abstract; from separate indexical links between signs and objects to an organized set of relations between signs. In order to bring the logic of token-token relationships to the fore, a high degree of redundancy is important. (1997:402)

The point Deacon is making is not that ritual behaviour is symbolic but that the first forms of symbolic communication would have been rituals because they provided the kind of repetition that is required to create the conditions in which symbolic thought can emerge. Then, through a process of co-evolution, language would have emerged from this ritual grounding.

The late Roy Rappaport approaches the issue from a completely different angle but arrives at very similar connections if not conclusions. For him, it is the fact that

"problems of falsehood are intrinsic to language" that explains the co-existence of religious thought with language. He says:

> I do not claim that religion arose more or less simply as an adaptive response to enhanced possibilities of falsehood, but that certain defining elements of religion, especially the concept of the sacred and the process of sanctification, are no less possibilities of language, particularly linguistic expressions in ritual, than are lies, and that *religion emerged with language.* As such, *religion is as old as language, which is to say precisely as old as humanity.* (Rappaport 1999:15-16)

Language and religion, then, are very closely tied to each other. They are imbricated in each other as forms of human behaviour. Both Deacon and Rappaport, independently of each other, show the intimate connection between language and religion. Language has its roots in ritual and religion. It is, itself, a magical instrument.

To continue the argument: writing is an extension of language, already a magical instrument. It incarnates language[98] but it also simultaneously makes it more inaccessible, mystifies it for those who can't read. Where language might be seen to separate human beings from other beings in the life-world, writing separates human beings from each other, contrary to all the ideologies underlying it and well recognised by our Indian research participant and Lévi-Strauss's chief . It is, therefore, not surprising then to see that books are seen as powerful objects, embodiments not just of the works of authors but of authority itself. They are charismatic objects.

In other words, books are given a special place in social formations such as ours because they are objects which particularly objectify what Bourdieu calls cultural capital. Access to them requires literacy and literacy, above all else, enables the

[98] Bourdieu quotes Notopoulos as saying that "`The poet is the incarnate book of the oral people'" (Bourdieu 1990a:301). Here I want to reverse the order and say that the book is the incarnation of language.

preservation and accumulation, as Bourdieu says, "in objectified form the cultural resources of the past" (Bourdieu 1990a:125). Bourdieu continues:

> The transformations that an instrument such as writing makes possible have been clearly established. By detaching cultural resources from persons, literacy enables a society to move beyond anthropological limits - particularly those of individual memory - and liberates it from the constraints of mnemotechnic devices. [It] makes it possible to accumulate the culture previously conserved in the incorporated state and, by the same token, to perform the primitive accumulation of cultural capital, the total or partial monopolising of the society's symbolic resources in religion, philosophy, art and science, through the monopolisation of the instruments of appropriation of these resources (writing, reading and other decoding techniques), henceforward preserved not in memories but in texts. (1990a:125)

But we need to go one step further and realise that what is true of Buddhist amulets in Thailand is also true of books in our social systems. Certainly they function instrumentally as forms in which cultural capital is sedimented but we also need to look at what Tambiah calls "the objectification of power in objects, ...the sedimentation of charisma" (1984:33). Bourdieu quite rightly says that there are two states of the social. He himself concentrates on the incarnated state of the social, captured in the concept of *habitus*. What we are doing here is to look at the objectification of history in a particular object.

CHAPTER 4 METHODOLOGY AND DATA SOURCES FOR THE EMPIRICAL COMPONENT

The research for the empirical component of this thesis raised some specific methodological issues especially in the light of the kind of argument that I have developed about the concepts of "animism" and an animated habitat. The work was also an exercise in, amongst other things, "doing anthropology at home". This made it inevitable that I would have to explore some of the issues raised by turning an anthropological sensibility developed in the sixties and seventies in the context of an engagement with India towards my "own" society.[99] This chapter addresses those issues. I do this by discussing, firstly, the move towards doing anthropology at home and then, at length, a particularly important problem that is raised by my conclusions about some methodological innovations that may help to do anthropology at "home": doing ethnography through statistics. Needless to say, I do not claim to have exhausted all the very interesting methodological issues raised by the turn to doing anthropology at home. I hope I bring to the attention of others engaged in similar work a salient issue and I hope the discussion at the end of this chapter points to some solutions raised by the problems I raise in my discussion. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of my data sources.

ANTHROPOLOGY AT HOME

> Like sailing, gardening, politics and poetry, law and ethnography are crafts of place.
>
> Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge*

Both social and cultural anthropologists have increasingly made their own "home" societies and cultures the basis of their fieldwork experience. In the last two decades Anglo-American anthropologists have begun to "repatriate" the locus of their studies. Michael Moffat, writing in his review article in 1992, says

[99] I do not want to problematise this term here though it does deserve to be. That would require more extended treatment. However, it should be noted that the concept of "home" or "own" society has been seen largely as unproblematic in the literature I refer to. This is a matter which needs urgent attention.

"anthropologists have done more research in the United States in the last dozen years than in the previous history of the discipline - far more, perhaps twice as much" (Moffat 1992:205).

Repatriation figured prominently in *Anthropology as cultural critique* (Marcus and Fischer 1986), a major text of the mid-eighties with almost two whole chapters of a 6 chapter book devoted to it. And in the same year The British Association of Social Anthropologists produced a book devoted to the same theme: *Anthropology at home* (Jackson 1986). More recently Rapport has reviewed the state of anthropology at home in Britain (Rapport 2000).[100]

Most of these works discuss the imperatives that have led to the move towards home. Marcus and Fischer, for example, adduced the following reasons:

> There is less funding for social-science research, especially for ethnography abroad, the practical applications of which are not apparent. Host societies, protective of their nationalisms, have complicated the acquisition of research permits. And there is a growing awareness in anthropology that the functions of ethnography at home are as compelling and legitimate as they have been abroad. (Marcus and Fischer 1986:113)

They add:

> Fears that the subject of anthropology, the exotic other, is disappearing have proved groundless: distinctive cultural variation is where you find it, and is often more important to document at home than abroad. (Marcus and Fischer 1986:113)

Moffat echoes these reasons and adds some of his own:

> heightened inter-disciplinarity and genre-blurring all through the social sciences and humanities, post-colonial critiques of First-World/Third-World distinctions foundational to an older anthropology, new forms of older concerns about relevance and application, growing numbers of

[100] But see also the response to it (Quigley 2000).

> anthropologists in a period of declining transnational access and funding (Moffat 1992:205)

And most recently, for the special case of Britain, Rapport advances the following reasons:

> The growth of interest in analytical models of "Western" society and culture, in particular Europe; the growing difficulty of gaining access to traditional non-Western sites, and the political and moral questionableness of so doing; critique of a merely quantitative, sociological appraisal of the West, also of the dichotomisation between so-called "pure" and "applied" research in this regard; and a burgeoning appreciation of the sophisticated studies being undertaken of their own, "home" societies and cultures by anthropologists of North America, Scandinavia, and also France. (Rapport 2000:21)

In my own case, the prime reasons for the change of locus were two-fold. Firstly, I had engaged with the literature on the relationship between anthropology and colonialism (what Moffat calls "post-colonial critiques of First-World/Third-World distinctions foundational to an older anthropology") and recognised the cogency of many (but not all) of the arguments advanced in that literature about the role of anthropology in the creation of knowledge about the "other". Secondly, I had also come to the conclusion that the "functions of ethnography at home are as compelling and legitimate as they have been abroad" (see above). In this I was persuaded by the work of Bourdieu who had, in *Distinction*, powerfully demonstrated both how one could do ethnographic work in one's own society and also the value of such work.

It is important to note, however, that the displacement of the traditional locus of anthropological attention was also connected with much broader changes that took place in social theory in general in the early eighties. Since then, there has been a dramatic change in what are considered the central issues for social theory and these are reflected in, if not provide an impetus for, changes in the locus of anthropological fieldwork.

In an essay that can be taken as a benchmark from the start of this period we see Anthony Giddens identifying the central theoretical issue of that time as *the structure/agency dichotomy* (Giddens 1979). The work of people like Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1977) and Giddens himself were oriented towards trying to reconcile the gains from objectivist structuralism with a greater emphasis on humans beings as agents in the construction of the realities they lived. Social theory until then had been dominated by a variety of objectivist structuralisms (Althusserian, Lévi-Straussian, the Early Foucault, Godelierian, etc). Bourdieu, Giddens and others, in a movement of critique against this tradition, tried to give more attention to culturalist theories, to history, and to the human capacity to create the worlds in which humans live; in other words, the agentive dimension of human action.

If we now look at a more recent benchmark essay we see that the central problem that occupies the horizon of social theorists has changed. Craig Calhoun, in a wide ranging review of critical social theory, says:

> The *tension between universality and difference* has come to the fore ... as perhaps the central issue informing contemporary debates in social and cultural theory. (1995:xii. Emphasis added)

In other words, if structure/agency was the key issue for social theorists in the last days of structuralism in the late seventies and early eighties, the problem of the relationship between universalism/particularism seems to have pushed those concerns into the background in the last decade of the twentieth century.[101]

The move in anthropology which we call "repatriation" must be seen against this background of broader changes in the climate of social theory rather than just as a simple reaction to the institutional circumstances of the discipline itself. Rapport is right when he says "these changes [repatriation] accompanied a number of others in wider social-scientific and institutional milieux" (Rapport 2000:21).

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[101] A crude measure of this change is alluded to by Brubaker and Cooper who point out that "between 1990 and 1997 alone... the number of journal articles in the *Current Contents* database with "identity" and "identities" in the title more than doubled, while the total number of articles increased by about 20 percent" (2000:38).

Feminism, post-colonialism, subalternism and other "positionalisms" led to theoretical, methodological, political and ethical concerns about the sites of research and the position of the researcher in that site. These broader changes in the climate of social theory itself are inextricably linked to social and historical changes in the wider world within which social theory is produced.

One of the first things we can say about the phrases "at home" and "repatriation" is the way they make reference to the broader concept of "place" or "space". Spatial metaphors have an interesting place in anthropological discourse. Firstly, they make reference to the movement of the anthropologist from her own "home" society to another. Johannes Fabian has argued convincingly that spatial metaphors of this kind have more often than not been codes for temporal categories (Fabian 1983). The movement away from home, from the metropolitan centres of the West has been seen as a movement back in time. Shostak, for example, invites the reader to see the encounter with the !Kung as an encounter with people who are what the whole of humanity must have been like thousands of years ago. A movement to the Kalahari from the United States is a movement from the modern period into an almost prehistoric period. Fabian's lengthy critique discusses the effects of what he calls this denial of co-evalness, of living in the same time, on anthropology.

But, as I have already indicated, spatial metaphors enter anthropology through more generic social theory. There is a whole set of ideas, concepts and theories which collectively are called "standpoint theory" though, in actual fact, they are made up of a number of different theories. Calhoun traces the lineages of this "theory" to the Enlightenment and in particular to Kant. Kant sought to construct a concept of universal "man" who has, "a broadened way of thinking if he overrides the private subjective conditions of his judgement ... and reflects on his own judgement from a universal standpoint" (Calhoun 1995:163). In other words, for Enlightenment thinkers, one goal was to find a position in social space from which the knowledge produced could be seen as referring to universal truths. These thinkers were deeply antagonistic towards particularism and localism which they all saw as being partial and hence incomplete. In other words, it was believed that one should seek out of

the transcendental, a place outside of common places, in order to speak the truth and to obtain true knowledge.

This search for and commitment to a "universal" standpoint is what characterises Enlightenment thought. Science is conceived of as being successful precisely because it speaks from this standpoint. Any epistemological problems that arise for science arise because of the hidden partialities of hidden particularisms. A major task of all enquiry is to seek these out and root them out.

For some thinkers this "universal" standpoint coincided with that of certain privileged groups in society. Thus, for example, for Marx this universal standpoint coincided with the standpoint of the proletariat.[102] To see the world from this point of view, from the standpoint of the proletariat, was to see it in universal terms. The move to universal knowledge consisted of moving towards an understanding of the world from the standpoint of the proletariat.

This commitment to the universal and the derogation of the particular, then, have been part of the ideology of Western thought. However, in recent years this ideology has been challenged from a number of quarters. Firstly, it has been pointed out that the standpoint from which these so-called universal truths have been sought has been a very male and a very Eurocentric position, that it has systematically excluded, for reasons of power, the standpoints of women and other oppressed groups. Thus, feminists have pointed out how the proletariat was almost always conceived of as male. There have been a number of different kinds of reactions to this perception. For example, one reaction has been, amongst socialist

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[102] Echoes of this view can be found in recent ethnographic writing such as that of Michael Taussig and Paul Willis who attribute special abilities to "peasant" and "working class youth" to "penetrate" the mysteries of the social worlds they inhabit.. Again, the Monty Python team did a sketch where a group of individuals sit meditating on and voice their views about what the young people are coming to these days and reminisce about which of them had the hardest childhood: "Luxury , sheer luxury. I was brought up in a paper bag on the side of the road. My father would beat me the moment I woke up (and I had to wake up before I went to bed), and then make me clean out our paper bag home by licking it clean with my tongue before making me go out to work a 30 hour day. The young folks these days, they don't know how lucky they are". The reason for the escalation in these accounts of hard experience is so that those recounting them can take the moral high ground or position from which they speak about universal matters.

feminists, to try and get rid of this partiality and to move to a true universal genderless standpoint.

Another challenge has been the positive re-evaluation of particularisms. And this is where the discussion reconnects with the issue of "repatriation" or "doing anthropology at home". The argument goes as follows: there are social groups whose experience is incommensurable. That is, one cannot establish equivalences between them such that these equivalences can form the basis of the development of universal standpoints. For example, some feminists would argue that the experience of men and women are so fundamentally different, it is pointless trying to find in them a basis for a universal standpoint. Rather, we should simply accept that there are a large number of standpoints and that each gives access to different kinds of knowledge.

This argument can be extended beyond feminist theory to other standpoints. Anne Salmond in an essay on a move towards a local anthropology says:

> In *metropolitan* countries anthropology shares with its subjects a colonial past; in *New Zealand* Pakeha, Maori and Pacific Islanders share a future that has yet to be worked out, and a past which goes in contradictory directions - on the one hand back to Europe and on the other westwards across the Pacific. This sets social anthropology in New Zealand in a context of unusual intimacy, and offers *epistemological* possibilities which our students sense and which some of them want very much to explore. (Salmond 1986:44 emphases added)

Angela Cheater says something similar but in slightly more negative tones:

> The exotic ritual obscurities that find a publication market at the centre, justifying the "expert" status of metropolitan colleagues, seem to us peripherals largely irrelevant to our lives, our teaching, and our research. [We] feel that there is nothing to talk about that will be of interest and value to ourselves as professionals in our own societies: *the starting premises are so different as to be irreconcilable.* (1986:174, emphasis added)

Cheater continues:

> Citizen anthropologists, especially in the Third World, experience a different subjective professional reality. In my view it is time that we recognised both this difference and the changes in the world of anthropology which have caused it. (1986:175)

In other words, our particular historical and social experience, grounded in a particular place and time, is the base on which we develop our social anthropological practice, both theoretical and empirical. We need to understand this experience in order to use it as the basis for developing our practice. "There is," says Salmond, "no pure position to adopt". In Aotearoa New Zealand we have epistemological possibilities not available elsewhere. The problem, however, is that our disciplinary practices and concerns until recently have been dominated by imported models. Whereas our artists - painters, poets, writers, etc. - have long since begun to forge a new path firmly located here, academia still operates on the basis of practice imported from metropolitan centres.

> Social anthropology, if it is to contribute anything of lasting value to New Zealand cultural life, must meet these matters and not evade them. There is a possibility of a better relationship between Maori and Pakeha, with the Pacific and Pacific Island people, with Anglo-American traditions and socio-political practices and the full richness of human life; and if a good pathway can be found through some of these questions within our discipline in New Zealand it will have justified its local existence. (Salmond 1986:47)

In other words, it is being recognised that anthropology and ethnography are, in the words of Geertz, crafts of place. More than this, not only is this particularism being recognised but it is being valorised as something that offers new horizons for disciplinary practices. The move towards doing anthropology at home is not simply, as suggested by Marcus and Fischer, a change in the locus of fieldwork; it is accompanied by changes in methodology and by new epistemologies.

If we accept this, then we should not be surprised if each particular locus will present unique methodological possibilities for the ethnographic imagination. And a study located in middle Pakeha New Zealand is no exception. This brings me to the substantive methodological issue raised by this particular turn towards doing Anthropology at home.

STATISTICAL MODES OF KNOWLEDGE AND SOCIAL SYSTEMS[103]

A key feature of the locus of this study which raises some interesting methodological issues is the fact that it is being conducted in a society in which relationships are said to be less "authentic" than in those which anthropologists have traditionally conducted their research. I realise I am raising a dubious distinction, one which has been shown to be deeply problematic. I want to bracket those issues for the moment before returning to them. Lévi-Strauss long ago distinguished between societies on the basis of the degree to which they permit or are based on "authentic" relations between individuals, on direct face-to-face relations. He argued that in societies like our own actual people are, by and large, cut off from each other or are interconnected only through intermediary agents or systems of relays, such as administrative machinery or ideological ramifications (Charbonnier 1969:58). "Authentic" relations, on the other hand, are those that are multivalent and face-to-face. The relationships are "total" in the Maussian sense, that is phenomena which are at once "religious, juridical, moral, political, familial, economic" and even aesthetic (Mauss 1990:3).

Lévi-Strauss suggested that in societies in which relationships were predominantly "authentic" structural models would be "mechanical", that is focussed on the mechanisms that underlay or underwrote the relationships themselves whereas in societies like our own structural models would be "statistical". Lévi-Strauss gives an example from his own speciality, the different approaches to dealing with laws of marriage in the different types of society:

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[103] The argument here repeats and extends the discussion I began in an earlier publication (Barnard 1990:75ff). Asad has also written on this subject but with a different purpose. My discussion here is more programmatic whilst his are more critical, yet our views converge on occasion (Asad 1994).

> In primitive societies these laws can be expressed in models calling for actual grouping of the individuals according to kin or clan; these are mechanical models. No such distribution exists in our own society, where types of marriage are determined by the size of the primary and secondary groups to which prospective mates belong, social fluidity, amount of information, and the like. A satisfactory (though yet untried) attempt to formulate invariants of our marriage system would therefore have to determine average values - thresholds; it would be a statistical model. (Lévi-Strauss 1968c:284)

The distinction Lévi-Strauss is making here is linked to his notion that "primitive" (sic!) societies are "cold" societies and societies like our own are "hot". By this he means that they have different ways of dealing with the passage of time and the inevitable disjunctions it brings to social life. "Cold" societies are ones that attempt to neutralise these disjunctions whereas "hot" societies are ones that use them as fuel for a historical relation to time.[104] In this respect, Lévi-Strauss was suggesting that these types of societies are incommensurable and he even went so far as to suggest that ethnography was a mode of knowledge appropriate for "cold" societies and inappropriate for "hot" ones. These societies were incommensurable because knowledge of the former was based on immensurable facts whereas knowledge in the latter was based on mensurable ones.

Now, we don't have to follow Lévi-Strauss down these paths and make such rigid distinctions between different types of societies. Mechanical models are just as

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[104] This naïve dualism is not dead. Miller, whose work I discussed in an earlier chapter, struggles with this. On the one hand, he wants to retain the relativism of anthropology and to simply treat "modern" societies as one of a number of possible types of society but, on the other, he insists that there is something extraordinary about the nature of social change to be found in modern societies. It is, to use his term, "developmental". (Miller 1987:66ff). The difficulties he has to go through in order to accommodate this contradiction are nicely summed up in the following sentence: "The Walbiri as presented by Munn are not more primitive than we are, and they are our contemporaries, but they are clearly a lot less modern" (Miller 1987:67). Similarly, in her hyper-theoretical Foucauldian essay, Kalpagam, speaking of India, says: "History and historical practice thus appeared on the scene as a new way of organising the past for political objectives, thus displacing, at least partly, the earlier modes of constructing the past for ethico-moral ends. *As the linear notion of time assumed dominance over the cyclical one* and in the process secularised it, the secular idea of progress predicated new possibilities for the future, if indeed the goals could be pursued rationally." (Kalpagam 2000:50, my emphasis). If one removes the veneer of multi-syllabic theoreticisms all one is left with is a similar dualism to that of Lévi-Strauss's.

appropriate for dimensions of our own society and it is equally the case that statistical models are applicable to so-called "primitive" societies. However, we need to recognise that Lévi-Strauss was drawing our attention to some interesting issues. In particular, we need to recognise that one way in which modern societies know themselves is through statistical forms of knowledge. This is tied to the forms of "persons" found in these societies which, both practically (as the Foucauldians suggest) and ideologically/discursively are constituted as "individuals-in-society" (as Dumont has expressed it).[105]

This is not the place to discuss the rise of statistics as a form of knowledge. Nor does one have to adopt conspiratorial Foucauldian theories of the relationship between the growth of the idea of "populations" and the need for "governance" of these populations through discipline, surveillance and administration to acknowledge the intimate link between statistical forms of knowledge and the development of particular conceptions of the person and population. It is important to recognise that one of the most important ways of knowing social wholes constituted of "individuals-in-society" is through enumeration.[106] It is an "experience near" form of knowledge for the kind of society in which this study was conducted and as such needs to be part of any attempt to understand that society anthropologically. However, there are a number of hurdles that anthropology has to overcome in order to be able to take on this mode of knowledge as one of its tools for understanding our "own" societies.

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[105] Dumont contrasts the forms of individualism to found in modern societies with those such as that of India. In India, he argues, one *does* find "individuals" but such persons exist outside-of-society in the form of renouncers. The contrast is particularly apposite here because in Dumont's view "individuals-outside-society" are naked in social terms: no accounting of social characteristics can be carried out in relation to them. They cannot be the subject of enumerative forms of knowledge because they have divested themselves of any characteristics that can be enumerated. By contrast "individuals-in-society" can be enumerated in terms of the relationships they have to the larger whole and to each other.

[106] Raymond William's observations are apposite here: "It is very striking that the classic technique devised in response to the impossibility of understanding contemporary society from experience, the statistical mode of analysis, had its precise origins with the 1840s. For without the combination of statistical theory, which in a sense was already mathematically present, and arrangements for collection of data... the society that was emerging out of the industrial revolution was literally unknowable..." (As quoted by Asad (1994:68)).

STATISTICS AND ANTHROPOLOGY; THE CASE FOR STATISTICAL ETHNOGRAPHY

> Why should there be this resistance to statistics?
>
> (Bourdieu 1990a:70)

In embarking on this study one of the major hurdles I have had to confront is the resistance to the use of statistics in social anthropology. In the following discussion I trace the history of the relationship between statistics and social anthropology in order to set the stage for an argument for their reconciliation.[107]

Mitchell, in his contribution (Mitchell 1967) to the first systematic work in social anthropology devoted to questions of method, addressed the question of the relationship between social anthropology and quantification. Drawing on a number of comments from anthropologists he demonstrated that there was generally a deep scepticism about the appropriateness of the use of quantitative methods in the field,[108] that is, the use of methods of investigation in the field which would result in numerical data. There might have been something of a "softening" in the years just preceding his review but, drawing on a hoary anthropological analogy, he suggested that this was more in the nature of the kind of change a son-in-law goes through in relation to a mother-in-law, a change from hostility to respect but where an appropriate distance is still maintained (Mitchell 1967:17-18).[109]

Mitchell gave the impression that at the time of writing he was witnessing the possibility that even this attitude might be changing and that a gradual, but real rapprochement would take place. He drew attention to the work being done by

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[107] Chibnik, in a recent review of the use of statistics in sociocultural anthropology, provides a *very* brief history of the use of statistics in anthropology. He alludes to but does not explore the tensions in the discipline about the use of statistics in the way that I do here. Rather his review is largely "a description of some of the multivariate methods most frequently (sic!) used in sociocultural anthropology" (Chibnik 1985:136). Nor does he discuss the epistemological issues raised by the use of this mode of understanding in different social contexts.

[108] There has been, as Mitchell points out, a long tradition of the use of statistical analysis outside of the field context which saw its apotheosis in the development of the Human Relations Area Files project. This attempted to develop a comparative social science based on the cross-tabulation and correlation of cultural and social traits. This development was not dependent on quantification **in** the field. This essay will not address the use of statistics for this kind of purpose. There is, in my view rightly, profound scepticism about the validity of the methodological framework within which such comparative studies are carried out (Mitchell 1967:19).

[109] An image that seems to have occurred independently to Driver (as quoted in a review essay by Chibnik (1985))

members of the "Manchester School" (in their institutional bases of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute and the University of Manchester) who were beginning to make regular use of quantitative methods both at the level of data "collection" or "production", i.e. in the field, and at the level of analysis.[110]

In their slightly more recent survey of the same relationship the Peltos's (Pelto and Pelto 1978) view does not seem to be all that different. They suggested, drawing on the work of Bennett and Thaiss, that there was "anthropological resistance to quantified research procedures" (Pelto and Pelto 1978:127). They went one step further and tried to identify the reason behind this resistance, ascribing it to the tradition of "holistic depiction" characteristic of an earlier approach to anthropology. However, like Mitchell, they noted a change in attitude and they documented a growing acceptance of quantitative data collection and analysis in cultural anthropology - though this still remained considerably attenuated in comparison with physical anthropology.

Both Mitchell and the Peltos were over-optimistic about the seeming rapprochement between anthropologists and the use of quantitative methods in social anthropology. In fact the Peltos and Mitchell were writing in optimistic terms about a future relationship which, if anything, was about to deteriorate into open warfare.

I begin by exploring the reasons why this is the case. I then move on to a discussion of some recent developments in statistical methodology which may offer ways of reconciling what for many are the seemingly irreconcilable. I have already reviewed the development of the concept of culture in anthropology in a previous chapter. In this chapter, we will see the effects or instantiation of these developments in relation to methodological uses concerning the use of statistics in anthropology.

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[110] See, for example, the extensive use of statistics in that classic of "situational analysis", Victor Turner's *Schism and continuity in an African society* (Turner 1957)

THE INTERPRETIVE AND DIALOGICAL TURNS

Marcus and Fischer (Marcus and Fischer 1986:33) identify the development of the interpretive perspective as one of the three "internal" critiques of anthropology that emerged in the 1960s. The others were a critique "of fieldwork as the distinctive method of ethnographic research" and a critique "of the ahistoric and apolitical nature of ethnographic writing". They say that only the critique embedded in the rise of interpretive anthropology had any impact on the practice of anthropology at that time, the others being merely polemical and at the level of "manifesto". It is only in recent years, in the 80s, that an anthropology which integrates all three critiques at a practical level is emerging.

Interpretive anthropology saw itself as a break with the deadening positivist and scientistic climate that had pervaded anthropology in the decades following its establishment as a discipline. It represented and gave expression to a sea-change, a gestalt switch in relation to the aims and scope of the anthropological enterprise. Rejecting the ambitious goals of establishing a universal science of "Man", given most vigorous expression in early American anthropology by the forced marriage of the "four fields"[111] and in Commonwealth anthropology in Radcliffe-Brown's visions of developing a natural science of society, the interpretive or hermeneutic perspective invited anthropology to embark on a more modest, though not necessarily any less difficult, enterprise of "understanding" or "translating" other cultures.

The chief architect of the interpretive approach to anthropology was and is Clifford Geertz. In a series of artfully crafted essays[112] (Geertz 1973; Geertz 1974; Geertz 1980a) he outlined the new theory of culture that had begun to inform his work and that of others in the previous decade. This theory of culture assumed hegemonic or

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[111] There was a hope, unfulfilled and now largely abandoned, that some day in the future they would be united in one "field".

[112] Geertz has never written a full monograph on the methodological and theoretical perspectives that he himself favoured. The essay is his preferred form (1973:25) and it is also his most influential. There is no easy categorisation of his work into, say, "theoretical and methodological" essays and substantive "monographs". It is true that all his monographs deal with matters of substance (Geertz 1963; Geertz 1965; Geertz 1980b) but it is equally true that much of his most influential "substantive" work has also appeared in essay form (Geertz 1966; Geertz 1972).

canonical (Thomas 1991:308) status[113] in the discipline, attempting to take the intellectual (and moral as we shall see shortly) high ground by ruling out of court any approach to cultural phenomena that did not subscribe to a purely semiotic view of them. It defined anthropology purely in operational terms (Geertz 1973:5) - that in order to appreciate what anthropology is as "a form of knowledge" we have to understand "what doing ethnography is". But it went further than this and narrowly defined the "doing" of ethnography as the fixing, in microscopic description, the "flow of social discourse". This description, being ineluctably an interpretation, gave the whole approach the name "interpretive anthropology".

Geertz has conducted systematic intellectual guerilla warfare against what he calls the "dreams of social physics" (1983:23). He has written scathingly of some social scientists preoccupation with isolating causes, determining variables, measuring forces and defining functions and has constructed, whilst construing, the field of the social sciences as a giant battleground between those who would turn to the humanities for their analogies (such as Goffman, Turner, and himself) and those who would turn to the natural sciences for theirs.[114]

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[113] "The move toward conceiving of social life as organised in terms of symbols . . . whose meaning . . . we must grasp if we are to understand that organisation and formulate its principles, has grown now to *formidable* proportions. The woods are full of eager interpreters" (Geertz 1983:21) Geertz lays claims, erroneously, to the dominance of this approach in the social sciences as a whole rather than just in anthropology. In fact, he is a little self-contradictory in that on other occasions he gives the impression that the bulk of the work in the social sciences, including anthropology, is in the hands of the social physicists. The confusion is resolved if we realise that certain forms of doing anthropology have higher status than others. There is a hierarchy within the field of cultural anthropology and the dominant positions are held by the interpreters. Their influence far outweighs their numbers.

[114] The debate between *Geistwissenschaften vs Naturwissenschaften*, says Geertz, has "broken out afresh, and in an especially virulent and degraded form" (Geertz 1985:623). This is wonderful. Not only does he manage to distance himself from the debate whilst simultaneously joining it but he manages to define the "battle" in such a way that should anyone contest him and his contribution to it he will be able to easily dismiss the challenge on the grounds that it proves his contention that the whole business is terribly degrading.

The fact is that it is Geertz, himself, who has raised the temperature in the debate and who has systematically set about assassinating the characters of those who might adopt an approach different from his own (thus his world is peopled by "cerebral savages" such as Lévi-Strauss, "symbolic-domination tribunes" such as Bourdieu, and unnamed "against-interpretation mandarins" (1983:34). If one were to practice the art of attributing guilt by association, one of the favoured tools in Geertz's armory of intellectual debate, it is instructive that Geertz published his article on Lévi-Strauss in the CIA funded journal *Encounter*.

There is an essay to be written on Geertz's mode of discourse in the light of Diesing and Bourdieu's theories of the social processes informing the scientific and intellectual fields. It

Of course, he is too subtle to take these "wrong headed" approaches head on. Geertz is nothing if not the grand master of the glancing blow which, as in some forms of martial arts, leaves the object of its attacks completely savaged.[115] The nett effect of the generally positive, even if self-deprecatory, comments on approaches to the social sciences that draw their analogies and methods of research from the humanities and the absolutely negative comments about those that draw theirs from the natural sciences make it clear that any social scientists that have recourse to mathematical and statistical tools, tools associated with the natural sciences, are going to have a hard row to hoe to be taken seriously as social sciences at all.

This move towards a "symbols and meaning" type of anthropology was not simply an American affair. In the guise of "semantic" anthropology and the "translation-of-culture" type of structuralist anthropology it became the dominant form of anthropology in the English speaking Commonwealth during the 70s and 80s. The Social Anthropological tradition (with a capital S), however, hung on grimly to the concept of society that it had inherited from Radcliffe-Brown, Evans-Pritchard and Max Gluckman. Thus, though questions of meaning and symbolism did come to the foreground in the works of Turner, Douglas and a younger generation like David Parkin and the Comaroffs, there is a distinctive cast to the kind of anthropology produced by those trained in this tradition which is different from the "symbols-and-meaning" approach of American anthropology.

Nevertheless "Symbols-and-meaning" type anthropology found widespread sympathy and acceptance in mainstream American and Commonwealth anthropology. It resonated too with the growing anti-positivist, anti-empiricist temper of the social sciences in general, and social and cultural anthropology in

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would look at the rhetorical strategies he employs in dealing with those who might contend with him in defining the nature of the field.

[115] Constructing the alternative perspectives in facile terms (they "would", he says, "transform the field into some sort of social physics"), inviting the reader to join him in ridiculing it, he goes further and suggests that their motives for entertaining these perspectives are anything less than noble - that they are motivated by the fear of not being taken seriously by the other sciences, that they are motivated by merely mercenary ambitions, "determined to get all the money there is going" (Geertz 1985:623).

particular. It also found a ready audience in the newly developing field of cultural studies which, in its American form, was the new disciplinary space in which a number of academicians from a variety of disciplines - literary studies, cultural anthropology, media studies, women's studies - found common ground. The woods did indeed become full of eager interpreters and translators.

The turn to the humanities and towards a semiotic conception of the anthropological enterprise did not stop there. In more recent times, and attempting to marry the other critiques of anthropology referred to above, mainstream anthropology has moved from the interpretive to the dialogical. The high ground of anthropological theory is now being contested by those who, trained as interpretive wood-persons in the 60s, are now engaged in attempting to construct anthropology as a dialogical enterprise. Conceiving of interpretive anthropology as still maintaining an unacceptable distance from the cross-cultural encounter which is supposedly at the heart of this enterprise, the advocates of dialogical (and polyphonic) anthropology argue that ethnographic texts should not simply be "interpretations" of other cultures but should attempt to "embody" the other culture in some form. The anthropologist should incorporate the voice of the "other". Starting with Rabinow and finding their grand master in the new Clifford - James - the wood has now begun to be filled with eager dialogists practicing various forms of dialogism.

Forms of writing and fieldwork practice

That these developments have had important implications for modes of writing has been fairly universally acknowledged. In fact they have led simultaneously to a huge increase in the attention paid to the processes of writing - a trend which has become a major sub-theme of the dialogical and interpretive turn itself, spawning numerous examinations of the written discourse of both traditional classics of ethnography and more recent "experimental ethnographies".[116] However, it is equally noticeable that, with partial exceptions,[117] little attention has been paid to

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[116] Marcus and Cushman (1982) is the Ur-text but it was closely followed by many others: Marcus and Fischer (1986); Clifford and Marcus (1986); Clifford (1988); Geertz (1988).

[117] Clifford on Maurice Leinhardt.

the fieldwork processes or fieldwork practice itself. In fact this has been bracketed off and mythologised (Marcus and Fischer 1986:186).

Thomas, in an excellent and thought-provoking essay, has argued that we need to make a "hard distinction between practices of research and the particular kinds of writing we recognise as `ethnographic'". He claims that there is no necessary link between modes of research practice and the forms of writing that the analysis of the data generated by those modes of research take. He says "it is obviously possible to generate similar analytic discourses from very different research procedures, and equally to use similar research procedures toward divergent theoretical genres" (Thomas 1991:307).

I don't think this "hard distinction" can be maintained.[118] There is a very strong elective affinity between certain forms of writing and modes of research practice. The new dialogical modes of writing, for example, are hugely dependent on extensive and intensive interviews between the anthropologist and, if not one, then a very small number of research participants. Thomas is right to assert that what anthropologists do in the field does not necessarily entail a certain mode of presenting the information they have acquired but it *is* the case that an anthropologist who enters the field with a certain conception of what the final written form will look like is more likely to engage certain modes of research practice rather than others because those chosen modes of writing entail the preferred modes of representation and it is equally the case that should an anthropologist only employ certain modes of research practice - for example, the census and/or the survey - then a number of modes of writing are foreclosed: in this case, the interpretive and the dialogical.[119]

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[118] Thomas's major arguments - about the enduring exoticism of anthropology and the particularly virulent form it takes in interpretive anthropology and the epistemological problems of ethnography posed by the fact that its major mode of dealing with empirical materials is subsumption - are not, to my mind, undermined by abandoning the hard distinction he makes. In fact abandoning the hard distinction raises the possibility of the extension of some aspects of those arguments to fieldwork practice itself.

[119] Thomas is actually somewhat ambiguous on this issue. On the one hand, he suggests that the reason for maintaining the argument for the separability of fieldwork and ethnography is a utilitarian one: "that at present it helps to situate the enduring problems of anthropological vision in the constitution of the ethnographic genre" . Thus he admits that "methods

Marcus and Fischer are quite conscious of this:

> Ethnographies of experience reinforce the idea (and ideal) that anthropology derives its knowledge mainly from face-to-face engagement and communication, which obscures the *many other ways* that knowledge is constructed in the field. (Marcus and Fischer 1986:186 emphases added)

More than this, they recognise that both dialogical and interpretive ethnographic practice have celebrated and mythologised these notions of fieldwork rather than disrupting them.

They are led to raise these issues in the context of addressing the problems of writing ethnographies of experience which take account of "large-scale-system processes" (Marcus and Fischer 1986:77ff). Yet, in spite of these comments, in the final analysis Marcus and Fischer also retreat from disrupting these mythologised notions of fieldwork and, instead, recommend tinkering with the dialogue metaphor suggesting that we give less emphasis to the idea of it as "communication between individuals" and more emphasis to the idea of "the patterning of communications among classes, interest groups, localities, and regions" (Marcus and Fischer 1986:186).

Interpretive and dialogical ethnography are characterised by the central place they give to processes of scription and the capture of the spoken word in writing. The origins of why this is the case are complex. I am more concerned here with its consequences. In the pseudo-reflexive turn to exploring ethnographies as texts concerns with non-scripted ethnographies are bracketed out. Thus, it is somewhat ironic that the development of interpretive and dialogical ethnography, with their celebration of and centralisation of processes of scription, should have occurred simultaneously with the rapid development of the field of visual ethnography. There has been an unprecedented increase in the number, variety and depth of visual ethnographies in the last three decades. This fact seems to have not

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...constrain and influence forms of presentation' and "methods and research techniques ..may strongly influence the form in which information is presented". Yet in his final summation he returns to the hard distinction saying that his "arguments have nothing to do with fieldwork". The fact is that this is so because he has made it so from the beginning.

registered at all with those who have spent an enormous amount of energy defining ethnography as a form of writing. Yet the concerns of those who are interested in visual materials of all kinds, including visual ethnography, have been of great influence in the development of conceptual tools deployed by those who would explore the processes of writing. More than this, interpretive (as opposed to dialogical) ethnography has a very strong specular view of what the task of ethnography is. Grand images play an important role in interpretive ethnography.[120]

If, then, those who theorise ethnography and celebrate it as a form of writing can ignore and bracket out concerns with the very field, visual ethnography, that they draw some of their most potent concepts from - one thinks, in particular, of the concept of the "frame" and "framing devices" - then what little hope is there for ethnographic work that depends on other modes of constructing knowledge in the field?

It is not, therefore, surprising that in the climate created by the rise to canonical status of the interpretive ethnography and dialogical ethnography that quantitative data collection and quantitative data analysis should have withered or been marginalised. They were and are seen as emblematic of all the kinds of approaches to social science that the interpreters, translators, dialogists, polyphonists, even historical anthropologists,[121] oppose: empiricist, positivist, objectivist, non-reflexive, anti-humanist, even sexist.[122]

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[120] It is a characteristic of James Clifford's writing that his ruminations on ethnographic writing often begin with an extended meditation on some strong visual images: he begins his discussion of the predicament of anthropology by evoking the image of Elsie in Carlos Williams's house; he begins his exploration of field-notes by discussing various scenes captured by three photographs of ethnographers at work.

[121] Thus the Comaroffs refer to their position as being "anti-statistical", though they fall into the trap discussed later of equating statistics with probability and inference: "It should be clear that we do not use the term `statistical' here in its narrow, purely numerical sense. We mean it to refer, generically, to any inference of prevailing pattern or probability derived from past rates of occurrence" (1992:47).

[122] One anthropologist, in verbal conversation, said that she felt that statistics was a sexist mode of relating to reality and was to be opposed on feminist grounds. She added that she felt that pure mathematics was gender neutral and therefore to be encouraged!

THE BABY'S BATH WATER; SOCIAL SCIENCE AS SOCIAL PHYSICS

This is not to say that we should blame interpretive and dialogical ethnography alone for the marginalisation of quantitative methods in ethnography. Certainly a great deal of the blame can be laid at the foot of those who have chosen to deploy these methods in the social sciences. Geertz is right in so far as those who have adopted quantitative methods have, for the most part, subscribed to a vision of anthropology which sees it as a form of social physics. And he is right, too, in that this vision of social research dominated the funding bodies and the work of those who drew their resources from them.

More than this, however, these social scientists have worked with an impoverished and inappropriate notion of science. The reasons for this are complex but include the seductions of statisticians for whom the development of the field of probability has been a major goal in the last half-century and who have had little or no practical understanding of social science itself. They have, consequently, offered tools quite inappropriate to the kinds of materials social scientists deal with. There is also, as Geertz suggests, the fear that social science needs to dress properly in order to be taken seriously at the high table of science.

According to Lieberson (1985:3ff) the notion of science that many social researchers[123] have worked with is one which sees Boyle's Law and the experiments that give it expression as the epitome of what science is all about. They "attempt to manipulate their analysis of non-experimental data so as to approximate, as closely as possible, the kind of experiment that would be used to examine Boyle's Law" (1985:6).[124] The search is always on for the fundamentally "causative" principles or variables and the most sophisticated statistical techniques are enlisted to this end.

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[123] This includes those who are opposed to scientistic conceptions of the ethnographer's art.

[124] Given the popularity of inferential multivariate techniques one would think the favoured model would be actually closer to the ideal gas law, one which combines Gay-Lussac's, Charles's and Boyle's Laws but this is not the case. Social scientists transfer their obsession with dependent and independent variables to these techniques. A model (such as that embodied in the perfect gas equation) which shows the mutual and equal dependence of all the variables on each other is one which does not fit with the desire of social scientists, even those working with more than two variables, to find *linear* relationships (the perfect gas equation results in a *curved surface* and not a line!).

The poverty of this image of what constitutes "natural" science amongst social scientists has been commented on before. The consequence of this image for practical work in the social sciences is that much social science that uses statistics resembles the social physics that Geertz so rightly criticises. In order to break with this image we need "to break with *linear thinking*, which only recognises the simple ordinal structures of direct determination" (Bourdieu 1984:107)

How do we do this? The first step is by recognising the various sources of our problems. These are twofold: firstly, incoherent ideas of "causation" and "association" and, secondly, the way social scientists are inducted into the use of statistics.

Incoherence about association and causation

The irony is that nearly all modern texts that deal with quantitative methods include warnings about the dangers of positivism and the dangers of confusing correlation and association with causation. Thus, for example, a recent text published by Polity Press - a leading and reputable publisher in the field of social research - devotes considerable space to criticism (and reminders of earlier criticisms) of positivism and a whole section entitled "A word of caution" which is worth quoting in full:

> The relationships which we observe and statistically establish, should always be regarded as associations between variables, and not as simple causal relations. The nature of social behaviour means that relations will rarely, if ever, be uncomplicated, one-way relations between two factors: other variables will always impinge and influence; the variation in one factor may be attributable to variation in two, three or more other variables, all of which are themselves related. This is why we tend *not to speak of causality* but of association, *not of* determination but of *probability* in relationships.
>
> This reasonable caution which all social scientists must observe also affects our model of research procedure. This model is derived primarily from natural science procedure and needs to be treated as a model rather than as a description of the reality of the research process. (Reid 1987:45-46, emphases added)

This is typical of the confused and confusing statements that are to be found in most standard texts developed to introduce social scientists to quantitative research. It classically tries to have its cake and eat it as well or should one say "Refuse the cake but somehow sneak large portions of it into the researchers mouth!" The fact is that despite protestations and warnings about correlation and association not being the same as causation, associations and correlations **are** seen as evidence of causation. This becomes clearer if we examine what Reid has to say latter in the text:

> I have stated on a number of occasions during this introduction to statistics that the nature of sociological variables, their distribution and relationships, are complex and resistant to simple, *monocausal* explanation. It is not surprising, then, that statisticians have developed techniques for measuring complex relationships between a number of variables, and that these have been *eagerly* utilised by social researchers. Indeed, such techniques, grouped together under the heading multivariate analysis, have constituted the primary growth area of social statistics in the past 30 years as social scientists have attempted to enhance their analytic capabilities through refinement of statistical technique...The main problem which multivariate analysis attempts to solve is that of discriminating between possible *explanatory* variables in terms of their *influence* on a single dependent variable. We have mentioned some of the difficulties created by the complex nature of *social causality* but hitherto we have been dealing with only two variables in the simplest relationships...Once, however, we introduce the possibility of more than two variables, the nature of the relationship becomes less simple. Let us take two examples of three-variable relationships. In the first the apparent association between variable A and variable B is in fact due to both of these variables being *primarily influenced* by a third factor, C. ...An example of such a relationship would be the association between earnings and trade union membership, where both would, in fact, be *primarily determined* by a third factor, occupation. (Reid 1987:125-26, emphases added)

These statements are a wonderful case study of the confusion that arises in most social research that makes use of quantitative techniques. Desperately hanging on to the idea that association must not be confused with causation Reid surreptitiously introduces a third term – "influence". This term is supposed to act as kind of half-way house between association and causation (refusing the cake and having it). Once, however, one adopts the language of "influences" it is hard not to slip into the language of causation which Reid quite unconsciously does in the last sentence where "primarily influenced" becomes "primarily determined". If determination is equivalent to influence and if influence is a substitute for association then it is hard to see what has become of Reid's cautionary remarks about not confusing association with causation - unless of course one wants to make the argument that to say something is "primarily determined" by something else is not the same as saying that it is caused by it. This would take us into realms of unusual sophistry but one which could not, in any case, be sustained as it is in the very words of warning that Reid himself equates causation with determination.

How the baby's bath water came to be soiled

It is a notorious fact that many speakers of English as a second language use verbal forms that are statistically infrequent in ordinary language (George 1972:60ff). Thus, for example, amongst Indian speakers of English as a second language there is a tendency to use the present continuous form far more frequently than is justified on the basis of a study of the actual language-in-use or speech of mother-tongue speakers of English. This has a number of different consequences: the use of the tense inappropriately and the tendency to remain silent until an appropriate moment arises for the use of the form. The causes are simple! They are linked to the fact that this tense is the one that English as a second language learners have been introduced to first in their language learning experience and it is also the one that was most favoured by teachers of English as a second language because it allowed them to use the direct method to teach the vocabulary of verbs - "He is sitting!", "I am standing", "She is going" etc.

In other words, one of the major causes of common errors is poor course design. Course designers have not taken into account the frequency of occurrence of different verbal forms. [125]

We have, I feel, a lot to learn by comparing the roots of the problem of the use of statistics in the social sciences with the problems encountered by those learning a second-language.[126] The parallels are strong: learning statistics, and for that matter mathematics, is often referred to as the learning of a "language"; the distance in experience of learning the "language" of statistics of those doing the teaching and those doing the learning is similar to the distance between those who have learnt their language as "native" speakers and those who are experiencing it as a "second" language; the language experience of those learning and those teaching a language are often extremely divergent; there is even the question of the appropriate variety of language to teach. Even some of the myths are the same: that, for example, the "errors" of second-language learners is due to the "interference" of their mother-tongues - how often have social scientists had the blames for their "errors" and problems in the use of statistics laid at the foot of the language of their disciplines?

Social scientists encounter statistics as a foreign language taught by those who have been taught by statisticians. The latter serve a clientele that is as diverse as one can imagine: from astronomers to physicists, from linguisticians to biologists. They have developed a huge variety of techniques to meet the needs of this disparate clientele. More than this, there is a social dynamic within the statistical profession which encourages the display of gratuitous virtuosity in mathematics thereby leading to the development of more and more complex techniques and the mathematical honing of already established ones. The question of the relevance of these activities often disappears from the agenda.

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[125] The language needs a word – "docegenic"? - to refer to disorders of learning caused by teachers in the same way that we have a word - iatrogenic - to refer to diseases that are caused by doctors!

[126] A study of some of the problems of second and foreign language course design would be a good place for those designing statistics courses to begin. One of the most lucid, cogent and thoughtful entries to this subject is the work of H.V. George (1972).

The nature of the design of courses in statistics is, then, a complex result of the hysteresis effects and games of distinction in the field of the social sciences. The results themselves however are clear to see: an absolute conformity of design (see boxes below which give the tables of contents of some recent texts); condescension in relation to their clientele;[127] absence of any serious consideration of the particular conditions under which the target discipline operates and a propensity to emphasise those aspects of statistical techniques most celebrated in the statistical profession itself.[128]

Contents
An Argument for Statistics
Methodological Considerations
The Vocabulary of Social Research
Ordering the Data: Frequency Distribution and Visual Representation
Summarising the Data: Measures of Central Tendency and Dispersion
Taking a Sample: Inductive Statistics
Working with Two variables
Working with Three or More Variables
From Reid (Reid 1987:v)
Contents
Statistics and the Social Sciences
Frequency Distributions, Graphic Representation and Measures of Central Tendency
Measures of Variation and the Standard Normal Distribution
Probability
Sampling and Estimation
Hypothesis Testing with Single Samples
Statistical Inference with Two Samples
An Introduction to Analysis of Variance
The Chi-Square Test and Contingency Problems with Nominal Scales
Regression and Correlation
Sources of Statistics From Startup and Whittaker (Startup and Whittaker 1982:vii)

[127] The irony is, of course, it is the social sciences that are the "hard" sciences. It is the natural and abstract sciences that are the easy ones - working largely with closed systems and objects of study that are manipulable and don't talk back! In comparison with the social sciences they are quite "primitive" in the original sense of that term - less complex, simple. Trained in such disciplines it is hardly surprising to discover statisticians offering social scientists methods that are incapable of doing much with the kinds of data that they produce. As Barnard said a long time ago: "..the problems in this area [social sciences] are of a degree of difficulty order of magnitude greater than any met with in mathematical or physical science." (Barnard 1967:292)

[128] In this respect the early Bourdieu was wrong. In 1963 he said: "The fetishism and the shamanism of statistics lie in wait for the sociologist more than the statistician. The latter forms a just appreciation of it and knows its limits because he is master of its techniques. He knows that nothing would be more futile than to treat his own science as an autonomous instrument" (Bourdieu 1994:9). In more recent work Bourdieu has taken a more sceptical attitude towards the "mastery" by statisticians of their own tools and has subjected the indiscriminate use of statistical techniques to critical analysis.

It is not surprising that in such a disciplinary environment that social scientists, and especially social anthropologists, should regard the use of quantitative techniques with scepticism. They have been exposed to only a limited range of statistical techniques and have therefore developed a limited sense of what statistical methods may to have to offer. Revolting against this and the seeming imperialism of these statistical methods they participate in the illusion of thinking that there is only one way of doing "statistics":

> Le movement de revolte contre l'imperialisme des techniques statistiques, *produit de cette domination elle-meme*, contribue tres directement a cette "illusion" de l'univocite statistics (qu'il denonce comme unilateralite, partialite). (Champagne, et al. 1989:161 emphases added)

To counter this situation, one could argue that rather than the endless production of books whose main theme seems to be a kind of generic 'Understanding statistics: an introduction for social scientists" we probably need an equal number of books produced under the rubric "Understanding social science: an introduction for statisticians".

THE BABY; DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND ITS UNDERVALUATION

A recent popular textbook on method in the social sciences opens its discussion of statistical methods with these words:

> There are two main types of statistics: descriptive; for example, measures of dispersion, and inferential; for example, regression analysis. *All that needs to be said* about the former is that they offer *limited* forms of description which may usefully *supplement* qualitative descriptions. However, *the more ambitious and demanding* project of statistical inference requires further discussion. (Sayer 1984:173, emphases added)

The confidence with which the author distinguishes between the two "types" of statistics is breath-taking. His choice of an example of inferential statistics is particularly unfortunate. It is certainly the case that regression is usually associated with prediction and hence inference. But fitting regression lines (and with data for

any two variables there could be a multitude of them) to data can also be seen as an attempt to find a graphical summary description of the data, in the same way that the different kinds of mean - arithmetic, geometric, harmonic - are seen as numerical summary descriptions of the data. Whether one sees it as connected with inference or description is dependent on one's intentions (Levine 1993:15). Sayer, himself, is aware of this when he says "regression equations . . . say nothing in themselves about causal or conditional relations, yet there is a widespread assumption that `causal analysis' and regression analysis are virtually synonymous" (Sayer 1984:175).

It is surprising then that he should fall into exactly the same trap by uncritically subsuming regression analysis under inferential analysis.[129]

More disturbing, however, is his dismissal of descriptive statistics. Sayer is critical of the methodological tendency which he calls "deductivism" in which "description and conceptual preparation are seen as unimportant preliminaries to the `real' business of science - the construction of testable ordering structures or models" (Sayer 1984:182). Given this critical stance towards deductivism and its devaluation of description his dismissal of any serious consideration of descriptive statistics comes as something of a surprise. If description is "necessary for the discovery of mechanisms and structures" in reality then surely descriptive methods - including those provided by statistics - that assist in this task should be given greater attention and not be dismissed in order to proceed to a discussion of methods of deeply questionable value.

It has been the obsession with probability and inference that has been the undoing of quantitatively minded social scientists and the low-esteem in which their less quantitatively inclined colleagues in the social sciences and the other sciences hold their work. It would seem that the time is ripe for a reappraisal of the relationship between statistical techniques and social research.

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[129] This simple subsumption of regression analysis under *inferential* statistics is not one shared by all standard texts cf. Clegg (1984:127) and Loether and McTavish (1974:233ff).

Such a reappraisal is now under way. As Levine says there is a "way of thinking that seems to be `in the air'" (Levine 1993:12). There is no standard text but a number of key references amongst which must number the following: Levine (1993); Marsh (1988); Lieberson (Lieberson 1985); Ragin and Becker (Ragin and Becker 1992); Champagne, Lenoir, Merllie and Pinto (Champagne, et al. 1989). These works address the general issue of the place of statistics in social science from novel points of view. However, the most important text is the magisterial work of Bourdieu who not only raises all the methodological issues and subjects them to complex critique but also demonstrates the fruitfulness of alternative approaches to use of statistics in ethnographic work (Bourdieu 1984; Bourdieu 1988; Bourdieu 1998).

ETHNOGRAPHIC STATISTICS

> Quite apart from a value in testing, statistics has a heuristic value since it permits the disclosure of relations which would not otherwise have been considered.
>
> Pierre Bourdieu, *Statistics and sociology*

It will be clear from the critique above that it is my view that, for the social sciences, it is "descriptive" statistics (from simple summary statistics such as frequencies and means to the far more complex varieties of multivariate descriptive statistics) that offer the greatest utility. The argument is as follows: ethnography is nothing if not a form of description. Certainly there are serious epistemological problems associated with the notion of "pure" description. The recent critiques of ethnography as a re-presentational activity and the epistemological, political and ethical issues it raises problematise the notion of ethnography as "pure" description but underlying these critiques is the acceptance that it is a representational activity. It is carried out under the rubric of "understanding" (Bourdieu 2000) rather than "explanation". We should, then, when making use of statistical methods as part of the tool-kit of ethnography make use of descriptive statistics because this form of statistical analysis is more compatible with the general thrust of ethnography as a representational activity.

The use of statistics in this way as part of social scientific work and analysis does have a respectable tradition, not in Anglo-American traditions but in France. The

leading figure has been Jean-Paul Benzécri. Van Meter and his colleagues distinguish the two traditions in the following way:

> One approach was based on the principles of classical statistical inference developed at the beginning of the century for the analysis of data from experiments. This largely Anglo-Saxon approach required researchers first to state a model, then to try to fit the data to it. Long-linear models, logistic regression and latent variable models are the product of this school. Such procedures can only model a limited number of variables, and their use is restricted to local aspects of the data. The problem with such methods is to move the focus from wide-ranging questions down to narrower questions concerning particular relationships.
>
> On the other hand, the description-oriented French Data Analysis approach, exemplified by correspondence analysis and Benzécri, followed the principle of the founder: "the model must follow the data and not the reverse". Other descriptive techniques - cluster analysis, or classification analysis, and multi-dimensional scaling - also cover wide areas of data simultaneously and are used widely in France.... French social scientists appear to be interested in finding patters in their data...[They] are rarely interested in formal methods of inference or in testing models based on hypotheses concerning *relationships between variables*." (Van Meter, et al. 1994:134, emphases added)

The problem with inferential statistics, including the more sophisticated forms such as log-linear techniques, logistic regression and latent variable models are they are based on a non-relational epistemology. Thus, even a technique such as log-linear modelling which attempts to uncover " the potentially complex relationships among the variables in a multiway crosstabulation" still works on the basis that "all variables that are used for classification are *independent* variables" (Norusis 1992:162, emphases added). As Van Meter indicates the French school of data analysis is more interested in finding patterns in data, "seeing shapes in clouds" as Benzécri once put it, than in working with ideas of independent and dependent variables.

In a crucial section of *Distinction* Bourdieu draws attention to how relational descriptive statistical epistemology overcomes what we have already seen him call the "linear thinking which only recognises the simple ordinal structures of direct determination" (Bourdieu 1984:107). In a discussion of how we should construct class he says the following:

> The individuals grouped in a class that is constructed in a particular respect (that is, in a particularly determinant respect [as conceived by "traditional" forms of statistical analysis HB]) always bring with them, in addition to the pertinent properties by which they are classified, secondary properties which are thus smuggled into the explanatory model. Jean Benzécri puts this well: "Let us assume individuals $\alpha\beta_1\gamma_1$, $\alpha\beta_2\gamma_2$, ..., $\alpha\beta_n\gamma_n$, each described as possessing three features. Leaving aside the last two elements in each description [a process characteristic of forms of statistical analysis which attempt to *isolate* variables HB], we can say that all the individuals belong to a single species defined by the feature α, which we can call the species α. But although feature α enables us to define this species and recognise its individuals, we cannot study the former without considering features β, γ of the latter. From this standpoint, if we call B the sum of β modalities which the second feature can assume, and C the sum of γ modalities of the third feature, then studying species α means studying αBC, i.e., in addition to the first, stable feature, every form which the first (B) or the second (C) may take, and also the possible associations between the latter (e.g. β with γ, rather than with γ^1 or γ^2)". This means that a class or class fraction is defined not only by its relations of production, as identified through indices such as occupation, income or even educational level, but also by a certain sex-ratio, a certain distribution in geographical space (which is never socially neutral) and by a whole set of subsidiary characteristics which may function, in the form of tacit requirements, as real principles of selection or exclusion without ever being formally stated (this is the case with ethnic origin and sex). (Bourdieu 1984:102)

This "relational" approach to the study of class depends on a different kind of statistical analysis. Rather than seeking to isolate variables in order then to see the causal relationships between them such an approach begins with the relationships themselves and seeks to "elaborate" them, to complicate them.

It will be clear from what I have said that this argument for the use of a certain form of statistical analysis is an elaboration of the developmental systems approach to human reality that I argued in the theoretical chapter of this thesis. A fundamental feature of that approach is that it argues for an anti-essentialist, relational view of the human worlds. Various forms of descriptive analysis lend themselves to such a view.

In this thesis use will be made of descriptive statistics to discuss and describe the life of books in the life of middle New Zealand. The use of this kind of material should not be seen as in any way detracting from the ethnographic status of the work.

ETHNOGRAPHY AND METHODOLOGICAL MONISM

My discussion above has been focussed on statistics and the place of statistics in ethnographic work. I have addressed this issue in detail because my study makes extensive use of statistical methods in the context of an anthropological study of material culture. The methodological monism of anthropological research needs to be challenged and I have done so in the context of a defence of the use of statistics but I have also pointed to the conditions for the use of this particular form of analysis.

Much of the discussion and arguments advanced in relation to statistics can also be advanced about the relation between other research methods and ethnographic work. I have already indicated the roots of the emphasis on discursive writing as the main way of representing ethnoscapes.[130] As we have seen, the dominance of

[130] A useful term coined by Appadurai to refer to the "landscape of persons" that are the objects of the anthropological gaze and which is meant to draw attention to the "the dilemmas of perspective and representation that all ethnographers must confront, and it admits that (as with landscapes in visual art) traditions of perception and perspective, as well as variations in the situation of the observer, may affect the process and product of representation"

discursive writing as a mode of representation in anthropological work lies largely unchallenged. The most significant challenge to this dominance has come from various forms of "visual" anthropology, in particular the use of cinematic techniques. However, a number of other challenges to the dominance of the discursive writing tradition should also be noted.

Firstly, there is the work of Victor Turner in the last years of his life. In collaboration with the dramaturge Richard Schechner, Turner sought to transpose his textual studies of Ndembu ritual into dramatic form. Rather than understanding Ndembu ritual through the experience of them in the form of discursive written texts he invited his interlocutors to an understanding of them based on experiencing them in "practice". Schechner and Turner experimented with the dramatisation of the materials on Ndembu ritual i.e. the recreation of those rituals in a different cultural context. It is true that such "appropriation" may seem particularly fraught from ethical, moral and political points of view but this is partly *because* this form of understanding the Ndembu ritual process is so much more evocative and powerful. If the study of Ndembu ritual is based on the oxymoronic research method of participant observation, dramatic re-enactment seems to give the student of it access to understanding based on the "participatory" element of the method more than the observational.

As I have noted already, Pierre Bourdieu has led the challenge to what he has called methodological monism in the social sciences. More recently he has, as Derek Robbins notes in his latest account of Bourdieu's latest work, "sought to transpose what he [Bourdieu] called the `social maieutics' of that text [*The Weight of the World*] from the formal, written, sphere to the sphere of direct political action." (Robbins 2000:xxv) Robbins adds:

(Appadurai 1991:191). I would prefer, as argued in the theoretical chapter, that we should really conceive of ethnoscapes as "persons in/and landscapes" rather than "landscapes of persons". Needless to say, Appadurai's concept of ethnographic representational activity is firmly in the discursive writing tradition. The possibilities implicit in the idea of ethnoscapes - that other forms of representation can be used to represent social realities - is not developed in his discussion.

> In my view he is doing this legitimately precisely because his present actions follow logically from and seek to *actualise* the theory of practice which first brought him intellectual authority. (xxv, emphasis added)

In other words, Bourdieu is moving from the practice of the written text to the practice of politics but both are based on the same theory of practice. Bourdieu's practical intervention in the field of journalism and television through the production of an alternative television[131] should be seen as part of these "transpositions" of a form of critical theory (Calhoun 1995).[132]

But there is nothing new about all of this. Bourdieu has always challenged the hegemony of discursive forms of ethnography.[133] All his productions, his "creations of the mind" (Bourdieu 1993:264), have been unusual by the standards of "normal" social scientific practice. They have been innovative in construction bringing together statistical tabulations and analyses with excerpts from interviews, montages of extracts from popular periodicals, photographic essays, alongside the more traditional theoretically informed discourses.

In this thesis, I too will be making use of montage as a mode of representation. Chapter 3 makes use of visual materials to represent the "charisma" of books in late 20th century New Zealand society. Chapter 7 makes use of visual materials to draw attention to the nature of what goes on in reading. These materials should not be

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131 The "script" of Bourdieu's alternative TV can be found in Bourdieu (1996). Bourdieu opens that intervention with the following words: "I'd like to try and pose here, on television, a certain number of questions about television" (13).

132 An interesting subject for elaboration would be the comparable but divergent transpositions of the critical theories of Giddens and Bourdieu from the field of academic cultural production to the field of power. One would begin by noting that Giddens has become the mandarin of the Blairite third way and an apostle of globalisation whereas Bourdieu has engaged in the support of striking workers and the establishment of a "social movement" called "Acts of Reason" (Robbins 2000).

133 This is not to say that he is opposed to the "literary" techniques in the scientific research: "the evocative power of style constitutes one of the unsurpassable forms of scientific achievement when it has to objectify the relevant features of a social configuration and thereby to reveal the principles of the systematic appraisal of a historic necessity" (Bourdieu 1988:285). Bourdieu then goes on to give the example of Georges Duby, the historian of the Middle Ages, who through the power of language evokes the "strangeness of Carolingian culture". And he finally adds: "We could say as much of the sociologist who may have to alternate the awkward machinery of conceptualisation, inseparable from the construction of the object, with the search for stylistic effects designed to recapture the constructed and unitary experience of a lifestyle or a way of thinking." (285). (See also Bourdieu (29-30)).

seen as merely illustrative of the argument of the written text but as integral to the goals of the thesis.[134]

DATA SOURCES

The thesis draws on a wide range of empirical materials which have been developed using a range of different methods. All research is interminable particularly because it is impossible to exhaust both the modes of creating data for study and the refinement and elaboration of the results of the various modes themselves. A thesis is an act of closure which combines the bringing to an end - largely arbitrary - of both processes and the elaboration of a framework for their representation.

SURVEYS

A community survey was organised in late summer 1991. A random sample of 660 households of the provincial city of Palmerston North was conducted using a team of volunteers. The survey was a joint effort of the Palmerston North Public Library and myself. Interviewers selected an adult member of the household based on a randomising protocol who was then interviewed at length on a face-to-face basis about their reading, book-buying, and library use. At the completion of the interview, interviewees were left with a self-completion questionnaire which asked them to address a range of further questions relating to their activities and preferences in a wide range of "cultural" activities from listening to music and watching films and television to sporting and other leisure activities.

The resulting data set is extremely large. This thesis makes use, in particular, of the results relating to books and reading but reference is also made to the results from other aspects of the survey.

INTERVIEWS

A range of interviews were conducted of members of book reading groups. The interviews were carried out by myself and Dr. Roy Shuker of the Media Studies

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[134] The inspiration here is from a number of sources: chiefly the work of Bourdieu but also the classic ethnography of James Agee and Walker Evans (Agee and Evans 1988) and the work of Stephen Muecke, Kim Benterrak and Paddy Roe (1984).

Programme.[135] Interviewees were selected on the basis of "availability". Both Dr. Shuker and myself used our knowledge of people who belonged to such groups and we interviewed individuals who had indicated a willingness - one might say eagerness in some cases - to be part of the study. The interviews were open ended and unstructured and covered a wide range of topics. Dr. Shuker's interviews were guided by a particular interest in the formation of taste and preference whereas my interests lay more in dimensions of sociality. The complementary nature of our interests and our different interviewing styles has meant that the materials I have had available to work with are heterogenous.

PARTICIPATION

In 1993 I joined with others to form a book reading group. I made it known to the members at that time that I was participating in the group with a double purpose: both to participate in the group for its own sake and also because I wanted to make use of my personal experiences of participation in the group a source of materials for my study of the social life of books. I have been a member of the group now for 7 years and I draw on my experience as a participant over those years for my account of book reading groups in Chapter 7 below. I chose not to interview members of this group because I did not want to prejudice my relationships with members and the group as a whole and to try and keep the experience as close to "natural" as possible. In any case, the chief interviewee in this study is "myself", an exercise carried out in the spirit of "participant objectification" recommended by Bourdieu.

OTHER MATERIALS

> If I could do it, I'd do no writing at all here. It would be photographs; the rest would be fragments of cloth, bits of cotton, lumps of earth, records of speech, pieces of wood and iron, phials of odours, plates of food and excrement. Booksellers would consider it quite a novelty; critics would

[135] I would like to thank Dr. Shuker for his generosity in making the tapes of the interviews he conducted available to me. By sheer serendipity we discovered our shared interest in book reading groups.

> murmur, yes, but is it art; and I could trust a majority of you to use it as you would a parlour game. (Agee and Evans 1988:13)[136]

With these words, James Agee evoked the frustration of all ethnographers working within the prison house of language to represent the realities they have engaged with. He, himself, partly escaped it through incorporating the searing photography of Walker Evans, images which have become extremely well-known. I have already discussed the problems of thinking of ethnography as a merely discursive, written, mode of representation. In this thesis I too, like James Agee, will make use of a number of visual images to further the argument. The images and other materials seek to convey to readers what one of the authors of the images herself calls the "double life" of books, that they are not just to be "read, but objects that it is desirable to possess and display" (Mahy 2000) and, one may add, to house and care for.

Frances Hodgkins drew attention to the irony of self-portraiture - a picture of a painter - by painting a self-portrait consisting of a montage of objects: a red beret, a handbag, a pair of shoes, a mirror, a scarf and a cushion. There is an irony in this work which is about books and yet has the form of a book itself. The alternative materials are integral to giving expression to that irony.[137]

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[136] See also the discussion by Kathleen Stewart of "`subjects' and `objects' in the space of immanent critique" in her ethnography of cultural poetics in an "other" America: "Take the life of objects themselves. If I had fifty thousand words to describe the life of watched and *remembered* things in those hills, I would use them ... to heap detail upon detail so that we might at least imagine an escape from the `you are there' realism of ethnographic description into a surreal space of intensification. .. I could describe the rooms and rafters, the crack in the walls, the damp underneath of the houses where dogs and fleas and other creatures lie, the furniture, the contents of drawers, the smell of coal soot ground into the floor over years and covering the walls with a thin greasy layer..." (Stewart 1996:21).

[137] On irony in ethnography see Marcus and Fischer (1986:14-16).

CHAPTER 5 THE SOCIAL SPACE OF BOOKS; GENRES AS TOTEMIC OPERATORS OR CASTE MARKS

> We are dealing not with an autonomous institution which can be defined by its distinctive properties and is typical of certain regions of the world and certain forms of civilization, but with a *modus operandi* which can be discerned even behind social structures traditionally defined in a way diametrically opposed to totemism. (Lévi-Strauss 1966b:129)

> One must wonder whether [the `natural' totemic operator] has not been replaced by species and varieties of manufactured objects, which like totemic categories have the power of making even the demarcation of their individual owners a procedure of social classification. (Sahlins 1976:176)

INTRODUCTION

I sit on the sofa of my parents-in-law main sitting room, facing the fire. On the right of the fireplace, the door to the dining room, on the left shelves of books rising in tiers above a sideboard. The books themselves have not been read for years. Some of them may never have been read. As Bourdieu says, their presence is "solemn". One could imagine the bookshelf and the books it contains extracted and moved into a museum space, displaced from its habitual location and set up as an installation juxtaposed alongside, say, a totem pole taken from a house on Vancouver Island. The "figures" on each installation tell a story and the "poles" themselves are unique.

The conclusion of the investigations and discussion of Chapter 2 was that books are sacred, charismatic objects. They occupy a special place in the world we inhabit and this specialness is expressed in a number of different ways. I move now from a discussion of books in general to a discussion of types of books. In particular I will be looking at the way types of books are used to classify people. I will then go on to discuss the possibility that book genres are "totemic operators", to think about book types as "food for thought" about the relationships between classes of people.

As I have already noted, in a direct and prosaic sense, books have been conceived as food for thought for a long time and whole disciplines – Literary Studies and Communication Studies – have developed to help us understand our understanding of books. These disciplines address the content of books and the ways they are interpreted by readers and, even, communities of readers. Some of the work and practices in these fields can be seen as seminarian, the training of a priesthood or caste of priests – the literary critics and other specialists - in the cult of literature. Other such work is `theological', helping us to understand the world of books as a pantheon of powers, distinguishing between the more or less powerful agents of that world.

The phrase "food for thought" was used by Lévi-Strauss, in his books *Totemism* and *La Pensée Sauvage*, to point to a way of thinking about the relation between the material and social worlds which drew attention to the importance of classification in human life. This idea was further developed by Marshall Sahlins (Sahlins 1976:166ff) in relation to Western culture and Bourdieu took it even further in his major work *Distinction* by demonstrating that class struggle included a struggle over classifications of the material, natural and social worlds.

This chapter consists largely of a discussion of book genres and their relation to social classification. I draw on the result of my own research, as well as the work of Australian based researchers who carried out very similar research, and on the work of Bourdieu. Combining the findings of these various researches raises a number of interesting theoretical and methodological issues about social classification. Bourdieu's work on books is of limited use for reasons which will be outlined shortly. The work of the Australian researchers on books, on the other hand, is much more substantial and is directly comparable with my own. I will use their work to demonstrate both the similarities and differences between the social fields of Australia and New Zealand. The comparison will also provide an opportunity for a critical look at the methods employed both by the Australian researchers and myself, a comparison which highlights the strengths and weaknesses of both. I conclude with an argument about books as `totemic operators' which frames the results of the discussion.

The mode of analysis of the data relating to book genres from the community survey is prosopographical.[138] Prosopography is a form of statistical analysis that embodies the relational epistemology which underlies the argument of the discussion of the place of descriptive statistics in ethnography in the methodological chapter. It invites an exploratory relationship to data with a view to building up a picture or ethnograph of the persons or objects which are the focus of the analysis, a picture based on the relationships of the persons or objects with other persons or objects rather than being based on essences and causes. Given the arguments made in the first two chapters it is also interesting to note that the term *prosopopoeia* is an alternative term for `personification'. Prosopography is a method appropriate to theoretical and methodological arguments I have made.

"READING THE ROMANCE": GENDER, CLASS AND GENRE

> Whether we are concerned with questions of class or education, the role of these factors in the social organisation of reading is *often less immediately significant* than that of gender which, in some areas, dramatically polarises the field of reading into what are virtually separate and gender-exclusive domains. (Bennett, Emmison and Frow 1999:147-88 emphasis added)

READING FREQUENCY

A preliminary examination of the data makes it clear that gender is a crucial factor in understanding the social space of books and, as the Australian study begins with it, it would be useful for comparative purposes to begin with it here as well. Bennett et al. launch their discussion with observations on `reading frequency' and `ownership of books'. It is clear from their results that women indicate that they read books more often than men: "When asked whether they read books, 13.8% of men say `no' compared with 4.8% of women"[139] (Bennett, Emmison and Frow

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[138] For a discussion of prosopography and what it entails from a Bourdieuian perspective see (Bourdieu 1988:39ff) (Raemdonck 2000) (Broady 1996) (Fisher 1990). It is not a term that is in general currency being a specialist field of medieval studies but is a useful term to denote a particular way in which a picture of a person or thing is constructed from the study - using statistics - of the relationships between a range of characteristics of that person or thing.

[139] These are results from question D9 of the Australian survey. It would have been useful to have had figures from the Australian study for question D16 which asked respondents how long it was since they read a book. Still, it is clear that the New Zealand study should have

1999:148). This is considerably at variance with the New Zealand study. The results for a question in my study which tracks the same issue are as follows: `When did you last read a book?' 18.3% of men said `more than 6 months ago or never' as compared to 14.3% of women. There is a gender differential in the New Zealand results but it is certainly not as marked as in the Australian case.

Comparison between the two studies raises a number of questions. Are both men and women in New Zealand less likely to read a book than in Australia? Are women in New Zealand far less likely to read a book than in Australia? In the absence of the results from some of the questions administered in the Australian study it is impossible to resolve these questions accurately. One has to be sceptical about an answer based on the evidence available from the Australian study. Another Australian study which asked a question which is directly comparable to that asked in the New Zealand survey produced the following results:

	Yes	No
Male	48%	52%
Female	57%	43%

Table 1 Australia: Currently reading a book? (Guldberg 1990:22)

The New Zealand figures are as follows:

	Yes	No
Male	55%	45%
Female	59%	41%

Table 2 New Zealand study: Currently reading a book?

These figures seem to indicate precisely the opposite of the conclusions drawn from the previous comparisons. New Zealanders (both men and women) are more likely to be reading a book than Australians. Furthermore, New Zealand women are more likely than Australian women to be reading a book. Thus, these figures would indicate that the differences between Australia and New Zealand based on a comparison between the study of Bennett et al. and my own researches should be

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given respondents an opportunity when responding to the question of their preferred types of books to indicate that they were or were not book readers per se.

treated with some scepticism and that there are no marked differences between the two social spaces as far as the role of gender in `reading frequency' is concerned. The crucial point, however, is that in both countries women are slightly more likely than men to be readers of books.

BOOK OWNERSHIP

The Australian researchers note that "women are more likely than men to own significant numbers of books". Table 3 below gives a tabulation of the results from their study (Bennett, Emmison and Frow 1999:148). Table 4 gives similar figures from the New Zealand study. It is clear, in spite of the differences in the categories used for enumeration in the two studies, that the patterns for the two countries are similar. However, I think it would be a mistake to draw the conclusion from these results that women *are* more likely than men to own significant number of books. The form of the questions in both cases suggest that, though addressed to individuals, the results relate to households and so the books `owned' are quite likely to be owned by both men and women where the household contains both.[140]

Number of books:	Women	Men
100-200	20.8%	17.1%
200-500	20.2%	13.2%
More than 500	10%	10%

Table 3 Australian Study: Book ownership by gender

Number of books:	Women	Men
100-300	21.8%	19%
300-1000	15.7%	11.2%
More than 1000	3.9%	2.7%

Table 4 New Zealand study: Book ownership by gender

One has to turn to evidence from other studies to arrive at a conclusion on this matter. The study by Guldberg of Australian book purchasing behaviour indicates that women are more likely to purchase books than men (Guldberg 1990:30). Thus,

[140] Australian study: "About how many books do you have in your house?" (Bennett, Emmison and Frow 1999:279); New Zealand study: "About how many books would you say you owned (in all)?"

even if book ownership statistics cannot be relied on because of the possibility that `ownership' becomes a problematic issue when questions addressed to individuals may in fact be making reference to households, it is clear from Guldberg's studies that the volume of books in a household owes a lot to the purchasing behaviour of women.[141]

The Australian study went on to ask a number of questions relating to the genres of the books "owned". Unfortunately, no similar questions were addressed to the New Zealand sample so no comparisons can be made. But the discussion of the two studies so far has clearly established that, though there are interesting differences between the two social spaces, one could expect similar results in relation to genre in New Zealand. The Australian researchers conclude:

> Women are significantly more likely than men to own books which have high-cultural associations... This difference is especially pronounced in the case of books that are aesthetically coded (literary classics, art books, and poetry) while diminishing in the case of books which have a predominantly factual or documentary orientation (history books, biographies). (Bennett, Emmison and Frow 1999:149)

In short, books classify women as being associated with the sacred realms of our culture.[142]

GENRE PREFERENCES

Turning to an analysis of genre preferences we see similar patterns. As I have already noted it is clear (from the statistics provided in Table 11 and Table 12 below) that different types of book occupy different positions in a topological space inflected by gender. For the Australian researchers this particular fact is so `dramatic' that it provides the justification for using gender as their entry point into a discussion of reading preferences (Bennett, Emmison and Frow 1999:147). At the

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[141] Radway, too, draws attention to women – especially in lower class families – as purchasers of books (Radway 1987:103).

[142] The relationship between religiosity and religious activity and gender in our culture is a pertinent issue here.

extreme, in both the Australian and New Zealand studies, are `romances' which are distinctively female. There is a remarkable consistency in the statistics for `romances ' across the two different national social spaces. Not only are the relative percentages between the genders close but the absolute percentages of women and men stating a preference for these books are also astonishingly close (Australia 26.2% &1.8%; New Zealand 26.2% & 2.1%). No other type of book shows such consistency.[143]

More than this - and importantly - these books are more `female' than any books are `male'. The genre that comes closest to being `male' are `Sports' books. However, these still have - especially in the case of New Zealand - a small but significant female following.

It is not entirely surprising that `romances' are so inflected by gender. Though profoundly patriarchal discourses,[144] they have been produced for women and largely by women. As Radway observes, depending on what one takes as one's focus - the reading of romances or the narrative structure of romances - one is confronted by either an oppositional activity as women "momentarily refuse their self-abnegating role" or by a "simple recapitulation and recommendation of patriarchy and its constituent social practices and ideologies" (Radway 1987:210). Either way we are confronted by a woman focussed activity and object. No other book genre has been so consciously geared to a certain audience. Ownership and readership of such books is almost the exclusive preserve of women.

In their study, the Australian researchers draw attention to the fact that not only are romances devalued in traditional literary hierarchies but also by readers of romances themselves. They present interview data in which women reluctantly admit to being readers of such books, almost always qualifying their admissions with some remark to the effect that they themselves don't take the books too

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[143] Some of the differences between the two sets of statistics must be due to the subtle but important differences between the two studies: the New Zealand study asked respondents to identify *four* favourite types of books whereas the Australian study only asked for *three*. The New Zealand study therefore created the opportunity for higher percentages for all types of books.

[144] Only 1 respondent indicated a preference for both feminist books and romances!

seriously and find them wanting in relation to more `serious' literature. The romances are described by the women as being `light', `soppy', and `easy'. In my own study of a book reading group I have found women ready to dismiss romance books too. There is never a whisper that the book reading group, predominantly female, would consider taking on a romance and on more than one occasion romances have been referred to disparagingly.[145]

However, we should not accept the notion, as the Australian researchers seem to, that the women have a low estimation of the books simply on the basis of the fact that their admissions in such research interview situations appears to be somewhat shame-faced. One would have to look at the dynamics of the interview situation itself and the gender and class relationships embodied in them to begin to understand the reasons why romance readers react in this way. Cultural goodwill can go hand-in-hand with subtle rebellion and it is not impossible for individuals to hold contradictory positions.[146]

This is borne out by the fact that the statistics for romances as a stated preference are very high when the question is asked in the context of the relative anonymity of a survey questionnaire.[147] Bennett et al. note that "statistically, however, despite these disavowals, romance fiction remains high in women's reading preferences" (Bennett, Emmison and Frow 1999:147). Where there is a reduced threat of exposure of ones values and preferences to the social judgement of others it could be argued that people are more frank about their `true' preferences. Yet, even this would be too presumptuous. It is quite possible for individuals who actually prefer a genre such as a romance (something which they perhaps demonstrate most clearly

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[145] It would be useful to study whether in fact romances appear in the bookshelves of living rooms where books are used to decorate a room. It would be my suspicion that, on the whole, books such as these are relegated to the bookshelves of the `private' spaces of a home thus reinforcing the idea that though `preferred' it is a kind of `denied preference'. Romances live a life in purdah, behind the public facade of the domestic world.

[146] See the next chapter for a more detailed discussion of the concept of "cultural goodwill".

[147] The New Zealand study was based on face-to-face questions but respondents were simply asked to state the number of their selected preferences and no further engagement took place between the interviewer and the interviewee on the issue; the Australian results were based on a postal survey.

in their actual reading practices) to still be unable to admit to it as a `preference' when confronted with the somewhat artificial situation of a survey or interview.[148]

MARKERS OF CLASS

The other genre that takes precedence in the relative preferences of women to men are "feminist" books. Though receiving a bare third of the total votes that romances obtained they are, nevertheless, the preferred genre of a significant number of women, ranking in the middle ranges of stated preferences. However, even fewer men state a preference for such books than for romances thus leading to feminist books being as distinctively marked by gender as romances and, on the surface, occupying the same position in the topological space of books inflected by gender. But such a conclusion would be deceptive because only 1 respondent claimed to have a preference for both romances and feminist books.[149] We need, therefore, to construct the principle that underlies this feature of social space.

So what is it that divides romance readers from readers of feminist books? There are a number of possible principles of division that could structure this dimension of the social space - age, class, education. All play a part. Taking each in turn we obtain the following results:

	FEMINIST	ROMANCES
Agegroup	**Col %**	**Col %**
under 19	3.1%	7.5%
20 to 29	6.3%	36.3%
30 to 39	43.8%	17.2%
40 to 49	21.9%	16.3%
50 to 59	7.0%	1.3%
60 to 69	11.7%	9.7%
70 to 79	3.1%	8.1%
Over 80	3.1%	3.8%

Table 5 New Zealand study: `Romances' and `Feminist books' by age group

[148] Radway's study (Radway 1987) of a group of romance readers is another tale which would caution us against simple conclusions about preferences. She demonstrates how her romance readers held contradictory views of their romance reading. On the one hand they felt guilty and shame-faced about it, on the other they valued it more highly than the `leisure' activities of their husbands and children because it was *reading*. For a study of romance reading in New Zealand see Lovelock (1995).

[149] Furthermore, closer examination of this case would lead one to doubt that the stated preference for `feminist' books is reliable.

It is clear that a transition occurs in the third decade. Very few women under 30 choose to identify feminist books as a preferred genre but overwhelmingly choose romances at this age. This is not to say that the thirty-somethings suddenly lose an interest in romances - in fact, in that cohort, an equal number of women stated a preference for romances as for feminist books; it is just that at that age a greater number of women start to show an interest in feminist books, though - as we have seen - these are not the same women but almost two mutually exclusive groups of women.

To establish this let us look at the class dimensions of the preferences for these two types of books:

	ROMANCES	FEMINIST
Class:	**Col %**	**Col %**
Upper Professional	3.1%	16.7%
Upper Managerial	3.1%	10.0%
Intermediate Professional	1.6%	20.0%
Technical Specialists	3.1%	
Lower Professional	1.6%	
Lower Intermediate	17.2%	6.7%
Clerical	32.8%	16.7%
Skilled Workers	3.1%	3.3%
Semi-Skilled Workers	25.0%	6.7%
Unskilled Workers	7.8%	13.3%
Never worked for money	1.6%	6.7%

Table 6 New Zealand Study: `Romances' and `Feminist books' by class

The results are quite dramatic: Feminist books are overwhelmingly favoured by women from the professional classes whereas romances clearly predominate as the preferences of the lower intermediate, clerical and semi-skilled classes.[150] And if we now go back and look at the figures that emerge from Bourdieu's study we see that these results are entirely consistent with his. Feminist books are the gendered form of the category "philosophical essays" and just as his results show a marked class

[150] The only serious anomaly is the figure for "semi-skilled workers". This figure includes individuals who are in training to be professionals, so the exception, as usual, only proves the rule.

differential between this category and that of "love stories", we see that within the space of gendered books there are profound class effects.

This raises some interesting methodological issues. In his study of the judgement of taste in France (Bourdieu 1984) Bourdieu included a question on preferred book types.[151] The respondents in his survey were asked which three of a range of types of books (thrillers, love stories, poetry, political, travel and exploration, historical novels, scientific, philosophical, classical authors, modern authors) they most preferred (Bourdieu 1984:514-15). A bare tabulation of the results of this question according to the `class' of the respondent is provided at the end of his book (530-31) but no further use is made of the results in the rest of the study.[152] Bourdieu commented on this neglect. He said that he left out the results of this question from his analyses because the question in his own survey had "proved to be badly phrased" (Bourdieu 1984:261). He doesn't state exactly what it was that was wrong with the "phrasing" but the context indicates it could have been one or both of two possibilities: the range of choices offered respondents was not classifying enough or, perhaps, the phrasing produced results which did not lend themselves particularly easily to incorporation into the kind of statistical analyses - including correspondence analysis - favoured by Bourdieu at the time. Bennett et al. implicitly suggest a third possibility for its neglect: it is that the most significant feature of book preferences and one which almost overwhelms any other, is the gender factor in the choices made.

In other words far from not classifying those who make the choices, book preferences are clearly differentiated by gender. The Australian and New Zealand

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[151] The remarkable closeness between the questions posed by the Australian researchers (discussed later) and myself is partly a function of the fact that both of these later studies were inspired by Bourdieu. The Australian researchers asked a set of 8 questions about books many of which are directly comparable to those in this study. It is a pity that we were unaware of each others work: it would have been useful to have collaborated on the construction of the questions. In particular, I regret not including questions on the types of books owned.

[152] Instead, Bourdieu makes use of the results from another survey of the reading habits of businessmen and senior executives to demonstrate the relationship between book type preferences and the distribution of cultural capital in the space of the dominant classes. He makes reference to other `reading' surveys as well throughout the study.

studies both illustrate this (See Table 11 on page 170 and Table 12 on page 171). The Australian researchers say:

> Whether we are concerned with questions of class and education, the role of these factors in the social organisation of reading is often less immediately significant than that of gender which, in some areas, dramatically polarises the field of reading into virtually separate and gender-exclusive domains. (Bennett, Emmison and Frow 1999:147-48)

Gender enters into Bourdieu's overall analysis, on the other hand, only in so far as it is an element that differentiates classes and class fractions. Given that `book-type' preferences are so overwhelmingly classifying in terms of gender as compared to class, it may have suited Bourdieu's purposes - imply the Australian researchers - to leave out any substantial discussion of the results from this question.[153]

There are a couple of problems with this interpretation. Firstly, Bourdieu's results clearly demonstrate that there is a very strong class effect in book genre preferences. The graph below gives a summary view of the profiles for book-type preferences by class groupings in Bourdieu's study.[154]

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[153] Radway has drawn attention to the way preoccupation or `excessive concentration' on a single variable can lead to the neglect of alternative variables. In her auto-critique of her study of romance readers, she criticises herself for her almost exclusive focus on gender at the expense of class (Radway 1987:9). In actual fact, Bourdieu *does* use some elements of his reading question in his analysis. Thus, for example, he points to the fact that the distribution of preferences as between class fractions for the `reading of philosophical essays' and `love stories' match the distribution of preferences for a legitimate musical work like the *Well-Tempered Clavier* on the one hand , and devalued or `light' music such as the *Blue Danube* on the other (Bourdieu 1984:16-18).

[154] It should be noted that there is considerable variation in preferences: the data for the various class fractions within the larger groupings have been aggregated in this table.

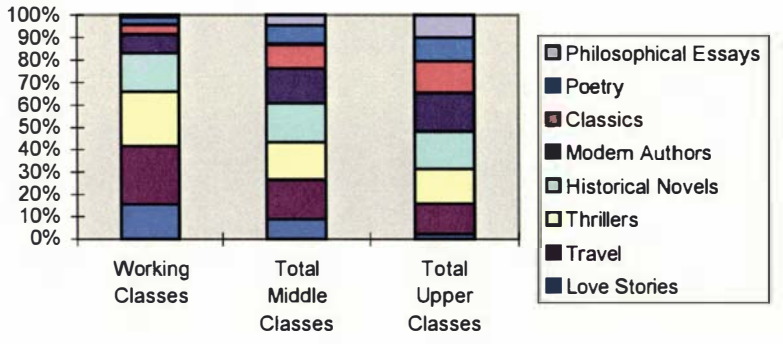

Figure 1 Distribution of Reading Preferences in France. (Bourdieu 1984:530-31)

Even in relation to the genre that gives the most gendered results (`love stories') in both the Australian and New Zealand studies there are clear and marked class differences in the French study with the `Working classes' 600% more likely to select this category compared to the `Upper classes'. In fact, only the genre `philosophical essays' is more marked in class terms with the `upper classes' showing a 1200% greater likelihood of selecting it as a category than the `working classes'. This result rivals the differences established between male and females tastes for `romances' in the Australian and New Zealand Studies.

More seriously, however, I think Bennett et al. should have given Bourdieu's self-criticism more attention and examined what its implications might have been for their own study. Bourdieu was right to challenge the drafting of his question in relation to reading and Bennett et al. have failed to realise the methodological issue implicitly raised by Bourdieu. For the simple fact is that the distinctions that a question makes when it is phrased in the way Bourdieu's question was phrased depends entirely on the nature of the categories on offer to the research respondents. Bourdieu was seeking "objects offered for consumers' choice" (Bourdieu 1984:16) which would allow him to distinguish between `legitimate taste', `Middle-brow taste' and `popular taste'. The categories on offer in the book preference question did this only partially successfully (Bourdieu 1984:16-18) whereas other questions - especially those relating to music and type of house - were far more useful analytically.

In my own study, by including a `feminist' books category,[155] I was able to distinguish between two almost mutually exclusive groupings amongst women: those whose predilections are oriented towards `popular' taste (in Bourdieu's terms) and those tending towards the more `legitimate' taste as a result of their expression of preferences for `feminist' books.

Bennett et al. did not include a `feminist' category amongst the range of possibilities offered to their respondents. The consequence of this was that the key factor which seemed to underlie the social organisation of book preferences in their study was gender. As a further consequence of this they were led to give gender a dramatically important role in their analysis of genre preferences. I would argue that they were deceived by their own survey instruments.

This is entirely to be expected. As Bourdieu observes:

> Appearances...must always support appearances; and sociological science, which cannot find the differences between the social classes unless it introduces them from the start, is bound to appear prejudiced to those who dissolve the differences, in all good faith and with impeccable method, simply by surrendering to positivistic laisser-faire. (Bourdieu 1984:22)

and we need to take his strictures on method seriously:

> So reflective analysis of the tools of analysis is not an epistemological scruple but an indispensable pre-condition of scientific knowledge of the object. Positivist laziness leads the whole, purely defensive, effort of verification to be focussed on the intensity of the relationships found, instead of bringing questioning to bear on the very conditions of the

[155] I can't take any special credit here: I did not pay enough attention to this methodological issue at the time of the original survey. In fact, I need to thank Anthony Lewis, Palmerston North City Librarian, who insisted on the inclusion of the `feminist' book category. It was the analysis of the data around this category which led me to the conclusions I have reached.

measurement of the relationships, which may even explain the relative intensity of the different relationships. (Bourdieu 1984:94)[156]

If we turn now to the education dimension of the contrast between feminist books and romances the following, perhaps unsurprising, results emerge:

	ROMANCES	FEMINIST
Further education:	**Col %**	**Col %**
None	48.4%	18.3%
Polytechnic or on-the-job	38.8%	24.2%
Teachers College		6.7%
University	12.8%	50.8%

Table 7 New Zealand Study: `Romances' and `Feminist books' by type of further education

A large percentage (87%) of those stating a preference for romances have either no further education or have had on-the-job and polytechnic education, whereas a goodly 58% of those electing feminist books as a preference have had university or Teacher's College education. Given that feminist books are the gender marked form of the category `philosophical essays' in Bourdieu's study we see these statistics suggesting that a degree of cultural competence is required for such books to be accessible.

[156] Bennett et al. were not the only ones guilty of failings in these terms. My own research seems now, in hindsight, to have been poorly constructed. I was lucky, as I have noted, in relation to the question about book preferences. But, for the most part, quite a number of the other questions that were posed in the study suffered from "positivist laziness" and I would approach their construction quite differently were I to revisit the study. The Australian researchers remained unaware of Bourdieu's methodological warnings to the end of their research. I became aware of them at a stage where I could do little about them.

The figures for length of education gives a very similar picture and allows one to draw similar conclusions:

	ROMANCES	FEMINIST
How many months of further education:	**Col %**	**Col %**
0	53.9%	25.0%
6	1.7%	
12	17.6%	13.3%
18	1.4%	
24	9.8%	3.3%
36	7.5%	20.8%
48	2.7%	24.2%
60	5.4%	13.3%

Table 8 New Zealand Study: `Romances' and `Feminst books' by length of further education

Nearly 60% of those stating a preference for feminist books have had 3 or more years of further education after secondary schooling whereas 84% of those stating a preference for romances have had 2 years or less and the vast bulk of these have had no further education at all.

All these figures - for age, class and education - demonstrate that the social space of book preferences, though deeply inflected by gender, is almost equally marked by other principles of social division.

At the opposite end of the gendered space of book preferences we find `Sports' and `Science'. These are certainly not as distinctively `male' as the `female' genres discussed above (New Zealand Study: `Romances' 1250%; `Feminist books' 967% as compared to `Sports' 343% and `Science' 450%; Australian Study: Romances 1455% as compared to `Sports and Leisure' 815% and `Scientific books' 591%)[157] but nevertheless do constitute a fairly male domain. The question arises: Do they constitute a comparable dichotomy in the male section of the gendered space of books as that which we found for the female section in the form of `romances' and `feminist' books?

[157] I followed Bennett and his colleagues and have used a somewhat unusual form of tabulation to highlight the "gendered spectrum" of book genres.

Unlike `romances' and `feminist books' `science' and `sports' books do not constitute mutually exclusive domains. About 23% of those who indicated a preference for `science' books also indicated a preference for `sports' books. This is quite high given the range of available options. However, only about 8% of those who indicated a preference for `sports' books simultaneously indicated a preference for `science' books. Readers of science books would appear to be more omnivorous in their reading behaviour than readers of sports books.

The age distribution profiles of those indicating preferences for `science' and `sports' books are much closer to each other than those for `romances' and `feminist' books. There isn't any marked transition between one genre and the other.

	SPORT	SCIENCE
Age groups	**Col %**	**Col %**
19 and under	13.7%	11.3%
20 to 29	20.2%	22.6%
30 to 39	23.6%	23.2%
40 to 49	14.5%	18.1%
50 to 59	9.7%	2.3%
60 to 69	8.3%	13.6%
70 to 79	6.7%	6.8%
Over 80	3.2%	2.3%

Table 9 New Zealand Study: `Science' and `sport' by age group

However, the class distribution of the preferences do show up some interesting features. In the upper levels of the class system a clear difference emerges between those who belong to the managerial classes and those who belong to the professional classes. The latter are 400% more likely to state a preference for science books as compared to `sports' books.

	SPORT	SCIENCE
Class	**Col %**	**Col %**
Upper Professional	6.7%	26.3%
Upper Managerial	11.6%	8.8%
Intermediate Professional	5.8%	5.8%
Technical Specialists	1.9%	8.8%
Lower Professional	1.9%	2.9%
Upper Intermediate	1.9%	2.9%
Lower Intermediate	22.2%	5.8%
Farmers	1.0%	
Clerical	10.4%	9.5%
Skilled Workers	17.3%	17.5%
Semi-Skilled Workers	10.6%	8.8%
Unskilled Workers	5.8%	
Agricultural Workers	1.9%	2.9%
Never worked for money	1.0%	

Table 10 New Zealand study: `Sport' and `science' books by class

In the New Zealand study, in fact, the positions of the preferences that mark `popular' taste as opposed to `legitimate' taste are reversed: the genre marking `legitimate' taste (`feminist' books) is more marked by gender than that marking `popular' taste (`sports' books). This is exactly the pattern we would expect as a result of strategies of distinction. It is a feature of hierarchical societies that class and caste distinctions are expressed in gendered forms. At the extreme, in the case of a hierarchical society such as India, we have the seclusion of high caste women behind the veil of purdah. Here we see the radical separation of romance readers from readers of feminist books as compared to comparatively less radical separation of science and sports books.

Table 11 New Zealand Study: Favourite books by gender

	Female	Male	Male as % of female	Female as % of male
Mainly female preferences				
Romances	26.2%	2.1%	8%	1250%
Feminist	10.1%	1.0%	10%	967%
Cookery	25.5%	3.5%	14%	730%
Poetry	5.6%	1.4%	25%	400%
Historical Novels	26.9%	7.3%	27%	367%
Health	21.7%	5.9%	27%	365%
Religious	14.0%	4.5%	33%	308%
Art	6.3%	2.1%	33%	300%
Classics	3.8%	1.4%	36%	275%
Biography	23.1%	9.8%	42%	236%
Modern Authors	13.3%	7.0%	53%	190%
Gardening	24.1%	12.9%	54%	186%
Crime	30.1%	16.4%	55%	183%
Social Issues	11.2%	7.0%	63%	160%
Humour	21.3%	16.8%	79%	127%
Travel	16.4%	12.9%	79%	127%
Thriller	21.3%	17.5%	82%	122%
Philosophy	3.8%	3.5%	91%	110%
Mainly male preferences				
Adventure	23.8%	27.3%	115%	87%
History	8.4%	10.1%	121%	83%
Music	2.8%	4.5%	163%	62%
Science Fiction	5.9%	11.5%	194%	52%
Plays	0.3%	0.7%	200%	50%
Political	1.7%	3.8%	220%	45%
Western	2.4%	5.6%	229%	44%
Business	3.8%	11.9%	309%	32%
Sport	9.8%	33.6%	343%	29%
Science	2.8%	12.6%	450%	22%

Table 12 Australian Study: Favourite books by gender (Bennett, Emmison and Frow 1999:150)

	Female	Male	Male as % of female	Female as % of male
Mainly female preferences				
Romances	26.2%	1.8%	7%	1456%
Historical romances	15.4%	1.1%	7%	1400%
Cooking	21.3%	5.3%	25%	402%
Contemporary novels	18.2%	5.2%	29%	350%
Poetry	5.9%	2.0%	34%	295%
Classical authors	6.8%	3.0%	44%	227%
Craft hobbies	14.8%	8.2%	55%	180%
Biographies	22.5%	12.8%	57%	176%
Crime/murder/mystery	27.4%	21.6%	79%	127%
Occult	1.8%	1.7%	94%	106%
Educational	11.7%	11.5%	98%	102%
Mainly male preferences				
Thriller/adventure	28.2%	32.5%	115%	87%
Gardening	11.4%	13.2%	116%	86%
Horror	5.0%	6.3%	126%	79%
Humour/comedy	14.5%	19.2%	132%	76%
Travel/exploration	9.2%	15.9%	173%	58%
Historical	8.2%	14.4%	176%	57%
Science fiction	5.2%	14.5%	279%	36%
Erotica	1.4%	5.8%	414%	24%
Political	1.1%	4.6%	418%	24%
Scientific	1.1%	6.5%	591%	17%
Sport & leisure	2.7%	22.0%	815%	12%

BOOK GENRES: TOTEMIC OPERATORS OR CASTE MARKS?

TOTEMISM AUJOURDHUI

The discussion thus far, though interesting in methodological terms, is not particularly remarkable from a theoretical point of view. There are numerous studies of the relationship between book genres and social class in Western societies. Their general findings are similar to those reported here. The signal contribution the discussion of my empirical findings have made is to, firstly, reassert the importance of social class in the face of the suggestion that gender is the most important feature of the social discriminations effected by book genres. Secondly, my findings confirm the important methodological point that Bourdieu

makes that differences cannot be established unless they are introduced from the beginning into survey instruments.

Bourdieu has yet another important lesson to offer at this point: that, in carrying out the kind of analysis we have done in this chapter so far we are engaged, in a transformed form, in precisely the same kind of classification process that ordinary agents in the field are engaged in:

> The classifying subjects who classify the properties and practices of others , or their own, are also classifiable objects which classify themselves (in the eyes of others) by appropriate practices and properties that are already classified. (Bourdieu 1984:482)

What Bourdieu invites us to do is to reflect on exactly what it is we are ourselves doing in carrying out an `analysis' of this kind, and see in it, in a transformed form what those involved in the ordinary struggles of culture do with the fuzzy logic of practice.

Thus, the kind of analysis that I have outlined above is the `scientific' counterpart of the kind of practical analysis that agents carry out in relation to the same objects. Those books that sit on the shelves of my in-laws lounge speak to the world they encounter, being variously understood according to the varying habitus that people bring with them to their encounters with them. The very practice of `reading' the shelves itself varies with habitus as does the question of whether any `reading' takes place at all.

The `scientific' habitus engages in a reading which is supposedly disinterested, while the readings of other agents is governed by social interests. This difference is, however, an illusion as the former has an interest in appearing disinterested. Furthermore, the kind of classification engaged in here is significantly unnuanced and impoverished as compared to the practical logic that underlies the dialectic of classification that agents and objects are engaged in everyday life. In fact, to understand the true significance of the `findings' of the former we need to

understand the latter, the practical and symbolic logic that is engaged in everyday life.

What kind of logic underlies these classificatory practices? This logic has all the appearances of totemism. Sahlins has noted that although in our society "the `totemic operator' articulating differences in the cultural series to the differences in natural series, is no longer a main architecture of the cultural system (Sahlins 1976:176), nevertheless, we have to ask "whether it has not been replaced by species and varieties of manufactured objects, which have the power of making even the demarcation of their individual owners a procedure of social classification" (176).[158]

Sahlins's work can be seen as an extension to Western societies of the arguments that Lévi-Strauss makes in *Totemism* and *The Savage Mind*. The former is a critique of an approach which constructs totemism in an illusory way. By employing a substantialist methodology which seeks to explain the correspondence between natural species and human groups in largely utilitarian terms early theories of totemism neglected to notice that "natural species are chosen not because they are `good to eat' but because they are `good to think'" (Lévi-Strauss 1962a:89). The principle approaches that come in for criticism from Lévi-Strauss are various functionalisms (Malinowski, the `functionalist' Radcliffe-Brown, and Durkheim). Thus, for example, he chides Radcliffe-Brown by summarising him in the following way:

> It is a universally attested fact that every thing and every event which exercises an important influence on the material or spiritual well-being of society tends to become an object of a ritual attitude. If totemism chose natural species to serve as social emblems for segments of society, this is quite simply because these species were already objects of ritual attitudes before totemism". (Lévi-Strauss 1962a:61)

[158] I think it is important to note the consistency between Sahlins's views and those elaborated in my discussion of the `power' of objects to act in the world.

So, for Radcliffe-Brown in Lévi-Strauss's view, natural species are highly ritualised because of the practical needs they fulfil. Having become ritualised because of their importance to life they are then used for other purposes such as demarcating groups. Basic needs are met first, symbolic uses follow. Lévi-Strauss argues that if there is connective relation between practical needs and symbolic use (and he doubts that there is) then it would be exactly the opposite. Natural species, to repeat, are chosen because they are `good to think' rather than `good to eat'

Sahlins, like Lévi-Strauss, is highly critical of functionalist and Marxist approaches to the study of culture because of their reduction of signification to the dictates of the needs of material existence. For Sahlins, as we have already seen, meaning comes first, needs follow and he tries in his work, to give a cultural account of even that most utilitarian of orders, the capitalist west:

> The uniqueness of bourgeois society consists not in the fact that the economic system escapes symbolic determination, but that the economic symbolism is structurally determining. (Sahlins 1976:211)

In an earlier chapter I critiqued this either/or argument about the relation of the conscious to the material. However, the substantive point about the homologous relation between series of differences in certain manufactured objects and the status of persons remains. Writing in relation to food preferences and clothing fashion in the United States, Sahlins argues that, through them, we construct "an entire totemic order, uniting in a parallel set of differences the status of persons and what they `eat'" and also, of course, what they wear.

Sahlins argues that the "clothing system...becomes a vast scheme of communication". Our clothing communicates directly who we are. Through a very complex series of cross-cutting sets of differences (types of clothes, fabrics, textures, colours, cuts, fabric weight, and so) a whole set of cross-cutting differences between persons (gender, age, sexuality, ethnicity, class, region) is articulated.

This is a refraction of Lévi-Strauss argument about the fundamental feature of totemic institutions:

> "[The] feature fundamental to totemic institutions is the homology they evoke...not between social groups and natural species but between the differences which manifest themselves on the level of groups on the one hand and on that of species on the other. They are...based on the postulate of a homology between two systems of differences, one which occurs in nature and the other in culture (Lévi-Strauss 1966b:115).

Schematically, Lévi-Strauss makes the argument in the following way:[159]

Nature: species1	≠	species2	≠	species3	≠	....		species *n*
Culture: group1	≠	group2	≠	group3	≠	...		group *n*

Sahlins's significant contribution is to point out that in Western societies manufactured objects play the role assigned to natural species in Lévi-Strauss's schema.

And this is where this discussion reconnects with the discussion of book genres. I would argue that books, like clothes, through a series of cross-cutting differences, are parallel to a series of cross-cutting differences between persons. Genres are one such set of differences. The difference between feminist works and romances parallels a great social divide just as the difference between romances and all other works parallels the gender divide.

But the practical logic that we, as ordinary agents, bring to our engagement with these series is far more subtle and nuanced than any scientific analysis based on survey material could reveal. Genre is only one set of differences. Alongside these are other sets of differences: the nature of the binding, the size of the objects, whether they are presented as series or individual tomes, their colour, and so on.

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[159] I have had to modify the diagram in the original text because it doesn't make much sense as it stands using the addition symbol to link the elements of the two parallel series. I have substituted the sign for inequality where the original text uses the addition sign.

FROM TOTEM TO CASTE

There is one final issue that needs to be addressed. Sahlin's argues that manufactured objects act as `totemic operators'. I would argue, drawing on Lévi-Strauss and Bourdieu, that in our society totemic operators have, in fact, become caste operators. Sahlins is aware of the hierarchical nature of the relationships in our society that constitute what Lévi-Strauss calls the `cultural series', the series of persons and groups but in his interpretation of our cultural order he downplays the significance of hierarchy. In his eagerness to argue the case for `culture' he elides or overlooks the significance of `power'. Even Lévi-Strauss, in the final analysis, does not ignore this:

> I do not at all mean to suggest that ideological transformations give rise to social ones. Only the reverse is in fact true. Men's conception of the relations between nature and culture is a function of modifications of their own social relations. (Lévi-Strauss 1966b:117)

In our society the cultural series is quite definitely a hierarchical one. As I will show in a subsequent chapter, Bourdieu's work demonstrates clearly that we live in a regime of castes. The consequence of this is that totemic operators are in fact transformed into caste marks. Rather than parallel series of differences the operators become direct analogies of the groups to which they relate. Lévi-Strauss says:

> When nature and culture are thought of as two systems of differences between which there is a formal analogy, it is the systematic character of each domain which is brought to the fore. Social groups are distinguished from one another but they retain their solidarity as parts of the same whole, and the rule of exogamy furnishes the means of resolving this opposition balanced between diversity and unity. But if social groups are considered not so much from the point of view of their reciprocal relations in social life as each on their own account...then the idea of diversity is likely to prevail over unity. Each social group will tend to form a system no longer with other social groups but with particular differentiating properties regarded as hereditary, and these characteristics exclusive to each group will

> weaken the framework of their solidarity within the society. The more each group tries to define itself by the image which it draws from a natural model, the more difficult will it become for it to maintain its links with other social groups and ... it will tend to think of them as being a particular `species' (Lévi-Strauss 1966b:116-17).

Schematically, this kind of social order can be expressed as follows (Lévi-Strauss 1966b:117):

Nature:	species1	species2	species3	....	species *n*
Culture:	group1	group2	group3	...	group *n*

In other words, in a hierarchical society, there will be a tendency for the series of system of differences between elements of a `natural' or `manufactured' series relating to a system of differences between persons and groups to be replaced by an order in which each element stands for a particular group.

Needless to say, this is not an either/or framework for understanding the relationship between the order of things (in this case books) and the order of groups. Just as Bourdieu says that "the order of words [that designate groups] never exactly reproduces the order of things" (Bourdieu 1984:481), so too the relationship between the order of things and the order of groups is a complex interplay of totemic operators and caste marks.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have tried to show the complexity in our habitat that underlies the relation between book genres and human organisms. As books and human beings circulate in each others lives they engage in a elaborate pas-de-deux of classification, one in which they are mutually animated. The life of the unread books on the shelves in my in-laws house is lived in relation to those they encounter in the common space they occupy with other beings, including human beings. Amongst these are human organisms who, in their engagement with each other,

make use of these charismatic objects to sense each other in subtle and complex ways.

In the next chapter, I explore how an understanding of the place of books in the life world we occupy can help us resolve some sociological disputes.

CHAPTER 6 REGIMES OF VALUE, CULTURAL GOODWILL AND THE SACREDNESS OF BOOKS[160]

INTRODUCTION

> The members of the different social classes differ not so much in the extent to which they acknowledge culture as in the extent to which they know it.
>
> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*

> For consumers of "low" culture the sense of illegitimacy or of cultural inferiority that characterized previous regimes of value has now largely dissipated.
>
> John Frow, *Cultural Studies and Cultural Value*

In the last chapter I used the data from the survey to explore the social space of books and the way practices and preferences revealed in that study, acting as totemic or caste lenses, refracted the larger social world in which the books had their life.

In this chapter I use the survey material in a slightly different way. The purpose here is to address a debate that is implicated in the contradiction between the two statements above. In order to resolve the debate I will adduce evidence from my research to show that, in this instance, Bourdieu's formulations are still valid. In the process of unpacking the debate it will be seen, once again, that books are emblematic of culture with a capital "C" and that they are invested with a degree of sanctity.

Bourdieu has been accused of being simultaneously enchanted by the myths of high culture that he seeks to demystify and given to romanticism in his interpretation of the culture of the working classes. He has also been accused of not recognizing the displacement of authority and legitimacy that has taken place in relation to what was once "high" culture. The latter, it seems, is tied to the view that Bourdieu does not see the French case as being atypical and, more than that, that his work is rooted to a France at a particular historical conjuncture, that of the time of

[160] A modified version of this chapter has already been published: see Barnard (1999).

Bourdieu's empirical research - the time before Television. After Television, everything it seems changes. A new age has dawned to which the models appropriate for all other times and places are no longer appropriate and must be replaced by a new theoretical structure more appropriate to the New Times we live in.[161] More than this, Bourdieu has been accused of a static view of class. Bruce Robbins, for example, says:

> For Bourdieu, unlike Marx or Gramsci, class is a static sociological category, a mere set of income brackets, a fixed and isolated locale on the social map. It allows for no active relationship between classes, no pressure from below, no hegemonic concession from above, no dynamic of articulation whereby fractions of different classes enter into and fall out of alliance with each other. (Robbins 1994:374)

Thus, according to these critics, there is little room in Bourdieu's account for the decline in cultural goodwill and the increasing relativisation of regimes of value that has taken place over the last three decades or so.

As an anthropologist and a comparativist, however, I am sceptical that we live in a social order in which modes of domination no longer rely on culturally inflected hierarchical systems of symbolic violence for their reproduction and transformation. I will be suggesting that one of the areas in which this can be tested is to rigorously explore what Bourdieu calls "cultural goodwill". However, I will adopt an unusual track into this problematic. I will approach it in a crab-like fashion by moving between a discussion of Bourdieu's argument in relation to class structured societies and the part cultural goodwill plays in them and a discussion of another project, that of Louis Dumont in relation to caste structured society which has also occasioned considerable debate in relation to the issue of cultural goodwill. This interplay of ideas and locations will help to clarify the concept of "cultural goodwill". Engaging with the concept in an "exotic" location helps us to see it at work more close to

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[161] This post-modernist discourse is profoundly allochronic, relegating those who wear "Coca Cola T-shirts in the Third World" either to a modernity in which they live their life under the sway of cultural imperialism or the "promise" but not the actuality of modernity. See, for example, Frow (1995:81).

home. Anthropology needs to reassert its comparative mission. Comparison has many uses and not the least of these is the clarification of systems of ideas which are applied to particular sites.

SACRED HIERARCHIES[162]

One of my main areas of interest for over two decades has been in the comparative study of social life under regimes of complexly structured inequality or, in Bourdieuian terms, in modes of domination. My initial studies were of the caste system in India and in the course of these studies I developed an interest in the problems associated with the study of the middle castes, as opposed on the one hand to that of the Brahmans and, on the other, the low castes and the untouchables. In a move of my field site to New Zealand I have developed an interest in the problems associated with the study of the middle classes in, for want a better term, capitalist society and its various sub-species. In the study of both of these specific substantive areas and the larger context in which they exist, I have found in the work of two of the heirs of Durkheim and Mauss (and also Weber) - Louis Dumont and Pierre Bourdieu - my most useful guides. I have found it useful to read one in the light of the other. The results have been somewhat asymmetrical. The reading of Bourdieu in the light of Dumont helps me to see both the strengths of the former as well as appreciating some of his ideas in a comparative context and reading Dumont in the light of Bourdieu helps me to see not only Dumont's ideas in a comparative context but also both the strengths and the weaknesses of Dumont. It may seem strange to say but this double reading shows clearly how much more of an anthropologist Bourdieu is as compared to Dumont. In particular, the weaknesses of the methodology of Dumont's recent anthropology of *Homo Equalis* becomes all too apparent. Briefly, it is as if Dumont leaves his ethnographic sensibility at the gates of Europe becoming an European equivalent of an Indologist or, to paraphrase Burghart, Dumont moves from the role of a European Brahman to a Brahmanical European (Burghart 1990:266ff).

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[162] Etymologically speaking this is a phrase with built-in redundancy as "hierarchies" are already connected to the sacred.

Anthropologists with a background in Indian studies, coming to the study of Western social formations, experience a strong sense of *deja vu*, a feeling that they are confronted by the same spectrum of debates as preoccupy students of India but in a different key or, to use perhaps a more appropriate analogy, experience a red shift in comparing these spectra of debate. Thus, where there have been endless debates about caste there are endless debates about class; where there are endless debates about the relationship of caste to occupation[163] there are endless debates about the relationship between class and occupation; where there are endless debates about kingship there are endless debates about the State; where there are endless debates about the right way to construe the relationship between caste and kingship there are endless debates about the relationship of class to the state; where there are debates about popular culture and its relationship to the dominant culture there are debates about the "little tradition" and its relationship to the "great tradition", to use early forms of phrasing the latter problem in India; where there are debates about the relationships between caste, kinship and gender there are debates about class, household and gender; and, finally, where there is now a growing debate about the death of class there has been a strong debate about the death of caste. These are only some of the more striking parallels.

Caste society and societies in which class has been seen as a, if not *the*, major structural feature have been addressed simultaneously and comparatively before in classical social theory. Both Marx and Weber, but more particularly the latter, encompassed India in their substantive studies and thus, at its very birth, social science was provided with a comparative dimension that incorporated these particular societies within the one frame. What *is* surprising is that the subsequent development of social scientific discourse in each area has been conducted largely in ignorance or at least neglect of the other. This is probably related to the fragmentation of the social sciences and in particular to the division of labour between sociologists and social anthropologists. But, whatever the reasons, the

[163] This debate, in the context of India, can best be followed by tracking the debates concerning what is called the *jajmani* system.

consequences for comparative studies have been damaging.[164] Sociologists interested in the study of class may, perhaps, be excused on the grounds that they have never seriously claimed the mantle of a grand comparativism and have restricted their comparisons to the regional level (class in the various countries of the "advanced capitalist world" or class in the countries of the Eastern Bloc), though lip service is still paid from time to time to a more general comparativism.[165] Social anthropologists, however, have little excuse as the very identity of their discipline is based on the notion that it is a comparative social science. Instead, what we are delivered in relation to India is a sociology (as opposed to a social anthropology) of India;[166] what anthropologists deliver in relation to Western social formations has been little or nothing, at least until very recently when anthropologists have begun to try and make up for lost time.[167] The time to renew the dialogue has come and Bourdieu is showing the way.

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[164] Bourdieu is highly critical of the premature and unnecessary fragmentation of the social sciences into "disciplines" and he has done more than any one to break down the specious and spurious boundaries erected by sociologists and anthropologists between themselves. The subtlety of his strategies in this field are revealed even in so simple a tactic as the naming of his joint work with Wacquant - published in English as *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) and in French as *Reponses; Pour une Anthropologie Reflexive* (Wacquant and Bourdieu 1992).

[165] Thus, for example, a recent textbook on *Class and Stratification*, caste systems and feudal systems get a paragraph each (Crompton 1993:1-2).

[166] In the case of India, Dumont can be held to account here, perhaps. The narrow definition of the comparative approach in social sciences within which he embarked on his study of caste society excluded direct comparisons of these two societal forms. The quite acceptable stipulation that one should understand a society in-its-own-terms became transformed into the unacceptable premise that one should *only* understand a society in its own terms (see Bourdieu's critiques of ethnomethodology (1990a:26)). Somewhat obscured in its original formulations the sterility of such an approach to comparison became clearer in the marginality of Dumont's later "Contributions to European Sociology". Whereas his *Contributions to Indian Sociology* were saved by the fact that he began at the grass-roots village level and through the exploration of data constructed on the basis of ethnographic research, his studies in European Sociology began at the "ideological level" and remained there. It was the contributions to European Sociology by Bourdieu and his colleagues at the Centre for European Sociology that, for me, brought this home.

It should be noted however that recently anthropologists working on Indian subjects have begun to realise the isolation generated by adopting Dumont's methodological premises. Thus, the late Richard Burghart, said: "it is time for South Asianists to look outward and pursue an intertextual dialogue with their colleagues." (Burghart 1990:277). Though it is possible to interpret this remark as meaning other "anthropological" colleagues, I am sure, in the light of his other work, he meant to include sociologists. Cf. Sharma (81-84).

[167] Though there have been a number of programmatic statements (Marcus and Fischer 1986:111ff; Ortner 1991) it is Bourdieu and his colleagues who have showed anthropologists

CASTE; THE WORK OF DUMONT

I will begin with Louis Dumont whose work perhaps more than anyone else's resulted in the construction of the disciplinary iron curtain behind which South Asianists have beavered away developing an account of Indian social formations (with the occasional escapee!).

Dumont's account of the caste system can be summarised as follows. The Hindu social order is, on the surface, "composed of hereditary groups which are both distinguished from one another and connected together in three ways:

(1) gradation of status or hierarchy

(2) by detailed rules aimed at ensuring their separation

(3) by division of labour and the interdependance which results from it" (Dumont 1980:43)

But all of these aspects "rest on one fundamental conception and are reducible to a single true principle.. the opposition of the pure and impure" (Dumont 1980:43)

This fundamental principle accounts for all three aspects. Pure groups have to be kept separate from impure groups and yet are dependant for their purity on the impurity of those very groups. It accounts for the rigidity in relation to marriage. It accounts for endless preoccupation with pollution that informs the lives of those living with the regime of castes - the hugely elaborate code surrounding commensality, the intricate structure of ideas concerning the ability of different types of food and differently cooked foods to transmit pollution. It accounts for some of the distribution of the occupations - those concerned with the organic world being considered polluting and thus to be avoided as much as possible. "Chamar or Mehtar" - Leather worker and Sweeper - as epithets have a similar affect structure to that which is associated with the term “nigger”. Those at the bottom of the hierarchy are considered to be so polluting that they are ghettoised in hamlets,

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how they could develop an ethnographic approach to a social form which had been, for a variety of complex reasons, ruled out of bounds for anthropologists (Barnard 1990:75ff).

attached to, but separate from, the villages in which the other castes are to be found (the term untouchability is not a particularly accurate description of the relationship because as a practice, though found in some places, it is not universal: Untouchability is marked, more accurately, by a series of social interdictions, from living in the village proper, to access to the services of castes such as the washerman, barber and, of course, Brahmans).

But what is the source of the notion of purity? Purity, in a sense, is a purely negative thing. It is an absence from, a distance from impurity. The idea can best be grasped by understanding the temporary impurity that all Hindus of good caste (and this, of course, excludes renouncers who aren't of *any* caste) "contract in relation to organic life" (Dumont 1980:47). Death, faeces, menses - the irruption of the organic into the social - are occasions for temporary pollution. Those whose occupations by definition are constantly concerned with such events are considered to be permanently impure.

This system, for Dumont, is a hier-archical system, a sacral order in which purity is given paramountcy over political power. Secular power, in the form of kingship and the dominant (the landowning) castes, does exist, of course, but does so only in full recognition of its subordination in relation to hieratic values. At the apex of system sit the pure castes, including those with power, but all are sustained in their legitimacy by its encompassment by the fundamental principle. This is a *pas de deux* but with the Brahman, the pure caste always in the centre.

To support this latter account about the relationship of status to power, Dumont draws on an indigenous theory of the social order - the theory of the *varna*. In the Hindu texts is found an account of the social order which puts Brahmans at the top but in alliance with those who hold power. This indigenous theory helps us to understand the dynamic tension that exists at the apex of the system.

There are some very interesting features of this account of the caste system. Firstly, it is a fully relational account. Dumont, like Bourdieu, is resolutely opposed to substantialist modes of thought: "We shall speak of structure exclusively in this case, when the interdependence of the elements of a system is so great that they

disappear without residue if an inventory is made of the relations between them: a system of relations, in short, not a system of elements" (Dumont 1980:40). Secondly, it provides a clear framework for understanding the extremes of the system: the purity of the Brahmans and the high castes, those who are distant from the irruptions of the organic (the Brahmans at the top of the system maintain an almost ascetic withdrawal from the social world while still remaining at the very centre of it),[168] and the impurity of the untouchables, those relegated to dealing with the irruptions of the organic into the social and who are consequently also removed from the social but this time right on the edges of it. These opposed elements are defined in relation to each other and make no sense in isolation from each other. Thirdly, it is in the middle regions that there is most room for ambiguity about the position of castes in relation to the hierarchical whole. Fourthly, the fundamental principle of the system permeates the whole system: it constitutes the doxa of the social order. The principle informs the habitus of all those who are agents in the system. It is useful here to introduce an idea from Appadurai which helps us to get a comparative grip on this principle. This is the idea of a regime of value: a cultural framework characterised by a set of shared standards of value (Appadurai 1986:15-16). The caste regime of value is characterised by a high degree of value coherence (Appadurai 1986:16). It permeates all social exchanges and transactions.

This, in brief, is the start of Dumont's account of the caste system. Needless-to-say, perhaps, the implications of this account are complex and occupy a considerable portion of his major book on the subject (Dumont 1980).

Criticisms of Dumont's views of caste

Dumont's account of the caste system still remains the most influential. Though it has been subject to wide-ranging critique on a number of fronts it is, nevertheless,

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[168] Some recent criticisms of Dumont have pointed out that his account is weakened by the fact that some Brahman subcastes, as priests, are often despised by other Brahman subcastes. Dumont anticipated these criticisms:

> It should be recalled that although the Brahman is characterised in the Vedic period by his sacrificial functions, in the Hindu period, in harmony with the decline of sacrifice in favour of other rites, the Brahman is, above all, purity...Today Brahman lineages are graded in virtue of rank of the castes they serve as domestic priests, the highest being the learned Brahmans who do not serve at all. (Dumont 1980:70)

the account against which all others have to be measured and thus far no other accounting has been able to encompass as wide a range of aspects of the Hindu social order under the rubric of the one over-arching theory.[169]

For the purposes of this chapter, I want to focus on three particular criticisms of Dumont's work. Firstly, the Dumontian account of the caste system is said to be a Brahmanical view of the caste system. This criticism was voiced most vehemently by Berreman, who argued that Dumont's view of the caste system derived from Brahmanical sources and were profoundly coloured by them. Low castes and untouchables, said Berreman, were quite aware of the caste system as an exploitative system and did not subscribe to the same regime of values as the Brahmans:

> It is a view which conforms rather closely to the high-caste ideal of what the caste system of Hindu India ought to be like according to those who value it positively; it conforms well to the theory of caste purveyed in learned Brahmanical tracts. But it bears little relationship to the experience of caste in the lives of many millions who live it in India, or to the feeble reflections of those lives that have made their way into the ethnographical, biographical and novelistic literature. And this is, I insist, a travesty. A frank talk with an untouchable who knows and trusts one would be enough to make this clear. (Berreman 1979:162)[170]

In other words, there was no cultural goodwill. Low castes and untouchables were quite aware of the Brahmanical view as being pure ideology and that they, the low castes and untouchables, only adhered to the Brahmanical regime of values out of fear for their safety. More than this, they took every opportunity to subvert it. They certainly did not believe themselves to be less pure than the higher castes.

In other words, the lower casts and, in particular, the untouchables do not have "cultural goodwill", they do not subscribe to the ideology of caste purveyed by

[169] The school of Marriott (Marriott 1990) may feel as if they have but on any objective criteria this hyperculturalist theory of the Hindu social order is quite uninfluential even if one limits oneself to South Asianists: beyond that domain they have had no impact at all.

[170] See also Sharma (1994:78).

Brahmans and other high castes and which Dumont uses to construct his own theory of caste. The question of "cultural goodwill" in the caste system is an empirical one. Berreman suggests this by saying that all one has to do is to ask an untouchable "who knows and trusts one" to become aware of the fact that they do not share the same ideology and the values attached to it by Brahmans.

It would be nice if the empirical question could be settled so easily but unfortunately the situation is more complicated than that. It may well be the case that untouchables rail against the Brahmanical sense of superiority based on relative purity, but it is also clear that the ideas and values that are expressed in the daily practice of low castes, shows that they fully subscribe to this ideology and that they show as much adherence to notions of purity and impurity as do the high castes. They seek higher status in practices such as commensality and marriage. The evidence is fairly overwhelming that "cultural goodwill" does exist amongst low castes. After much agonising over the question Parish concludes:

> Low caste people do subscribe to values of hierarchy: they use, in ways that seem authentic, and profess commitment to, in ways that seem quite sincere, concepts of purity and pollution, of karma, of `high' and `low', that stigmatise them. (Parish 1996:202)

The second criticism of Dumont's view of caste is that it is accused of not just being Brahmanocentric but also Indocentric. His account, it is said, of the nature of the Hindu social order is such as to make it an order sui generis, unique and incomparable. The leading critic here was Bailey who challenged Dumont's methodological assumptions when they were first proclaimed (Bailey 1959). Bailey said that adopting Dumont's approach to the caste system would make comparison impossible, that it would turn the sociology of India into Indian sociology. Berreman, too, shared Bailey's concerns about the Indocentric nature of Dumont's approach to the caste system and the inability to use this approach as the basis for a comparative study of systems of inequality. And it is true, as I have already pointed out, that the advent of Dumont led to an inward turn in the gaze of South Asianists,

one which has probably been carried to its extreme by Marriott and his school at Chicago. [171]

The third criticism of Dumont's view of caste that I want to draw attention to is that it is seen as being completely static. Certainly, there is room at the empirical level in this account for the dynamics of the coming and goings of particular castes, for mobility up and down the system (though not at its extremes). But the system, as constructed by Dumont, is completely static from the point of view of its fundamental principles, its regime of values. As Mencher says: "In [Dumont's] view Indian society has been permeated with the concept of hierarchy for at least the last 1500-2000 years." (Mencher 1974:469) This resonates with the image of the unchanging East which has been the subject of much criticism since Said's demolition of Orientalism (Said 1978).

Now, what is interesting about these critiques from the perspective of this chapter is that they echo almost exactly the criticisms made of Bourdieu and his account of the social structure of France. These parallels, particularly those relating to "cultural goodwill", allow us to see more clearly what is at issue between Bourdieu and his critics.

CLASS; THE WORK OF BOURDIEU

> The only legitimate object of comparison is each system considered as a system.
> (Bourdieu 1990a:302 n.9)

Bourdieu's work as a whole must be seen as a contribution to "a general anthropology of power and legitimacy" (Bourdieu 1996:5). As Wacquant says: "The whole of Bourdieu's work may be interpreted as a materialist anthropology of

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[171] The reputation of South Asianists in social anthropology is not a very good one...The institutions we investigate - caste, the jajmani system, religious traditions - are supposedly unique to the region. Our ethnographic writing is so strewn with native terms that should the curious outsider take an interest in our region, she finds her ignorance of a local language an impediment to her learning...From the mid-1950s ethnographers of South Asia began to write as if they did not have a common problem with ethnographers of other regions (Burghart 1990:260).

In 1955 Dumont announced his programme for the sociology of India which he described as being at the intersection of Indology and sociology (Dumont and Pocock 1957). This was a crucial element in the increasing isolation of South Asian social anthropologist from the general body of social anthropologists.

the specific contribution that various forms of symbolic violence make to the reproduction and transformation of structures of domination." (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:14-15) [See also (Wacquant 1996a:163)]. *Distinction* and *The State Nobility* are works that look at the logic of social domination in "advanced" capitalist society, just as *The Logic of Practice* looks at the logic of social domination in the pre-capitalist society of the Kabyle. Other works, such as the *The Rules of Art,* explore the historical genesis of new regimes of value - of an aesthetic that participates in the work of symbolic violence which, in the very act of setting itself up as an autonomous domain, creates the conditions for its use as a mark of almost Brahmanical purity for the dominant actors in the field.

Thus, in France, the *pas de deux* of the tastes of the dominant and dominated fractions of the dominant classes, tastes based on the pure gaze but marked by differential means for appropriating and producing the objects sacralized by the touch of those "naturally" endowed with it, dissembles the labour of domination that is the product of the dance itself. *Distinction* explores the class system that both produces and is the product of the new systems of vision and division that are incorporated in the aesthetic disposition. *The State Nobility* describes the way the higher levels of the educational system work to ensure the reproduction, through a process of consecration, of the privilege of those already born with privilege. Because this reproduction is effected through a supposedly meritocratic system those born privileged are confirmed in their privilege. The educational system gives the appearance at every stage of being purely stochastic and meritocratic but in reality it is a process for ensuring that those who are born privileged are twice-born (*dvija* as it is called in the caste system). As Wacquant summarises it:

> The granting of an elite degree is not so much a `rite of passage' à la Van Gennep as a *rite of institution*: it does not demarcate a before and an after so much as it differentiates - and elevates - those destined to occupy eminent social positions from those over whom they will lord. It evokes reverence for and consecrates them, in the strongest sense of the term, that is, it makes them sacred. (Wacquant 1996a:154)

In other words, at each level of the educational system, strands are added to the sacred thread of those born entitled to wear it already.

The parallels between Dumont's account of the caste system and Bourdieu's of the French social order are quite strong. In both cases the apex of the system is based on what Wacquant has called a chiasmatic organization, a division of labour of the labour of domination between material and symbolic capital - social capital and "religious" capital in the case of the caste system, economic and cultural capital in the case of class societies.

The fundamental principle of the class system based on cultural capital is the opposition between the aesthetic disposition and the popular "aesthetic", between the pure gaze and the polluting touch (the moment a work of art becomes popular, the aesthetic disposition distances itself from it). Just as impurity (*asaucca*) provokes disgust and avoidance amongst pure castes in Hindu India so does the "bad taste" of the popular classes in the class system amongst the higher classes:

> Tastes are the practical affirmation of inevitable difference. It is no accident that they are asserted purely negatively, by the refusal of other tastes. In matters of taste, more than anywhere else, all determination is negation; and tastes are perhaps first and foremost distastes, disgust provoked by horror or visceral intolerance (`sick-making') of the taste of others. (Bourdieu 1984:56)

Thus, where the pure castes seek to distance themselves from the impurity of lower castes, so too the higher classes avoid the taste of the popular classes. Bourdieu adds:

> Aesthetic intolerance can be terribly violent. Aversion to different lifestyles is perhaps the strongest barrier between the classes. (1984:56)

Just as caste endogamy is based on and gives expression to intolerance of the relative purity of castes so too, says Bourdieu, "class endogamy is evidence of the aversion" by the higher classes of the tastes of the lower classes: "The most intolerable thing for those who regard themselves as possessors of legitimate culture

is the sacrilegious reuniting of tastes which taste dictates should be separated" (Bourdieu 1984:56-57). In other words, as the very use of words like sacrilege would lead us to believe, the class system is as much a *hier*archical system, in the religious sense, as the caste system. Like Brahmans, holders of cultural capital "provide a sort of absolute reference point in the necessarily endless play of mutually self-relativising tastes." (Bourdieu 1984:57)

In both the caste and class systems those at the lower end of the social order serve a similar function: "As for the working class", says Bourdieu, "perhaps their sole function in the system of aesthetic positions is to serve as a foil, a negative reference point, in relation to which all aesthetics define themselves, by successive negations." (Bourdieu 1984:57). And given that *Distinction* demonstrates the "intelligible relations which unite apparently incommensurable `choices', such as preferences in music and food, painting and sport, literature and hairstyle" (Bourdieu 1984:6) Bourdieu does for social practices in a class based society what Dumont has done for a caste structured society. The idiom of relations may be explicitly an idiom of purity in the case of caste society but it has its counterpart in the idiom of taste in class society and both can be "terribly violent" (Bourdieu 1984:56).

There are, of course, large and important differences between the two systems not the least of which is the differentiation and multiplication of semiautonomous fields in class society, whereas in caste society - as Dumont has gone on to argue vigorously - this differentiation has not taken place. In the caste system, the various domains of social practice are fully dissolved in each other: the "field" of marriage, the "field" of education, the "field" of religion, the "field" of cultural production, etc (and I put field in quotation marks in order to indicate that in the caste systems they are "fields-of-themselves" and not "fields-in-themselves") are in reality all one field, they are suspended in the one solution. Social facts are *total* social facts in Mauss's sense. And it is because they exist in this state that this system does not have to rely on a mechanism like the educational system to ensure its reproduction. When cultural practices across a large range of domains are homologous - from

marriage through occupation, from gender relations to commensality - reproduction takes place in the minutiae of the practices of everyday life.

But Dumont and Bourdieu's accounts are similar in an altogether different way. They are subject to homologous forms of critique. I have already outlined major critiques of Dumont's account of the caste system. I will now, briefly, do the same for Bourdieu's account of the logic of domination in France.

CRITICISMS OF BOURDIEU'S VIEWS OF CLASS

Firstly, Bourdieu's account has been accused of being mystified by the very myths of the dominant class that he seeks to mystify. Shusterman, for example, says that Bourdieu "remains too enchanted by the myth he demystifies to acknowledge the existence of any legitimate popular aesthetic." (Shusterman 1992:172) [See also (Fowler 1997:152ff)]. Bourdieu's account of aesthetics, according to these critics, leaves no room for alternative aesthetics to that of the dominant aesthetic and that Bourdieu takes the values of this aesthetic for granted. This closely echoes the critics of Dumont who argue that Dumont does not leave room for oppositional systems of ideas and values amongst the lower orders of caste society.

Secondly, just as Dumont's account of the caste system is said to be Indocentric, so too Bourdieu's account is said to be irredeemably Francocentric. It is said that his account is not transportable across national frontiers. Shusterman once again:

> However compelling this argument may for the French culture Bourdieu studies, it fails as a global argument against popular art. For, at least in America, such art does assert its aesthetic status and provide its own forms of aesthetic legitimation. (Shusterman 1992:196)[172]

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[172] Compare Mary Douglas:

> The trouble with Bourdieu's model is that it is so French. It is just as firmly rooted in the perspective of the nineteenth-century and twentieth-century French bourgeoise as the Hindu purity scale is rooted in India (Douglas 1996:30).

Douglas also offers a comparison of Hindu India and the west drawing on Bourdieu but for quite different purposes from my own. I also come to quite different conclusions from Douglas about Bourdieu's work.

Thirdly, Bourdieu's account of class, like Dumont's account of caste, is accused of being an account that has little or no room for societal transformation. It is a deterministic model of social and cultural reproduction. Thus, although profoundly inspired by Bourdieu, Kauppi still contrasts his own "processual field theoretical model" of the French intellectual field with Bourdieu's "structural" approach to culture (Kauppi 1996:139). Another critic complains that in Bourdieu's account "the totalizing grip of the `dominant norms', understood as a unitary set of values, allows for no possibility of critique and social transformation" (Frow 1995:46).

A TEST CASE: CULTURAL GOODWILL AND THE SANCTITY OF BOOKS

I would like now to draw the threads of my discussion thus far together. I have elaborated the structure of Dumont's account of the caste system alongside a discussion of Bourdieu's work for two reasons. Firstly, it helps to see Bourdieu's work in a different light, one which accentuates aspects of his work that are overlooked in other exegeses of Bourdieu's writings. But secondly, and more importantly, the discussion serves to highlight an area of interest to comparative sociology, one which I will now elaborate.

It seems to me that at the root of the homologous critiques of Dumont and Bourdieu lies a concern with what is seen as their totalizing views of the work of culture. This has been expressed recently and most clearly, in relation to Bourdieu, by John Frow in his critical work on cultural studies and cultural value (Frow 1995). Frow argues that Bourdieu is unable to "theorize relations of domination as relations of contested hegemony" (Frow 1995:45). Rather Bourdieu's account of the dominance of dominant values sees it as "something absolute". The dominated classes are "inevitably and inexorably entrapped within the cultural limits imposed" on them (Frow 1995:45).

Dumont has been criticised for something very similar in the Indian context by such critics as Berreman who, as I have already indicated, has argued vigorously that far from being in the grip of a totalizing set of cultural values, the dominated castes in India have a quite different set of values. In both cases, Frow's and Berreman's, one of the principal reasons advanced for rejecting the views of Bourdieu and

Dumont is the implicit conservatism of the politics implicated by such a view. Frow particularly stresses the "political deficiencies" of Bourdieu's work (Frow 1995:39).

Dumont certainly subscribes to a totalizing view of caste: "I submit that any general social ideology, any ideology that predominates in a given society is by its nature global, all-embracing, all-encompassing" (Dumont 1966:20). The caste regime of values is one which constitutes the *doxa* of the Hindu social world. It is a taken for granted reality. It's limits are the limits of the thinkable in this sociocultural order. Cognition and recognition are to be found equally at all levels. In fact, one could argue that caste "consciousness" is higher at the lower levels of the social order where the labour of distinction becomes particularly difficult when there is a large discrepancy between the cultural capital acquired by birth and economic capital acquired through time. Untouchable castes find it almost impossible to cross the pollution bar even when they have acquired considerable economic capital.[173] But, ironically, in the very attempt to do so they reinforce and demonstrate their commitment to the regimes of value that constitute the caste system itself.

It would appear that Bourdieu shares this view: "The members of the different social classes differ not so much in the extent to which they acknowledge culture as in the extent to which they know it" and he speaks of the "impossible refusal of the dominant culture" (Bourdieu 1984:318). For Bourdieu, "acknowledgment without knowledge is increasingly frequent as one moves down the social hierarchy" (Bourdieu 1984:318). In fact, even this statement doesn't quite do justice to the facts that Bourdieu adduces to support this statement because it would appear that the strength of the acknowledgment actually increases as one goes down the social hierarchy, even if one were to control for knowledge (Bourdieu 1984:320).

It is this view, of the role of "high" culture in the system as a whole, that particularly irritates those like Frow. They argue that this view does not take into account the immense changes wrought by the new media and in particular TV:

[173] The clearest and most extended treatment of this question in an ethnographic way is the work of Bailey *Caste and the Economic Frontier* (1957).

> Bourdieu assumes the legitimacy of this ground [of high culture] is still imposed on the dominated classes; but it may well be the case, particularly since the massive growth of a television culture in which working-class people tend to be fully competent, that high culture, or rather the prestige of high culture, has become largely irrelevant to them.

And he adds:

> Bourdieu never seeks to establish the case for the continuing legitimacy of high culture; he simply assumes it - and he pays little attention to television. (Frow 1995:37).

For Frow and similar critics, the postmodern world is world of completely relativised regimes of value no one of which holds the cultural high ground.[174]

This is a crucial issue. If it can be shown that the legitimacy of high culture no longer holds then the whole exercise of showing the elective affinities between this taste and tastes in other practices is really beside the point. All one has established, if one is successful in such an exercise, is something in line with a kind of marketing psychographics, the clustering of tastes in certain life-styles none of which are necessarily linked to any kind of hierarchy of classes. And if the legitimacy of "high culture" is problematised then so too is the view that acknowledgment of high culture is part of the doxic realm. In fact, the whole notion of a doxic realm in advanced capitalist society becomes an open problem.

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[174] See Swartz (1997:152) for a discussion of Gartman's critique of Bourdieu along similar lines. Bourdieu himself explicitly address this issue as follows:

> The model of the relationship between the universe of economic and social conditions and the universe of life-styles which put forward here, based on an endeavour to rethink Max Weber's opposition between class and *Stand*, seems to me to be valid beyond the particular French case and, no doubt, for every stratified society, even if the systems of distinctive features which express or reveal economic and social differences (themselves variable in scale and structure) varies considerably from one period, and one society to another. (Bourdieu 1984:xii)

And he adds an important footnote to the this:

> This contradicts the view, held by many intellectuals in every country, that cultural differences are withering away into a common culture. (Bourdieu 1984:561)

If one accepts this critique then it would seriously undermine the grounds on which Bourdieu's work is based and, in particular, the whole substantive element of his work. It may have very regional and local applicability to France, concede his critics, but certainly cannot be applied to all social orders in the post-modern world let alone be universalised.

Before I move on to addressing this issue directly, I want to draw attention to a number of errors of understanding. Firstly, and to repeat, Bourdieu's work has to be seen as a contribution to a comparative social science. Certainly it is the case that his work is dense with an account of the particulars of French ethnography. But there is, nevertheless, in everything he writes, an open invitation to universalise the modes of analysis to other social orders with the appropriate adjustments that would be required to allow for the specificities of those orders. Clearly, as I have shown, it would be relatively easy to do this for even a social order as different at the Indian caste system.[175] Secondly, the criticisms are simply wrong when they suggest, as Frow does, that Bourdieu *assumes* the legitimacy of "high culture". In fact, he is at great pains to *demonstrate* the legitimacy of "high culture" through an analysis of both survey material, his own and others, as well as that of others. That is, Bourdieu sees this as an empirical question and one which can only be answered by pointing to social reality. His discussion of the cultural goodwill of the middle classes and the allodoxic practices of the working classes addresses this issue on the empirical level (Bourdieu 1984:318ff and 372ff).

In the final analysis, these disputes about "cultural goodwill" in either the caste system or the class system cannot be resolved "on paper" but have to lead to more empirical research. Mere assertion, along the lines of Berreman's imaginary trusting untouchable, is not enough.

Frow's critique is, on his own admission, "unashamedly `theoretical'" (Frow 1995:4) and there is no empirical material adduced to support his assertions concerning the major transformation in the relationship between culture and class

[175] Milner in his *Status and Sacredness* (1994) attempts to apply a modified Bourdieuian perspective to the caste system.

that he advances. In fact, he does not propose a research agenda which would lead to a resolution of these problems and yet he was involved in research in the early 90s that does precisely that (Bennett and Frow 1991). And it is interesting to note that the findings of that research, far from substantiating Frow's position on the issue of legitimacy in relation to "high" culture, would seem to support Bourdieu's findings of two decades before. Thus, for example, in a study of reluctant museum visitors by Tony Bennett, which was a follow-on of research carried out by Frow with Bennett on visitors to three South Australian Art Galleries, Bennett finds the following:

> When attitudes to art are correlated with occupation, a related pattern emerges with manual workers, homemakers and the unemployed tending toward conservative aesthetic preferences and views of art galleries. These were also the groups most likely to see art galleries as requiring specialist competencies they didn't possess. (Bennett 1994:40)

This is precisely the pattern of acknowledgment without knowledge that Bourdieu refers to as cultural goodwill and which lies at the heart of the assessment of the question of the legitimacy of high culture. This finding corroborated those of the earlier study which showed that "those with least education expressed the strongest preference for traditional art" (Bennett and Frow 1991:32). Similar findings are reported for the Indian caste system where it is those at the bottom of the hierarchy who are often the most vigorous in the defence of their own position relative to those marginally below them (Moffat 1979). In doing this they express the strongest commitment to caste values.

NEW EVIDENCE FROM THE LIFE OF BOOKS

I would like now to briefly adduce some evidence from the study of the life of books based on the library survey carried out in 1990. One of the most striking findings of the library survey research was the degree to which the whole community supported the library's existence. This became clear even before the data were analysed. The non-response rate to the survey (12%) was far lower than that for any similar survey which had other aims in mind - 30%-40% is not

uncommon. Thus, those approached acknowledged the legitimacy of the institution not only by the answers they gave to the questions addressed to them about the library but also in their very willingness, in spite of not necessarily being users of the institution, to be asked questions about it. To this must be added the corroboration provided by the overwhelming 94% who answered in the positive to the assertion that "It would be a great loss to community if there were no public libraries", this in spite of the fact only about 35% were regular users of it. Now, it could be argued that libraries are associated with the educational process and acknowledgment of it is hardly acknowledgment of a legitimate high culture. But we need to read these figures alongside analyses of other materials.

The public sector in New Zealand, where it has not been privatised - and it should be noted that registrations of interest have been called for the sale of the first public library (!) - has undergone major "restructuring" (a term which belongs to the language of a new sect of high priests of capital) around the notion that wherever a direct individual beneficiary of its services can be identified then the beneficiary should pay some, if not, on occasion, all the costs attached to those services. This approach to public finance has now begun to impact on the library sector. In a neighbouring city this has led to a substantial "restructuring" of the public library services and extensive introduction of a "user pays" element in the delivery of its services. In this process, it became defined as "necessary" to distinguish between the public and private good elements of different genres of books. A committee was set up to explore this issue and came down with the judgement that the use of *fiction* by individuals had a 75% private good and a 25% public good element and that the figures were the reverse for *non-fiction* works. Now, from a certain angle this is a matter for some derision, but from the point of view of this paper what interested me was the caveats placed on these figures. The committee indicated that it had suspended judgement, on these terms, to a list of canonical authors: Shakespeare, of course, but also Dickens, Jane Austen, etc. It was going to have to look, it said, much more closely at such works to establish the distinction between the public and private good elements. In other words, it was quite conscious of the fact that a certain element of resources of the library were, from its point of view, of value beyond that of immediate pleasure. It is also relevant that many on the

committee were self-confessedly non-readers. Now, reading this in conjunction with the figures for the near universal support for the library as an institution, it would seem that, to a degree that the figures cannot fully reveal, the library is supported because it is seen as being devoted to legitimate culture. The "jewel in the crown" of public cultural institutions, a phrase used by the city council itself, acts as a kind of turnstile of cultural value blessing that which it contains whilst being blest by it, acknowledged by the reverence with which it is treated and by the "goodwill" extended to those associated with it. Thus those who are likely to associate the library with a *historic building*, a *museum*, an *art gallery*, or a *church* are *non-users* of the institution (67%, 68%, 57%, 85%) rather than *users* (33%, 32%, 43%, 15%). Users, on the contrary, are more likely to associate it with supermarkets (54%), department stores (59%), or banks (67%).[176] It is clear that we are in the presence of cultural goodwill, of acknowledgment without knowledge. The figures adduced by Bourdieu to support his theses on cultural goodwill were based on secondary analyses of survey materials concerning opinions on literary prizes. They showed that the reverence for literary institutions rose as one went down the class ladder. These figures from 30 years ago still find their echoes today in New Zealand.

Such figures are by no means conclusive but in as much as "legitimacy" is a social process[177] which can be recognised through such processes as the extension of

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[176] Similar, and even stronger figures, are obtained if one matches these associations with what has been suggested is one of the key indicators of cultural capital - the number of books owned. The fewer the books owned the more a library is associated with museums, art galleries, churches, historic buildings, the more books are owned the greater is the association with supermarkets, department stores, banks.

[177] Shusterman, in an interesting footnote, records that Bourdieu warned him that "the theoretical justification of popular art's legitimacy does not in itself render it legitimate in the real social world. Moreover, since such justification runs the risk of turning our eyes from the social facts of illegitimacy (thereby contributing to its perpetuation), it is a dangerous strategy to adopt". Shusterman's response to this warning is as follows:

> The risk is worth taking, that justificational polemics do not imply blindness to social realities, and that theoretical advocacy, empirical research, and actual socio-cultural reform can and should be applied to effect the desired legitimation. (Shusterman 1992:291)

The fundamental problem with this position is that it arrogates to intellectual activity powers in relation to the real social world that it very rarely has. I doubt very much that writing learned articles about rap in learned journals is going to be much of a contribution towards the "legitimation" of rap in the "real social world". Frow also suffers from a similar overestimation of the influence of "cultural intellectuals" (the influence of the broader

cultural goodwill then, it would appear, on the basis of the above figures as well as those adduced from studies that Frow himself was involved in, that the legitimacy of high culture is not much different now than it was three decades ago in spite of television culture and that the alternative case still requires empirical substantiation. Needless to say, perhaps, this question deserves much more attention in other research agendas.

My findings are corroborated by the results of Bridget Fowler's study of the consumption of literature amongst women in Scotland (Fowler 1991). She concludes her study of the reading preferences of her sample of Scottish women with the following statement:

> Post-modernist theorists have assumed too readily that earlier cultural divisions relating to class have collapsed in the wake of avant-garde modernism. (Fowler 1991:170).

She adds:

> So deeply entrenched are high cultural fortifications against the besieging barbarian forces of downward kitsch that only two of those possessing legitimate taste were prepared to flaunt their omnivorous reading. In this respect, the claims of postmodernist theorists that both high and popular culture are consumed today by the same groups are wide of the mark. (Fowler 1991:124)

Janice Radway to some extent misses the point when she says:

> What happens in the mass culture critique, which is elaborated for the most part by intellectuals, academics, and cultural professionals of one sort of another – that is, by our cultural elite – is that those who are richly

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"intelligentsia", "knowledge workers" is another matter) in relation to the social world. I would commend the empirical research which would make the "theoretical advocacy" superfluous (admitting of no serious disjuncture between theoretical and empirical work). As for the "actual socio-cultural reform" which would effect the desired legitimation, I would suggest that this is carried out at a different level from that suggested by Shusterman and here I think the work of Guillory which addresses questions of access to cultural capital points in the right direction (Guillory 1993).

> endowed with what Pierre Bourdieu calls "cultural capital" actively blame those who have not been so endowed and who must make do with what is often called a counterfeit culture. They blame them, these victims of cultural exclusion, for degrading the real thing, for devaluing the currency. What is at stake in the struggle over taste, then, is the right to define what will count as legitimate culture. (Radway 1987a:30)

The point is that there is much less of a struggle over taste than she imagines. The legitimacy of legitimate culture is much less questioned by the 'popular" classes than one would imagine. It is one of the profound hidden injuries of class that often those actively excluded from access to legitimate culture by the "cultural fortifications" of the elites acknowledge the value of that which they are excluded from.

I would like to conclude, however, with the observation that even if the figures above had turned out to demonstrate that there had been a significant decline in the legitimacy of "traditional" high culture it would still remain an open question as to whether the distinction between high and low was no longer warranted. One could, in that eventuality, just as easily call for an investigation of what now occupied the place of "high" culture held earlier by canonical works of art and literature. In other words, it would still be an open question as to whether we now live in times in which modes of domination and the role of culture and symbolic violence are quite different from other times.[178] This would appear to be the position that Frow adopts: "Whereas in highly stratified societies culture is closely tied to class structure, in most advanced capitalist societies the cultural system is no longer organized in a strict hierarchy and is no longer *in the same manner* tense with the play of power"

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[178] Certainly, as far as the educational system in New Zealand is concerned, the consecration processes are still very much alive as the following extract from a recent letter from the Chief Executive of the Independent Schools Council will attest:

> It is clear that many more parents would choose independent schools if they could afford the fees. Research at Canterbury University has actually shown that independent schools do so well in motivating their students that a far higher proportion gain entry to university. *Although only four percent of students attend independent schools, 14 percent of students in their first year at university were from independent schools. The schools must be doing something right!* [Emphasis added; exclamation mark in the original!]

The CE fails to realise how the private schools act as sites of rites of institution.

(Frow 1995:85). Frow does not then proceed to show in what other manner it *is* tense with the play of power and one is left with the distinct impression that it has, now, very little do with power at all. Perhaps this has everything to do with the "advanced" nature of this society.

Which brings me to my final remarks. It is of some concern that much of this debate has been conducted in an environment in which the nature of North American and European class structured societies are taken as a reality *sui generis*. Rather than Bourdieu privileging the French case or being guilty of static analysis, it would seem to me that it is his critics who privilege so-called "advanced capitalist societies" or the "post-modern world". By refusing to explicitly address the "Other" implied in the use of such terms, these critics work with an implicit and imaginary other and engage in the creation of the "savage slot" (Trouillot 1991). It is time, I feel, to take Bourdieu's comparative project seriously and to realise that he has created "the space between a thorough-going cultural particularism and a naive universalism for provocative comparisons which are more than mere illustrations of difference" (Sharma 1994:73).

CHAPTER 7 BOOK GROUP OCCASIONS; RITUALS OF COMMUNION

> Therefore it is necessary to follow the common; but although the Logos is common the many live as though they had a private understanding
>
> Heraclitus,*Fragment 2*

> After all, experience tells us that the character of a thing changes when one places it next to others.
>
> Marilyn Strathern, *Anthropology, by comparison*

A RITUAL FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

In this chapter I will describe and analyse a part of a phenomenon of late twentieth-century "Western societies", the book group movement. The chapter will consist of an analysis of its central feature: the book group occasion. The analysis, however, will take place within the context of a particular understanding of what these occasions are. Elizabeth Long, in her study of book reading groups in Houston, Texas, has said that her research has helped, firstly, to establish "the ways group participation constitutes social identity and solidarity", secondly, to illuminate "the moral and cultural dimensions of this process", and finally to indicate "the kinds of innovative positions people take up regarding the literary institution and their own experience". Nevertheless she has found it difficult to find a broad "discursive frame" which would allow her to grasp the significance of these groups in their larger social and political context (Long 1992:197). She asks:

> How can analysis give contemporary groups the analytic prestige that comes from linking their activities to broader social transformations or macro-social developments, without knowing what the crucial and determining developments of our era are? (Long 1992:197)

I think part of Long's problem in finding an answer to this question is embedded in the very way she has phrased it. It would seem that for Long, and for the whole trend of "Cultural Studies", the only way in which social phenomena can acquire "analytic prestige" is by understanding them within a political context, what she

calls "broader social transformations". For these scholars, cultural sites are always, first and foremost, sites of political struggle. This is implicit in those issues that Long, herself, has addressed: her overriding concern with questions of identity and its formation (Long 1992:197, 198, 205, 207) and her concern with the "positions" that people take in relation to the "literary institution". It would seem that, for Long, the only interesting aspects of this phenomenon are the agonistic dimensions of cultural processes.

Long sees participation in these activities as attempts by individuals to fill gaps that they feel that they have in their lives. And, as a corollary of this, participation "reveals both to participants and to the analyst some of the ways in which contemporary society fails to meet its members' needs, needs that correspond in patterned ways to their social situation" (198). This meliorist explanation of book groups and book group occasions is functional. It does say something about those occasions, but it can also stand in the way of other forms of understanding that may get closer to what is at the heart of those occasions. It is an explanation little different from those explanations of romance reading which make use of the concept of "escapism". Radway, drawing attention to an observation by Escarpit, says "there are a thousand ways to escape and it is essential to know from what and towards what we are escaping" (Radway 1987:251). Similarly, there are numerous "needs" and rather than using them as the basis for understanding these occasions we might be better served by looking at them more directly.[179]

Instead of a meliorist explanation I propose that a partial solution to Long's question is to understand or "discursively frame" these occasions as rituals. In thinking about ritual, I draw on the work of Victor and Edith Turner and Roy Rappaport. These scholars, and in particular Edith Turner, have moved towards a non-reductive account of ritual phenomena which allows us to understand them as giving access to "other orders of reality" (Turner, et al. 1992:13). The problem for us is to sufficiently defamiliarise our relation to and our own actions towards our

[179] I participate in a book group. The "need" that this participation is fulfilling for me is quite different from that of each of my companions in this group as each of their's is different from those of others. This is a huge variety of "needs" which, according to Long's formulation, are not being met by contemporary society and which the book group serves to fill.

own "other order of reality" so that we can recognise the book group occasion as doing something very similar to what is being done in those activities which we would, unhesitatingly, describe as true ritual.

Roy Rappaport has called for the invention of rituals to counter the dominance of our, Western, world by what he calls "monetary epistemologies". This would require "increase in the formalization of some aspects" of the kind of "concerted action" that he himself participated in which "conformed to or supported ecological value" so that they "might become as committing as ritual" (Rappaport 1999:460). I would argue that, in search of ritual in our society, we look to those orders of action in which participants are already committed as if they were committed to ritual. Certainly, the kinds of ecosystem protective actions that Rappaport alludes to may lend themselves to this kind of commitment but so do less dramatic and supposedly more ordinary activities.

THE BOOK GROUP OCCASION

> The Qawwali occasion is conceptualised by Sufis in two complimentary ways, each equally significant for an understanding of its structure, and each reflecting basic assumptions rooted in the ideological and historical background of Sufism. The two conceptualisations are contained in the two formal terms which Sufis apply to the Qawwali occasion: one is the *mahfil-e-sama`* or "gathering for listening",[180] the other the *darbâr-e-auliyâ* or "royal court of the saints". Each suggests for the Qawwali occasion a conceptual structural framework centred on the listener; one focussing on the listener in relation to the medium of the performance (the music), the other focussing on the listener in relation to the total audience. In both, the performer is included only by implication.
>
> As a "gathering for listening" the Qawwali occasion is conceived in accordance with its primary purpose: to serve as a context for the Sufi's

[180] The word "audience" means this literally and might have been an appropriate translation. But Qureshi, in calling it a "gathering for listening" is placing emphasis on the activity that constitutes the group. The word "audience" has connotations of passivity which she is trying to avoid. In its origins it emphasised the "individual" as opposed to "group" dimensions of the activity. Cf. (Radway 1988).

encounter with mystical experience through listening to music. The focus here is on the individual listener and on that which he hears, that is, the medium of performance. The way in which the two are seen to inter-relate in the process of listening is best understood as an application of certain fundamental Sufi premises concerning the influence of the music on the listener, and the listener's response to the music.

Ultimately, the focus in the "gathering for listening" concept, rather than being the music itself, is on the listener and on his ability to draw spiritual benefits from it. Two premises concerning the process of spiritual arousal are relevant here; they are related to the two dimensions of mystical love. According to the first one, the listening process is an individualised means for the Sufi devotee to activate emotion on the basis of his inner state and according to his need of the moment. This implies that the listener responds to the music intuitively and individually, and must therefore be provided with a structural setting of the utmost flexibility and scope for self-expansion. At the same time, a second premise holds that the individual emotion finds fulfilment through his link with the spiritual hierarchy (sic! HB). The process of arousal through listening, then, must take place within the frame of reference of the Sufi hierarchy and be directed toward its divine representatives. This is all the more essential because love, as an emotional force, can be directed toward a profane as well as a divine target. (Qureshi 1995:106-07)

The Book Group occasion is conceptualised by its members in a number of different ways. Some of these reflect basic assumptions rooted in the ideology and historical background of a "cult of literature" (Bourdieu 1984:315).[181] One of the most important of these conceptions of the Book Group occasion is as a structure which has at its centre the individual reader and her encounter with a chosen text. Another is as a gathering of individuals who have been through similar experiences. The texts themselves are carefully chosen: they have to be canonical

[181] Bourdieu uses this phrase somewhat disparagingly. I use it simply to emphasise the religious and ritual characteristics of book groups as part of this "cult". For a critique of the use of the word "cult" see my discussion of Tambiah's work on the cult of the amulets amongst Thai in Chapter 3.

or semi-canonical. They have to be serious, not in the sense that they cannot have comic content, but they have to be able to be taken seriously as "Literature".

These gatherings have a clearly articulated ostensive purpose: as an occasion for individuals who have had encounters with texts to discuss and listen to the accounts of the experiences of others and to give accounts of their own experiences. The focus here is on the individual reader and on what they have "read". The encounters with the chosen texts themselves are highly individualised. Two premises concerning the process of reading are relevant here. According to the first one, the reading process is an individualised means for the Book Group member to activate their own emotional response to the text on the basis of his or her own inner state as well as according to their own particular needs of the moment. Readers respond to the texts intuitively and individually and this means that, when they come to reflect on those responses, they have to be provided with contexts of a fair degree of flexibility and freedom to allow them to express themselves. It is important that the textual encounters that are discussed are centred on higher representatives of the spiritual hierarchy of texts. As Long observes:

> More generally, reading groups all operate within a commonly recognised hierarchy of taste that ***enshrines*** literary classics and "serious" modern books, while denigrating genre books and other "trash". Groups do establish differing relationships to this hierarchy, but all recognise it. (Long 1992:203 emphases added)

The process of the arousal of interest and emotion must be within the frame of reference of the hierarchy of texts and must be directed towards the more "divine" of its representatives. This is especially necessary because it is clear that the energy, emotion and interest that are invested in these responses could quite clearly be directed toward a profane as well as a divine target as they often are in the privacy of their own non-book group life.

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In the paragraphs above I deliberately juxtapose an account by an ethnomusicologist of key elements of a ritual occasion in a South-Asian society with a brief account of key elements of occasions centred on books that take place in our own. My purpose in using this strategy of defamiliarisation is to highlight the way in which the occasions I am about to describe and analyse can be seen as ritual events. They are as ritualistic as Qawwali occasions and, arguably, as suffused with religious significance as well.

Books are the catalytic ritual object for these ritual occasions. I have already argued that books are sacred objects, suffused with an aura and charisma which leads people to treat the objects themselves with respect. It is not surprising, then, that formalised occasions that make use of these objects – especially in such a central way – should become rituals in the traditional religious sense of the term. To emphasise this I structure some of the account of these occasions around focal points drawn from extending the analogy with the Qawwali occasion. As Strathern has observed of comparison like this "the character of a thing changes when one places it next to others" (Strathern 2002:xvi).

Qawwali is a South Asian Sufi musical tradition and the occasions in which it is performed are the "central ritual" of South Asian Sufism (Qureshi 1995:1). Qureshi describes Qawwali as follows:

> Under the guidance of a spiritual leader or *sheikh*, groups of trained musicians present in song a vast treasure of poems which articulate and evoke the gamut of mystical experience for the spiritual benefit of their audience. Through the act of listening - *sama'* – the Sufi seeks to activate his link with his living guide, with saints departed, and ultimately with God. (Qureshi 1995:1)

There are, of course, very significant differences between this central ritual of Sufism and the ritual of book group occasions in the cult of literature. In the former, public listening is the key activity in gaining access to an "other worldly" experience; in the latter, it is private reading. In the former the central "mystical" experience is evoked in a public setting, in the latter in a private one. In book group

occasions no leaders are present, in the Qawwali occasion there is always a spiritual leader or guide.[182] The *sama'* or Qawwali gathering is hierarchically structured; the book group occasion emphasises equality in its spatial organisation and processes.

All that said, however, there are significant parallels between these occasions and the extended analogy I develop will highlight them. For the description of book group occasions, I draw on a number of sources: accounts by members of various groups given in interviews; my own experience as a book group member for nearly 10 years;[183] the spontaneous stories of book groups gathered by Ellen Slezak (Slezak 2000); the reports of Elizabeth Long on her study of book groups in Houston, Texas (Long 1987; Long 1992); and the survey work of Jenny Hartley (Hartley 2002).

BOOK GROUPS

I begin, however, with a brief discussion of book groups in general and the book group phenomena which has sprung up in a number of different places in the Western world.

THE SOLITARY READER

> To me, reading has always been such a private thing, and I am such a solitude-loving person, that I find it baffling that others want to read together. (Foster 2002:viii)

Hazel Bell has pointed out that "reading...has usually been regarded as a solitary occupation" and, citing the historian Ian Norrie, she says, "one of the great joys of reading is that one can succumb to it happily alone" (Bell 2001:203). Escarpit notes "Reading is the supreme solitary occupation... The man who reads does not speak, does not act, cuts himself away from society, isolates himself from the world which

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[182] There are now reports, however, that in the United States some individuals are becoming guides for such occasions. And though authors rarely participate in these occasions, their occasional presence does give those particular occasions a special character. Roger Hall's play *The Book Club* is based around the consequences of just such an occasion.

[183] As I write this we are about to celebrate the completion of our 10th year by a festive meeting. As I indicate below one of the major ritual practices of these occasions is the preparation and eating of food. This special occasion is being marked by the elaboration of this dimension of the occasion. Each member of the group will be bringing a plate and there will be an attempt to involve erstwhile members.

surrounds him" (Radway 1987:251). Nicholas Howe draws attention to Wallace Steven's poem "The House was Quiet and the World was Calm" in which a particular image of book reading is constructed:

> The house was quiet and the world was calm
>
> The reader became the book; and summer night
>
> Was like the conscious being of the book.
>
> The house was quiet and the world was calm
>
> (Howe 1992:58)

In all of these observations we are told that an encounter with a book through reading is a solitary experience, an experience not unlike meditation in various religious traditions: detached from this world, still and calm. In the following picture by Monet a woman sits with a closed book in her lap. Her gaze is directed to the middle distance between herself and the edge of the frame, towards nowhere in particular. The book, now closed, has transported her, taken her to another reality. This picture, more than the others that follow, explicitly links reading with meditation, which is the title Monet has given to the painting. The book becomes a portal to another reality.

Figure 1 Monet *Meditation*

The painting above is naturalistic. The following painting gives direct expression to the idea of the book as a portal to another reality.

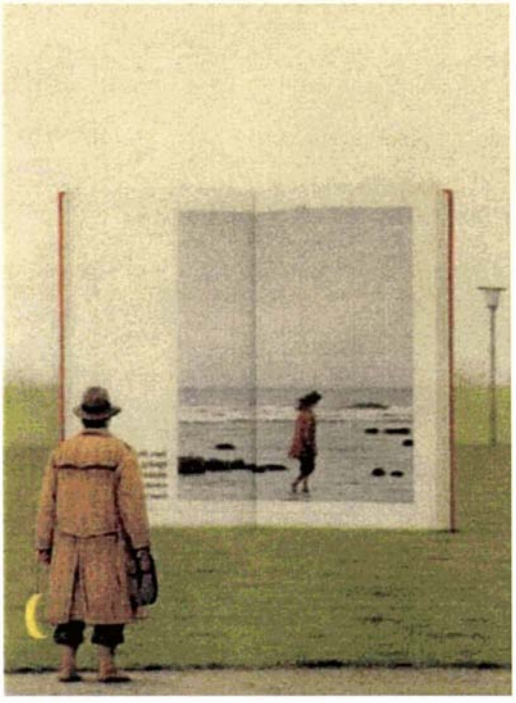

Figure 2 Bucholz *On the way book*

If we turn to the act of reading itself, the following works of art portray it in a very particular way.

Figure 3

Figure 4

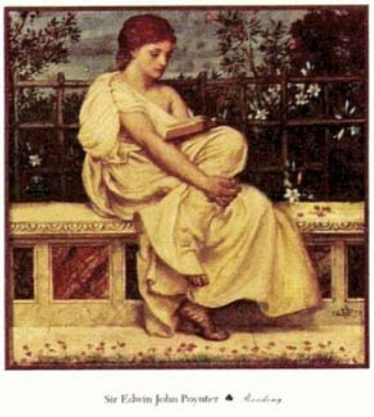

Figure 5

Figure 6

Figure 7

Figure 8

Figure 9

Figure 10

In most pictures, the reader is portrayed as being the only human person on the scene, and even when she is portrayed as part of an active human scene, such as in Figure 6 above, the very activity she is engaged in - reading - seems to remove her from the world in which she is embedded.

Elizabeth Long has also drawn attention to the "complex iconographic history" of "the solitary reader" (Long 1992:181-90)[184] and discusses the differences between the portraiture of women and men reading:

> By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, many images of women reading alone complement those of the serious male reader/writer. Domesticity continues to frame these readers, but now it is less serene than

[184] See Long (1992:181-90) for a range of paintings other than those provided here.

> sensuous, frilled, frivolous. The pictures celebrate the sheen and softness of the feminine sphere; they are as decorative as the women, and the books – grown tiny now – serve as the cultural decorations of a literacy at once leisurely and trivialised. The women themselves are less contemplative than languorous, narcissistically absorbed in imaginative literature that helps them while away the hours. (Long 1992:182)

I am not sure that I would read all the negative connotations ("frivolousness", "narcissism", etc.) that Long does from these portraits. It seems to me that she is reading into them ideas that she thinks may have been in the minds of the painters. The pictures themselves do not speak so directly. Is Long's interpretation not itself the product of a puritanical view of what reading should be? Does reading have to be done in a study to be taken seriously?

However, it is true that, for the most part, it is women who are portrayed as reading and, when men do feature, there are significant differences in terms of the contexts in which the activity is seen as taking place. Men are often portrayed as reading in a study (see the painting by Rembrandt below) or are associated with books in the sacred environs of a library (such as in the portrait of Don Quixote by Dore below). They seem to read in spaces set aside for reading. In other words, reading, itself a religious activity, takes place in a ritualised space for it. Women, on the other hand, seem to take the activity into the wider world: into the ordinary spaces of the domestic world; into the countryside; even into public spaces such as parks and swimming pools. Rather than seeing this as a purely negative phenomenon, this democratisation of the reading process should, in my view, be seen as a significant advance on the cloistered religiosity of older forms of reading.

Figure 11

Figure 12

That aside, however, the overriding theme that emerges from all of these images, verbal and visual, is of reading as an individual matter, the solitary reader communing with the book. The reader, to use Steven's images, becomes the book and the book itself becomes a form of consciousness in itself (even if demonic in Don Quixote's case!).

OTHER FORMS OF READING

Yet, solitary reading is not the only way in which books have been engaged with:

> Communal reading and discussion of books have their own history. The Blue-stocking Society of the 18th century; the French salons; university seminars; summer schools were all academic in nature, studying rather than exulting in the books – seeking shared enlightenment rather than individual pleasure. Away from academia, lovers of literature have banded together in literary societies or Workers Education Association groups, earnestly appreciative of the texts. Before the era of common literacy, groups gathered to share enjoyment of books at "Penny Readings" or sewing

parties, as described by Flora Thomson in *Lark Rise to Candleford.* (Bell 2001:203)[185]

A book group member describes her mother's participation in a "neighbourhood session":

> The novel she specifically remembers is Kathleen Winsor's *Forever Amber* because of its risqué reputation. My grandmother, aunt, and several neighbours "pooled" their tea rations and brought cakes, scones, etc. to these afternoon readings. My mother is sure that they did not knit or sew whilst she was reading (about two chapters a day, because the book was borrowed from the library). I have not been able to establish why they didn't just borrow the book individually... It is probably significant that these readings took place in the "front room/parlour" which was kept for special occasions. (Hartley 2002:125-26)

Though it has a long history, one which has yet to be written,[186] book reading as a communal matter is now receiving more attention. The kind of reading described above is common enough though more normally associated with the family group or mothers with their children than a neighbourhood group (which, in this case, is significantly a family group as well).

The book group phenomenon of recent decades combines elements of both forms of reading. The reading that actually gets done in book groups is still a solitary affair but it is directed towards a communal end. It has become a very widespread phenomenon of the contemporary world. In the United States it is said there may well be as many as 500,000 book groups and an estimate for Britain has been 50,000. Here in New Zealand, in the provincial city of Palmerston North I have identified, in an ad hoc manner, 25 different book groups. I would not be surprised if the number was twice that. In Houston, Texas, Elizabeth Long established the

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[185] Bell's account, echoing Long, gives expression to the traditional dichotomy between "enlightenment" and "pleasure" as if the two cannot go together.

[186] Various histories of the book and our relation to them remain to be written. Báez is writing a comprehensive history of book burning (Báez In press). We need a history of reading which explores the various different ways in which books have been engaged with. See Boyarin (1993).

existence of some 70 groups. On the basis of the Palmerston North figures one could expect anything up to 2000 groups in New Zealand. In Australia, there are over a 1000 groups associated with the Victorian Council of Adult Education (VCAE) alone (Devlin-Glass 2001:572) which would lead one to assume a figure of about 8-10,000 groups in Australia as a whole if we assume that there is at least one other group for every VCAE group.

In the United States, the spread of book groups has been attributed to the famous talk show host Oprah Winfrey and her use of her very popular show in 1996 as a basis to "get the country reading" (Hartley 2002:4). I am sceptical about this. Both the figures established by myself and Long very much predate the intervention by Winfrey. Rather, Winfrey tapped into and gave further impetus to an already existing movement. Book groups have grown organically and quietly. Devlin-Glass is right in thinking that what Winfrey did was to bring to the foreground a "largely invisible" phenomenon (Devlin-Glass 2001:571).

A better understanding of the rise of the book group movement might be gleaned from analysing its central feature, the book group occasion, that moment when those who belong to a group come together to create a new experience.

THE PROPER SETTING FOR BOOK GROUP OCCASIONS

> Setting comprises factors that remained fixed throughout the Qawwali occasion or are prerequisite to it; they include dimensions of time, space and occasion as well as personnel. (Qureshi 1995:108)

Time: Chronemics[187]

Barbara Adam has pointed out that the invisible times of everyday life have a number of dimensions: time frames, timing, tempo, and temporality. Many of these dimensions are invoked or especially implicated by book group occasions (Adam 1994).

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[187] This is a neologism: Maxwell, in 1972, noted "The cross-cultural study of time has not yet been given a name" but on the model of the construction of the word proxemics (see below pg. 220) chronemics would not be inappropriate. As in the case of so many other areas in this study the work of Bourdieu once again has been very influential (Bourdieu 1977:97ff).

Book group occasions are held on a regular basis. Almost always they are held monthly, on a regular set day of the month.[188] The group I belong to is typical, holding its meetings on the first Wednesday of the month. Regularity is a key feature of book group occasions providing a fixed point around which are structured not only the occasion itself but also the activities leading up to it and beyond it. The only exception to the general rule of regularity amongst those I encountered in Palmerston North is the case of one small group which meets on an ad hoc basis. It's meetings are arranged spontaneously and require a member to take the initiative to use the phone to muster a meeting. But even this group's time frames are not completely free: though they do not meet monthly, when they do meet it has to be on Thursday, a day negotiated as being the day which provides the best opportunity for a time-out-of-time for all members.

This regularity is a necessity for those groups that belong to the Workers Education Association's book supply scheme. The rhythms of the supply, distribution and return of books in this scheme means that it would be very difficult for a group to hold irregular meetings. On occasion some books supplied by this scheme are defined as "two-month" books[189] and thus there may be a hiatus in the stream of meetings but these are rare and when they occur mark, by the very fact that they are exceptional, the regularity of the series themselves. Most non-WEA groups are just as regular in their meetings.

A most interesting feature of the timing of these occasions is that they are almost invariably weekday events rather than weekend. Like Qawwali, they are held at

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[188] The calendar being referred to is, of course, the Gregorian. This calendar and sidereal time structure the chronoscape of most activities in New Zealand. The Qawwali occasions are, on the other hand, subject to the rhythms of the Islamic calendar and solar time. Calendrical times are such taken-for-granted dimensions of our activities that drawing attention to them may seem trivial but we need to see these activities with this kind of an optic in order to defamiliarise them. Just as it is not trivial to draw attention to the calendrical system of Qawwali it is not trivial to draw attention to the calendrical system under which book group occasions operate. Time frames may be one of the most difficult aspects of existence to defamiliarise. Bourdieu and Passeron, for examples, discusses in detail the temporal structures of the habitat that students live in France in their ethnographic study of the "games students play" and contrast them with the chronoscapes of the larger society (Bourdieu and Passeron 1979:29ff).

[189] Thus, the book at hand, *Sophie's World* by Jostein Gaarder, is defined as a two-month book. In general it is either very long books or those classified as being "difficult" that fall into this category. *Sophie's World* is classified as difficult because of its "philosophical" content.

"any time not requiring attention towards worldly cares" (Qureshi 1995:112). "Worldly" in the case of book reading group occasions would include almost any thing do with the world of work or of domestic life. They are held at a time out-of-time, in the interstitial period between the time of work and time of family or domestic life. This precludes the working day and it precludes the times devoted to domestic life, that is the time until after the evening meal. It precludes the weekends because these are assumed to be periods given over to domestic life. In their timing they are classically liminal and the timing highlights key features of the subjectivity that they call into being. This subjectivity is characterised by its distance from the relations of work but also, simultaneously, domestic relationships or relationships of friendship. The relationships implicated by the occasion and marked by its time are also characteristically liminal. But more on this later.

The exceptions prove the rule: groups of retired people often meet at times that most others are "working". But this is only possible because these members themselves are in a particularly liminal phase in the cycle of life.

The duration of the occasions are both closed and open-ended. They are closed in that they are bracketed by the exigencies of the times of work and domestic life. As a consequence they never begin until late in the evening, after the evening meal. They also rarely continue much beyond mid-night because they are held on a weekday and the pressure of the time of work bears on them to conclude at what is considered an appropriate hour. They are open-ended, on the other hand, because they can be short or long within the frames provided by this bracketing. A number of factors effect duration: in WEA book scheme based groups the nature of the reaction of members to the text which is the focus of the discussion has a significant effect on duration. A book which has either not been read by many or which has not been inspirational (and these often go together) usually receives short shrift and may lead to an occasion of shorter duration. Thus, for example, the occasion generated by *Sophies World* (See footnote 189 above) was very short: a number of members did not come; those who did had very little to say about the book.

But as book group occasions are energised by more than just encounters with texts other factors may come into play to extend the duration of the occasion beyond what may seem to be required for the text itself. And it is these latter factors that can have a profound effect on the duration of the occasions for non-WEA groups. Some interviewees have said that much may arise during occasions which has very little to do with books. This is a feature which is a bone of contention for a few members of some groups who believe that the ostensive purpose of the occasion should be the overriding force determining its length.

Book groups are punctual in many senses of the term. It is rare for members to arrive late. Like church services they have a strict time for their beginnings and, even though duration is not fixed, they are characterised by a punctual ending. By this I mean that members all depart at more or less the same moment.

Book groups occasions, then, are chronemically marked in the ways I outlined above.

Space: Proxemics[190]

The space occupied by the book group occasion can be discussed in at least two ways. There is, first, the physical spaces which are utilised for them and, second, the kind of "social space" they make use of. The two are, of course, interconnected the former being defined by the affordances particular sites give for this activity and the latter by the elective affinity of the physical space for the kind of social space occupied by book groups.

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[190] Proxemics (a word derived from the conjunction of "proximity" with "phonemics") is the study of the meanings attached to or subtending the use of physical space. Bourdieu's studies of the Kabyle house have been particularly inspirational for social scientists. Bourdieu subtitled his study of the Kabyle house "the world reversed". This would not have been an inappropriate subtitle for this discussion of the proxemics of book reading group occasions either. Stepping out of the normal structures of everyday life is a key feature of these occasions. Victor Turner, who uses the word "sociogeography" for the same idea, has also drawn attention to the need to pay close attention to the way in which physical space is used and socially marked in the course of ritual (Turner 1985:54). More extended treatment of the spatial dimensions of ritual can be found in his work on ritual processes (Turner 1995).

Sacred sites

> It is probably significant that these readings took place in the "front/parlour" which was kept for special occasions (A book group member). (Hartley 2002:126))

New Zealand book group occasions are almost always located in the public spaces of the domestic world.[191] Book groups congregate in the living rooms of members of the groups who act as hosts for the evening. I have already shown that these spaces often have books enshrined in bookcases. The living room, as I noted, drawing on Auden and Bourdieu, is ritual space. It is not surprising, then, that this is the favoured space for book group occasions. This liminal space, the living room, at once "private" and "public", is made doubly liminal by the book group occasion by accommodating a group that is neither "public" nor "private".

The living room ceases to be a space that can be used by any other members of the host family, adult or child. This is not a problem for those members who are single and without children at home. But, for all other hosting members, with a few exceptions, it means that the occasion in their house is a particularly poignant moment for experiencing the peculiar subjectivity implicated by the occasion itself. Other family members are hidden from the group, almost in a kind of purdah. The rare occasions in which a member of the family become visible to the group are marked by either silence, joking behaviour or even surprise.

All of this is in marked contrast to other occasions on which visitors come to the house of the host: on these other occasions the space of the living room may well be

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[191] I say New Zealand because reports from other sites, particularly the United States, suggest that non-domestic spaces are occasionally employed for such occasions. For Britain, Hartley provides the following statistics based on her opportunity sample survey:

	Proportion
Houses	80%
Libraries	6%
Other	14%

(Hartley 2002:171)

Elizabeth Long, based on her opportunity sample survey of book reading groups in Houston, Texas says: "Groups meet in libraries, bookstores, cafes, and – most commonly – members' homes". (Long 1992:196)

the site of the encounter between those coming from outside with those who dwell there but it is not on an exclusive basis; that is, other family members are not excluded from the space so long as their behaviour is appropriate to that connected with "having visitors". By contrast, on book group occasions, the host is treated as is he or she were the sole occupant of the house by other members of the household. The space is surrendered to her for the occasion. It becomes a space outside both the public sphere and the domestic sphere. It supports and resonates with a particular kind of social space.

The liminal space of book groups

There is a tendency in the anthropology of space to a dichotomous view of the world as being divided between the domestic and public or public/private worlds. The book group occasion challenges this dichotomy. This is particularly well illustrated by Willens's moving account of her discovery of the problems faced by her women friends in Slovakia where she spent a sabbatical year. They were bored and felt trapped in their lives. "How much gossip can I endure? How many conversations with my sister-in-law?" said one of them to her (Willens 1994:84). Willens's response to these complaints was to say "Why not start a book group?" (84). Their response, in their turn, gave her an insight which we can use as the basis for understanding key aspects of the social space occupied by book groups. They looked blank and then went on to say "No! No one would come" (84). And the reason for this was the fact that over the decades of totalitarian rule, with lives led with one eye constantly over the shoulder, conversations constantly guarded in case of revealing unacceptable thoughts and a general state of vigilance in relation to revelations about one self, the kind of liminal space occupied by book groups had become not just atrophied but impossible to contemplate. Willens describes this space as follows:

> In the United States, book groups meet in a particular psychological area, halfway between the private zone of household and family and the public zone where strangers conduct the affairs of the world, stores, offices, and civic services of all kinds. In between we have another region, where we meet acquaintances to discuss our children's play groups, the work of

> our church or synagogue, the safety of our neighbourhoods, or the protest before the city council. This is where we attend to the work of the bar association, the alumni association, Alcoholics Anonymous, or the board of a charity; it is the home of the PTA and the political club, the tennis association, the AIDS awareness group, the ecology newsletter – and the book club. (Willens 1994:84-85)

A space is carved out of social life which is neither public nor private but in-between, a liminal space in terms of the normal categories used to organise social life. The physical space and the social space imply each other. We can also see that if meetings such as those being described here were held in totalitarian regimes, they would be immediately open to suspicion by the state.

We can say more than this, however. Roy Rappaport has called for a revivification of ritual in the modern world currently dominated by what he calls monetary epistemologies.

Unsurprisingly book group occasions have the typical structure of *rites de passage*. They involve separation, transition, reintegration. Van Gennep observed that *rites de passage* differed in the degree of emphasis they placed on the elements of this structure (Gluckman 1962:3). In book reading group occasions it is the middle, the "liminal" or "liminoid", phase that is stressed. But even this phase has an internal structure which I outline below.

The physical structure of the book group occasion

A very important dimension of the proxemics of book reading group occasions is the way the space that has been set aside for it is used. In book group occasions the participants all face each other in a circle, seated in chairs. In this respect they are utterly unlike the Qawwali occasions. In the latter, there is a strict hierarchy of participants, each occupying a different space and facing in a particular way which represents their location in relation to the activity. Qureshi outlines the categories of participants on these occasions, giving their position in the hierarchical order with, surprisingly, the performers themselves as the lowest of them all (Qureshi 1995:109). In both rituals there is a formal seating "plan" which is adhered to and

which give immanent expression to the fundamental principles underlying their respective social orders.

In book group occasions, by way of contrast, all participants are largely seen as equal, though – with some groups – there may be a discussion leader. This latter role is rotated between members, so does not constitute a categorical distinction marking any one individual or individuals that is carried forward from occasion to occasion. On the contrary, the idea underlying these occasions is that every one is "equal", reflecting the ideology of individualism and equality of the wider social world in which these groups exist.

The religiosity expressed on such occasions is not dissimilar to that of a Quaker meeting. Participants are deemed to be equally capable of being possessed by the spirit of the book and have an equal right to give expression to their sense of what that experience was like.

THE PROPER PROCEDURE FOR "READING GROUPS"

Preliminaries

The book group "reading" process

> Sufism recognises two complementary modes for the expression of mystical emotion in the assembly; they correspond to the two dimensions of the Sufi quest for union with God - one through the individual mystical experience and the other through the active link with the Sufi hierarchy of spiritual power...Both modes are subject to constraints. For obvious reasons intuitive self-expression takes place within a wider range of individual variation, whereas activating the link with a Sufi divine is governed by rather more formal rules. (Qureshi 1995:120)

Very little reading actually gets done in the book group occasion. Thus, it is simply not the case that reading is done on book group occasions themselves as suggested by Margaret Foster (Foster 2002:ix). Reading is done, as it is done by anyone in our society, as a solitary activity, time for which has been carved out of each day. The reading group occasion presumes an agent who has already read something on their own. Very occasionally during discussions participants may read extracts

from books that are being discussed but this is rare. When this happens it is done to illustrate a discussion point, to draw attention to literary aspects of books that have been found to be of interest or for the pleasure that is gained from certain passages. Thus, for example, at a recent meeting one of the members of a group read extracts from J. D. Salingers *Catcher in the Rye* because she found the writing demanded a public reading.

The only serious way in which one could say that some groups engage in group reading is that many, but not all, read the same book prior to the occasion at which it will be central And it is certainly the case that this kind of reading effects the reading process as the following observations by members would suggest:

- Reading is no longer a solitary affair.

- You read in a different way with half an eye on the meeting ahead, makes you more thoughtful.

- Reading in a group is different from reading on your own.

Thus, even though the actual reading gets done in private by individuals, the experience of reading has been affected by belonging to a group.

It is important to an understanding of these occasions to have some understanding of the particular prior experience that is brought to those occasions: the experience of reading. There is a considerable variation in the particular experiences that individuals have with the particular individual books they encounter on these occasions but what these private occasions strain towards is an ideal which is often realised. It is this ideal that we need to reflect on to begin to see the religious dimensions of the reading group occasions. And the best way to do this is to allow readers to describe their own experiences when the ideal is achieved.

> I think my body is in the room but the rest of me is not (when I am reading). [A reader describing to Janice Radway her experience of reading (Radway 1987:87)]

> Every book group member has experienced or witnessed that moment of epiphany where it's clear a book is much more than just a book. (Slezak 2000:xviii)

And finally, in a recent radio discussion between Jonathan Rose, Elizabeth Long and Adrian Johns, all scholars of the reading process, there was general agreement that underlying the cultural and social variations of reading as a practice there was a universal experience, the experience which they referred to as "being transported" (Long, Johns and Rose 2002). Pre-liminal processes and practices mark out ritual occasions. In the case of book reading group occasions this involves leaving the normal space of everyday life and travelling to the house of the host. For those with families and non-individual households it means taking leave of those left behind.

Preparing the ritual space

For the hosting member, there is the need to prepare the space and accoutrements for the occasion. This may involve cleaning and tidying the living room. Absolutely essential to the occasion is the preparation of a small quantity of food – "refreshments" - which are almost invariably given towards the end of the occasion, though in some groups the discussions themselves may be marked by the provision of wine. The quantity of such refreshments may vary greatly from simply a few plates of biscuits and sandwiches to quite elaborate presentations though they are very rarely, if ever, complete meals in themselves (see picture below). Often, though not always, these may be on display as members arrive for the occasion.

Figure 13: The "Wine, Women and Words" Group

Occasionally, the feast itself becomes the central feature of the rite. Special occasions (the final event of the year or an occasion that marks a decennial anniversary) call for more elaborate preparations which involve the group as a whole. In New Zealand, the "ladies-a-plate" tradition comes into play which involves each member contributing a roughly equal share to the feasting for these occasions.

The discussion process

> The Qawwali listening process, that is, the part played by the Qawwali audience, is subject only to limited external structuring; however there are guidelines and even rules to facilitate the achievement of the spiritual purpose of the assembly, while maintaining its decorum. Of necessity, these rules are flexible, since their application needs to govern a wide range of internal experience and external expression. (Qureshi 1995:118)

The discussion process of a book group occasion varies. For groups that are centred on the reading of a single text (such as the WEA groups) there is a tripartite division to the talk of the evening. Firstly, as people arrive there are exchanges between individuals about who is expected and who isn't, brief comments on whether individuals had read the book, news about absent members, and other matters referred to by one person as "general chit chat". It is never the case that the book is discussed immediately. This phase is essential to the discussion process. It

allows a period for people who might be slightly late to arrive and for the others to settle into their surroundings.

The second phase is the formal phase. But even here there is a degree of variation. The organisers of the WEA scheme suggest that the discussion process be lead by the host who is expected to initiate the discussion by commenting on her reaction to the text which was supposed to be read in the previous month. This is a practice adopted by some groups and by some groups on an occasional basis. Other groups begin with an implicit general invitation for any member to say something about the book. Yet others invite those who have already demonstrated an eagerness for discussion to say their piece. Some groups use a combination of these.

I will have more to say on the content of these comments shortly. I am focussing here on their form. Once the first comments have been made, the discussion is opened up with people presenting their own reactions to the text or responding in either affirmation or denial of the reactions of others. At some stage or other of the process there will be a deliberate attempt to be inclusive. Thus, even though more articulate and forceful individuals may dominate the discussion itself, nevertheless everyone will be invited to comment on the work. Silence in the discussion, even of those members who have not read the text, is not an option. Even those who have not read the book are enjoined to say something, even if it is to comment on others comments.

Content

The content of the discussion has been the subject of particular attention by the few scholars interested in book groups. They have focussed on the relation between literary institutions and readers. Coming largely from literary backgrounds themselves they have analysed the dynamic relationships between cultural authorities and the ways book group readers discuss and select their texts. Thus Long's study uses an "ethnographic approach to investigate literary response among people who, on the whole, read `good' or critically-acclaimed books" (1987:11). These are people who are members of the 70 odd readings groups she discovered in Houston, Texas. Devlin-Glass, similarly, explores "the aesthetic and educational

objectives of the providers and consumers and issues of `taste' which govern collaborative book selection/discussion" (Devlin-Glass 2001:572).

These are important questions and have been fairly extensively discussed by these scholars. What I would like to suggest is that there is much more to these discussions and the situations that occasion them than just engagement with literary texts. These are occasions for people to engage in ritual communion blessed by the presence of charismatic objects that act as guarantors that the activity itself is a worthy one. The books are pretexts of these rituals not in the sense of being subterfuges but rather sanctifying the practices by connecting those practices with the most spiritual elements of our supposedly secular world.

THE SOCIAL DIMENSION

> The forgoing discussion of the Qawwali as a religious occasion makes apparent the basic congruence between norms of Indo-Muslim social structure and concepts of Sufi ideology. Quite naturally, this congruence is manifested in the concept and structure of the Qawwali occasion. (Qureshi 1995:128)

As I have noted, it is in the social dimension that one sees the most marked differences between book group occasions and Qawwali occasions. The latter operate with a hierarchical social world, where social status is clearly demarcated. The former works in a social world which, ideologically at least, emphasises egalitarianism (Dumont 1986). Furthermore, Qawwali, though a spiritual occasion has a significant economic dimension because the performers, those who provide the means for the spiritual transport that takes place on these occasions, are paid on the spot through donations. This economic transaction is incorporated into the occasion in order to highlight the relative status of the participants. This is done by making the act of donating a public and marked transaction in the process as a whole. In book groups, though there is an economic dimension - because the books have to be paid for – this is hidden from view. The transactions are conducted in the background. They are relegated to a small, quickly dealt with "business" part of one of the occasions.

The whole tenor of the book group occasion is geared towards emphasising the equality of its participants. No one person's experience is considered more important that any other. Each person is expected to involve themselves in the discussion. Both these facts are true at the ideological level. In actual practice, there is considerable variation and certainly the statuses that individuals bring to these anti-structural occasions from their structured worlds do play a part in the way particular occasions unfold. Thus, for example, I have personally experienced deference both because of my status as a University teacher and because of my experience of having lived and worked in India. The former is an ever present factor in the way in which I am engaged with and what is expected of me and the latter is brought into play when books dealing with the South Asian subcontinent are the focus of discussion.

UNDERSTANDING THE BOOK GROUP OCCASION

Thus far, the discussion of the book group occasion has demonstrated that it is a ritual event. The demonstration has been indicative. That is, by using the device of showing its parallels to another ritual occasion, Qawwali, a ritual in a completely different social and cultural setting, I have, firstly, defamiliarised our relationship to the event and, secondly, shown that it is just as much a ritual, in the religious sense, as Qawwali. In other words, I have used this matching technique to make a kind of iconic case for understanding book group occasions as rituals.

I want now to go a step further and to explore what I think is at the heart of this ritual and also why it is that it has become such a feature of middle-class life in western societies. The demonstration above has been formal and structural and, consequently, the discussion that follows will rely on structural forms of understanding ritual, unravelling what one might call the entailments or corollaries of the formal structure of the ritual.

My thoughts on these subjects have been inspired by a number of sources, the most important of which is Roy Rappaport's magisterial work *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Rappaport 1999). Rappaport's argument stretches to nearly 500 pages of a dense and complex argument about the place of ritual and religion in

the project known as humanity. I will not be summarising this huge work but rather I will be making use of a small, but critical, portion of it. I will also draw on the work of Robbins and the commentators on his important essay on ritual as communication. (Robbins 2001).

Rappaport argues that ritual and language have developed side by side in the evolution of humanity. The plasticity of language has allowed human beings to grow[192] in myriad different ways or, to put it differently, the variety of forms of human growth is demonstrated in the plasticity of human language. The major problem with language, however, is embedded in this very plasticity. The very fact that language is plastic allows not only for particular forms of growth but also points to, firstly, the fact that other forms of growth are possible (the problem of "alternatives") and, secondly, it can be used not just to communicate but also to lie, to dissemble, to hide the truth. This is where ritual comes in: it is the social act basic to humanity (Paul 2002). It is a form of action which, according to Rappaport, entails truth.

Roy Rappaport has argued that the ritual form is the way human beings give expression to the essence of the sacred which he defines as "unquestionableness" (Rappaport 1999:281). It achieves this because, firstly, it is a form of action which almost always involves more than one person. People participate in, share in the action. Rituals are also forms of action which, by definition, incarnate the idea of repetition and invariance. This is not to say that rituals don't change but, by definition, invariance is an idea immanent in ritual practice though, of course, in actual practice, rituals do change over time.

It is the repetitive, the liturgical, which instantiates the deep truth that is at the heart of ritual. Truth can, says Rappaport, be "conceived" independently of liturgy (1999:351) and, of course, expressed in language but it cannot be "established"

[192] The word used by Rappaport and his epigones is "create". I have already pointed out the weaknesses of cultural constructionist perspectives in an earlier chapter. I demonstrate, through the use of a modified vocabulary, that structural forms of understanding of rituals are quite consistent with the arguments made in that chapter. One has to switch from the teleological language of "creation" and "adaptation" to a contingent, developmental systems language of growth and

without it: "To establish an order is more than to conceive it and more than to agree with it theoretically. It is to accept it as binding" (351). Language can communicate truth but it can also be used to communicate lies. Ritual, by contrast, because of its repetitiveness, because of its collective nature brings people to act together.

It is not enough, in other words, to simply say the truth, one has to enact it, embody it in performance.[193] Rituals are the way fundamental truths are established and lived in everyday life. Rappaport defines ritual as "the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by its performers" (Rappaport 1999:24). Most important for Rappaport are the "logical entailments" of ritual so defined:

> *I will argue that the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers logically entails the establishment of convention, the sealing of social contract, the construction of the integrated conventional orders we shall call* Logoi *(singular* Logos*).* (Rappaport 1999:27 his emphasis)

What is Logos? Rappaport uses this term in the sense given to it by the Greek philosopher Heraclitus, as interpreted by Heidegger, as the idea of the "original unifying unity of what tends apart" (Rappaport 1999:347). It is the idea that underlying the seeming chaos and arbitrariness of contingent historical social orders there is an order which unites people with each other and with an order that

[193] This points to a paradox. The problem with discussing ritual is that, by its very nature, ritual is something that communicates beyond words. Just as it is not possible to put the meaning of music into words (Could a Chopin sonata be translated into words?) so, in the end, it is not possible to put the meaning of ritual into words because it is a reality *sui generis*. This may explain why Rappaport has provided a structural "understanding" (in Bourdieu's sense) of ritual and, also, why Keith Hart is led to remark that Rappaport work is "a sort of manual for those who would collaborate in the task of remaking religious life along lines compatible with the enhancement of life on this planet" (Hart 1999:xix). Some of Victor and Edith Turners's work on ritual also has a "manual"- like feel about it (Turner 1979; Turner, et al. 1992). That is, both Rappaport and the Turners seem to provide their readers not just with accounts and frameworks for understanding rituals but also with guides to how to experience them and , in fact, perform them.

transcends history. It is a sense of the unity of life. This sense, though universal, is of course also particular and historical.[194]

Ritual is a way of performing the fundamental unity of the order in which the performers live. In rituals, groups of individuals momentarily come together to put their "private understandings" together in order to "follow the common". The very form of rituals means that they simultaneously encompass and defuse the centripetal tendencies of individual motivations, feelings, and thoughts. To use Turner's terms, all rituals inherently have liminal dimensions and by creating these interstitial spaces they allow human beings to touch mysteries which cannot be touched in any other way.

I want to argue that the book group occasion is just the kind of liturgical event that Rappaport is talking about. It establishes, for the moments of its duration, a truth of the world in which members belong, of the ability of individuals to find in an anti-structural, liminal, space a way of being which takes them away from the hierarchies, lies and conflicts of the structures of both the private and public worlds. Participants give of themselves, bring their "private understandings", to a forum where the common can be pursued. For brief moments in their lives they experience a way of relating which is outside of all the normal and normalising categories they encounter in the domestic and public worlds. And they experience this under the umbra of the sacred object of the book, an object which, through its charisma, sanctifies the process in which participants engage.

But we can take this analysis further. The truth that is embodied in book reading group occasions is quite different from the truth embodied in another "ritual" which, superficially, may appear to be identical to it: the study group occasion in academic settings. In the latter, one is expected to leave ones "private understandings" at the door and to subject oneself to forms of understanding generated by the discipline of literary studies. Rather than a common truth being pursued, the "truths" are canonical ones, already given, and individuals are

[194] This echoes the universal/particular contrast in relation to the experience of reading discussed above (See page 226)

measured by the degree to which they can transform themselves to be able to articulate these truths in appropriate ways.

As Bourdieu and Passeron have observed:

> To study is not to create something but to create oneself; it is not to create a culture, still less a new culture, but create ones capacity to be, at best, a creator of culture, or, in most cases, an informed user or transmitter of a culture created by others, that is, a teacher or specialist. (1979:55)[195]

In other words, studying for an academic book group is quite different from reading for a book reading group occasion. The former is subject to more explicit, pre-defined forms of what can be considered legitimate reading experiences. It embodies hierarchical relationships even if, as Bourdieu and his researchers found, students are keen, in their imaginations, to subvert these forms and relationships and make them conform more closely to those one encounters in book reading group occasions.

Robbins's "reformulation" of Rappaport's theory is useful in helping to understand the contrast between the two book occasions. Robbins accepts the fundamentals of Rappaport's theory:

> I do take on board the semiotic core of Rappaport's universal claims about ritual: I too treat ritual as everywhere performative and hence productive of indexical messages, and I too treat those indexical messages

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[195] One way of reading all the work of Bourdieu and his colleagues on the French educational system is to see it as an extended ethnography of that system as a vast religious apparatus. Wacquant, for example, makes the connection directly saying, in effect, that the School is the Church of late capitalism:

> In feudal society, the Church was the institution entrusted with transmuting the lord's might, founded as it was upon control of weaponry, land, and riches, into divineright; ecclesiastical authority was deployed to justify and thereby solidify the rule of the new warrior class. In the complex societies spawned by late capitalism, Bourdieu maintains, the school has taken over this work of sanctification of social divisions. (Wacquant 1996a:153-54)

My brief comments on the literary study group occasion and the comparisons I make with the book reading group occasion can be seen as a small contribution to this defamiliarised vision of education system.

as routinely making strong claims to convey information. (Robbins 2001:610)

But Robbins adds an interesting twist to this by suggesting that ritual is not necessarily viewed positively in all cultures and that there may, in fact, be interesting relations between how ritual is viewed and language is viewed. Far from language being universally viewed as untrustworthy and ritual as trustworthy, there is considerable cultural variation in these views.

In our own society ritual is often used as a derogatory word, especially as it is used in the phrase "mere ritual", signifying empty practice with no meaning. Robbins sketches the outline of a history since the reformation of growing anti-ritualism and distrust of the ritual form and, simultaneously, the growth of what he calls "sincerity culture", at the heart of which is the idea that language more than ritual "reveals the truth about people". As Robbins says "early modern and modern cultures are ones in which people trust speech and distrust ritual" (Robbins 2001:598).

But this is not the end of the story that Robbins constructs. He draws attention to the "surprising development" within contemporary Christianity "of the popularity of charismatic churches and forms of worship among the middle class" (Robbins 2001:598). He points out that this seems puzzling because these forms of effervescent religiosity are normally associated with the "religions of the poor". He speculates that the middle-classes who fill the charismatic churches are doing so in the context of a social world which is changing rapidly.

> Caught up in a world in which new information technologies and other aspects of globalization have radically altered the nature, sources, and content of the information that they work with on a daily basis, these are people whose trust in the veracity of language may well be ebbing. They are painfully conscious of operating in a multicultural world where various norms of communication are in play, new forms of anonymity in communication are possible, and social and governmental controls over communication are weak. In this context, where middle-class people can no

> longer trust that everyone they meet face to face or in some other way is guided by Protestantism's sincerity culture, they are increasingly turning to ritual as a way of being together and communicating shared commitments to one another. (Robbins 2001:599)

In other words, alongside the "traditional" ritualism as found in the mainstream churches one finds the spontaneous, "face to face" ritualism of the charismatic churches. The middle-classes are flocking to the latter, wary of the former. In an almost exact homology to this situation we find the middle-classes flocking to the spontaneous, face to face, occasions created by book groups whilst wary of the traditional ritualism of the literary study group occasion. The former provide the context for truths to emerge whereas the latter invite participants to become other than who they are.

It may be thought that I have returned to a kind of meliorist explanation of the ritual of the book group occasion. Certainly Robbins and Rappaport's work would seem at some level to provide functional explanations. Like Robbins, however, I would plead that "I do not think the hints of functionalism that several respondents find in my argument address its fundamental architecture" (Robbins 2001:611). I am trying to make a structural argument. I want to suggest that we can learn something by drawing attention to the homologies that exist between ritual occasions in what we can traditionally accept as being part of a "religious" and other ritual occasions which, from the point of view of a defamiliarising ethnography, can be seen as fundamentally religious as well. In fact, drawing attention to these homologies highlights the religious nature of the book group occasion which has been the focus of this chapter.

In our habitat, these particular practices performed in the presence of an object which brings with it its own life, connect human organisms to each other and to the wider world of which they are a part. These "humble" – often derided – activities are an important dimension of being and becoming human in a particular kind of way. There is an important truth contained within them, one which in the end can only be truly understood in performance.

APPENDIX: DEFAMILIARISATION AS OBJECTIFICATION

> Confucius saw, and tried to call to our attention, that the truly, distinctively human powers have, characteristically, a magical quality. His task, therefore, required, in effect, that he reveal what is already so familiar and universal as to be unnoticed. What is necessary in such cases is that one come upon this "obvious" dimension of our existence in a new way, in the right way. (Fingarette 1972:6)

Marcus and Fischer discuss the "strategy of defamiliarisation" at length. (Marcus and Fischer 1986:137ff):

> Defamiliarisation by cross-cultural juxtaposition...offers a dramatic, up-front kind of cultural criticism. It is a matching of ethnography abroad with ethnography at home. The idea is to use the substantive facts about another culture as a probe into the specific facts about a subject of criticism at home. This is the classic technique of defamiliarisation pioneered by Margaret Mead, and it is the most frequently employed means of demonstrating cultural relativism. (Marcus and Fischer 1986:138)

Marcus and Fischer have a tendency to equate defamiliarisation with "cultural critique" and "cultural relativism". It can also serve a different function, a more purely methodological one: the goal here is not to critique or criticise but to highlight a way of looking at an occasion and the practices associated with it which is different from the taken-for-granted view both of those who participate in them and those of observers. This is done by drawing the parallels with another occasion and its practices which we do not take for granted. And seen in this light the occasion takes on a hue or colour which could easily be overlooked simply because it is so familiar to us. There is, however, a two-way flow: the naturalisation of the unfamiliar and the defamiliarisation of the seemingly natural. In other words, not only is the familiar activity defamiliarised but the unfamiliar activity is familiarized, i.e. it, itself, now takes on a familiar colour: one is less inclined to see it as exotic because it has been assimilated to something we find no difficulty in accepting

(Marcus and Fischer 1986:137). A key theme running through this study is the defamiliarisation and refamiliarisation of the notion of the "sacred", a process which aims to shake us out of the complacency we have when we use the word of "others" and simultaneously to assimilate our practices to those that we are very willing to call sacred in other contexts'. As Bourdieu has observed:

> There is nothing sacred except to the sense of the sacred, but this sense encounters the sacred as a full transcendence, and the *illusio* is an illusion or "diversion" only for someone who perceives the game from the outside, from the scholastic standpoint of an "impartial spectator". (Bourdieu 2000a:151)

In other words it is *we* who constantly refer to the practices of *others* as being oriented towards the sacred. This has the effect of establishing that we are outside of the game whilst also, simultaneously, implying that their *illusio* is an illusion. Bourdieu's strategy, and the one adopted in this thesis in a number of ways, is to write against the grain, to demonstrate the sacral dimensions of our own taken-for-granted practices. Geertz referred to this kind of activity as "the general anthropological conspiracy to deprovincialize all important social concepts – marriage, religion, law, rationality" (Geertz 1973:451).

For a particularly effective example of the use of this kind of strategy in highlighting taken-for-granted features of social practices in our own society see Bourdieu's use of Margaret Mead's description of vision quest behaviour among the Omaha in his study of French students and their relation to culture and their induction into academic culture. Ironically, as we have seen it was Margaret Mead herself who was seen by some as a pioneer of this technique of cultural critique (Bourdieu and Passeron 1979:1ff).

CONCLUSION

> Does it end in conclusions which, when they are referred back to ordinary life-experiences and their predicaments, render them more significant, more luminous to us, and make our dealings with them more fruitful? Or does it terminate in rendering the things of ordinary experience more opaque than they were before, and in depriving them of having in `reality' even the significance they had previously seemed to have? John Dewey in Jackson (Jackson 1995:163)

> It is because no word is able to contain the moods of a moment, or capture what Gerald Manly Hopkins called `things counter, original, spare, strange,' that writers approach the world so tortuously and obliquely, using `inept metaphors and obvious periphrases' to draw attention to a subject they are unwilling to name. It is their way of recognizing that life eludes our grasp and remains at large, always fugitive. Like a forest in which there are clearings. Like a forest through whose canopy sunlight filters and falls. (Jackson 1995:5)

In this thesis I have taken a mundane, everyday thing from everyday life and have tried to discursively reveal, through a process of defamiliarization, the textures of its life. I have tried to show how it is set apart from other objects and have focussed on its "sanctity", a sacred object in sacred orders. In a sense I have engaged in an exercise in re-enchantment or, more accurately, an exercise in reminding ourselves of the fact that our world is more enchanted than we realise, when we think about it consciously. I have shown how we acknowledge this enchanted world through our practices even if we do not do so consciously.

Lévi-Strauss, in *La Pensée Sauvage*, following in the footsteps of Durkheim, discusses the *churinga* of the peoples of Central Australia, in particular the Aranda.[196] These are a motley set of objects, the most famous of which are know as "bull-roarers". The latter consist of boards or elongated pieces of wood with rounded ends which have a hole cut at one end through which is threaded a string. The object can be whirled creating a roaring sound. The boards themselves are carved with intricate patterns from which can be read the appellation of the ancestors of the owners of the objects. Lévi-Strauss sees in the practices associated with these objects "striking analogies with the documentary archives

[196] Durkheim's `Arunta'

which we secrete in strongboxes or entrust in the safe-keeping of solicitors and which we inspect from time to time with the care due to sacred things, to repair them if necessary or to commit them to smarter dossiers" (Lévi-Strauss 1966b:238). He points out that these objects and our archival analogs of them are sacred in themselves.

> After all, a document does not become sacred by virtue of bearing a stamp which has prestige, such as that of the *Archives Nationalies*: it bears the stamp because it has been acknowledged to be sacred, and it would remain so without it. (Lévi-Strauss 1966b:239)

What I have tried to do in this thesis is to argue that books, like archives, are sacred objects in themselves and that, in understanding them in this way, we can begin to appreciate their life in a new way, one which transcends their communicative functions.

Needless to say, the thesis does not exhaust the ways in which we can get a denser sense of the life of books. There are at least two complementary directions in which this intensification could proceed. Firstly, and most conventionally, one could point to a number of areas which this thesis has not explored but which deserve attention. Thus, for example, the whole field of book collecting could be reconceived using the frameworks already developed in this work. If, as I have argued, we need to take an anthropological approach to fetishism and to stop seeing it as some kind of regressive form of engagement with the world, book collections and book collectors can be understood as particular forms of practice in relation to the sacred order and sacred things. What Heidegger said of the art work is more generally true: "The art work opens up in its own way the Being of beings" (Barry 1996:441).

The second direction in which intensification could proceed would be to realise the limits of what can be done discursively. Anthropology has largely been logocentric, taking the visceral data of fieldwork, noting it in word form in order to represent it as words in ethnography. Ethnography, itself, is seen largely as a discursive form, though the development of visual anthropology has been a significant challenge to this vision of it. Even though this thesis has made use of some visual materials and, in the chapter on genres, used a mode of representation – statistics – which ethnographers are often very

uncomfortable with, the work as a whole has largely remained with the logocentric world of writing and inscription.

Victor Turner, bringing his considerable ethnographic authority, makes a very strong and passionate case for alternative modes of doing ethnography. He talks about performing ethnography:

> To *perform* ethnography, then, is to bring the data home to us in their fullness, in the plenitude of their action-meaning. Cognitive reductionism has always struck me as a kind of dehydration of social life. Sure, the patterns can be elicited, but the wishes and emotions, the personal and collective goals and strategies, even the situational vulnerabilities, wearinesses, and mistakes are lost in the attempt to objectify and produce an aseptic theory of human behaviour modelled essentially on eighteenth century "scientific" axioms of belief about mechanical causality. Feelings and desires are not pollution of cognitive pure essence, but close to what we humanly are; if anthropology is to become a true science of human action, it must take them just as seriously as the structures which sometimes perhaps represent the exhausted husks of action bled of its motivations. (Turner 1979:82)

These comments form the basis for articulating a new approach to the study of rituals through their dramatic enactment (Turner 1979:83ff). Drawing on the expertise of Richard Schechner, professor of drama at New York University, Ndembu rituals were enacted at a summer institute involving anthropology and drama students. Turner gives an account of the processes and outcomes of the various experiments or trials that the group engaged in.

I would suggest that it would be appropriate to take the vision of books articulated in this thesis and perhaps, embody, it in other forms of representation: an exhibition, in particular, comes to mind. To this end, I have already begun discussions with a curator about the possibility of mounting an exhibition on the life of books which frames them in such a way as to accentuate the ways of seeing advocated here.

EPILOGUE

I began this work with a reflection on the place of the life books in the life of my mother and my relationship with her. It is two years since I wrote those words. Since then she has suffered an accident which has left her immobile and restricted to her bed. She has had to leave her own home and move into full-time care. In this time, books have come to play an even more important part in her life for a variety of reasons. Not least amongst these is her claim to the status of reader as part of her armoury in her struggles to retain dignity in an institutional setting. The presence of these objects in her room is a source of strength and shield against those, thankfully very few, caregivers who seek to define her as a "patient".

As I write these concluding comments she has turned 90. It is touching that her sister sent the card below. Painted in 1921 it shows a girl seated in an European garden dressed not dissimilarly to the way my mother would have been dressed at that time. The girl is enclosed by the garden but engrossed in her book. The remarkable thing is that my mother's sister knows nothing of the subject of this thesis!

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