Social Evolution and Societal Change

In this chapter we wish to address the question of social change and the manner in which transformations in the archaeological record may be described, assessed and interpreted. Nowhere is the intimate connection between archaeological theory and wider social theory so evident as in considerations of social change in terms of a long temporal perspective. In a very real sense the study of long-term social change marks out an intellectual field in which archaeology and social theory do not just come together, with perhaps slightly different perspectives, but actually coalesce. Consequently, we will be concerned to analyse conceptualizations of long-term change within the broad context of the sociological literature and archaeological texts, and in historical perspective.

The question of why and how social change occurs is vital to archaeology. Indeed, for many archaeologists it provides the justification for archaeology as a worthwhile academic pursuit. What other discipline can boast such a temporal perspective on humanity? By comparison, sociologists and anthropologists (even historians) lack such temporal data. They can, at best, hope to provide fairly synchronic 'snapshot' views of social totalities in which processes governing change have to be inferred from a delimited 'slice' cut through an ongoing temporal sequence. Despite such claims, frequently made in the archaeological literature, it is worth noting that no distinctive theories of change have been produced by archaeologists, nor does it seem likely that there will be any in the future. All theories of social change utilized in the discipline are derived from the wider social sciences and then used as modelling devices for considering temporal and spatial alterations in archaeological sequences. As in all other areas of archaeological theory and practice, views of the past are thoroughly embedded in the present.

Both social theorists and archaeologists, when considering social change over long time spans have relied heavily on some notion of evolutionary development, whether working within a Marxist or non-Marxist framework. It is almost impossible to exaggerate the profound influence an evolutionary conception of society has had in considerations of the relationship between past and present. A tendency to think in evolutionary or developmental terms has been pervasive in Western thought since, at least, the Enlightenment. It forms part and parcel of the nineteenth-century origins of both archaeology and sociology as academic disciplines. Archaeological views of the past have been greatly influenced by social theory of an evolutionary type and, in turn, archaeology has been used in social theory to provide a broader temporal perspective for its consideration of the nature of change.

We discuss a number of influential evolutionary perspectives used in archaeology and social theory to conceptualize change, studies relating change to forms of economic exploitation and the environment within a systemic framework, cultural evolutionary, Marxist and structural Marxist perspectives. In particular, we intend to urge that any notion of social evolution is theoretically flawed and almost always embodies unwarranted ethnocentric evaluations. We suggest that evolutionary theories, of whatever kind, need to be abandoned in favour of a theoretical framework that can adequately cope with the indelibly social texture of change within a framework avoiding both reductionism and essentialism.

SOCIAL CHANGE AND SOCIAL SYSTEM

Systems theory

Systems theory was introduced into archaeology primarily in order to explain change. Paradoxically, as utilized, it is a conservative theory of persistence and stability (see chapter 2). Accounting for change has always been the major problem with the approach. This is a result of the emphasis put upon homoeostasis and pattern maintenance, and owes much to the old Hobbesian problem of order, or how is society possible in the struggle between competing individuals, in the battle between all against all? In classical sociology, and in the systemic perspective, this 'problem* becomes resolved by the internalization of social facts, norms or values into the consciousness of individuals in the form of needs dispositions providing motivational referents for individualized action. Society

becomes treated in a reified manner in which change takes place 'behind the backs' of social actors who become irrelevant to the analysis, mere 'components' of the system (Cooke and Renfrew, 1979). The sole theoretical function of the individual is to act as an offset to the social realm, so serving to establish, in this difference, the existence of the specific realm of the social.

Systems theory provides a form of functional analysis no different from the Malinowskian functionalism which dominated anthropology until the late 1950s or the functionalist sociology of Parsons (1952) or Merton (1957), based more or less on organismic and physiological analogies. Any functional explanation of change presupposes some needs, wants or goals. In other words it is teleological in form. Something occurs as the result of reaching towards or pertaining to a desirable state. Individuals may be very well said to have needs. Indeed it is a fundamental feature of humanity to have aspirations and desires. By contrast, social systems themselves have no needs, they have no need to function, to survive, to attain a goal range or to seek out homoeostatic states. The needs of the social system cannot be independent of the actors which make it up so any notion of system function or subsystem function or the function of rituals or other institutionalized practices is entirely irrelevant and misplaced. But in a systems perspective feedback processes cannot be conceptualized except in terms of some goal unless they are just random, but to anthropomorphize such processes is invalid.

Why change should occur becomes a very real problem in a systemic perspective because the system has been defined in such a way that stability is a norm. In other words, systems theory, as utilized in archaeology, has a theoretical structure describing how a system is maintained but not how it is transformed. The theoretical structure is not isomorphic with the ontological structure it seeks to represent. Change via positive feedback mechanisms is always circumscribed and does not really penetrate the internal structure. The concepts used to analyse change are no different from those used to explain system equilibrium, and the processes operating to change a system are the same as those serving to maintain it in a stable state. They are only different forms of regulated feedback. So in order to explain change a position of exogenous causality must be resorted to. As a normative consensus is attributed to the social actors within the system (whom, we are led to suppose, all live together in a fairly harmonious fashion, with few internal conflicts, tensions, struggles for power, and contradictory sets of interests or wants), changes can only occur as a result of

pressures induced from outside the system. Hill (1977, p. 76) claims that to think that internal tensions might promote systems change merely 'begs the question' as to why these arise and this must result from factors external to the system impinging upon it. Plog argues that changes *are* constantly occurring in systems but these will always be 'deviation-countering changes' (1974, p. 47). However, under 'abnormal' conditions

> there are conditions under which a change is so great that the response fails to restore the initial equilibrium. These conditions are called *environmental changes,* and the behavioural or sociocultural responses to them are called *morphogenic* or *deviation-amplifying* changes.
>
> (Ibid, p. 47)

The view is that the cumulative effect of regulatory mechanisms and deviation countering devices will offset and countermand change unless there is a particularly violent oscillation in the system's environment which causes the normal operation of the homoeostatic mechanisms to break down. Positive feedback processes are then set into operation until a new state of equilibrium is reached.

Despite the general view, repeatedly advocated (most recently by Juteson and Hampson, 198S), that a systems framework is superior to other models of change because it enables change to be explained in terms of multivariate causality, in practice the approach all too often leads to the postulation of a few 'prime movers' such as exchange (Renfrew, 1969, 1972), population increase (Cohen, 1977) or the environment (Binford, 1964; Flannery, 1968; Plog, 1974). Of these the second, population increase, is undoubtedly the most popular and it is difficult to find texts ostensibly explaining change which do not use this supposedly independent variable to explain why change - any kind of change - occurs (e.g. Bradley, 1981; Sherratt, 1981; Dolukhanov, 1986), irrespective of whether or not a systems perspective is explicitly adopted. This kind of universal recipe is, in fact, no more than an easy way out. It remains non-explanatory in precisely the same way as the 'normative' diffusionist theories to which the new archaeology so strongly objected.

Plog (1974) in his 'dynamic-equilibrium' model of change isolates four features promoting change, which he also refers to as 'growth': population, differentiation, integration and energy. The first refers to the size of the system; the second to the number of

'parts'; the third to the strength of internal system ties; and the fourth to the nature and quality of the resources utilized in the system. His analysis, in common with many others, suffers from *double determination.* Plog characterizes systems as having inbuilt emergent properties and as changing adaptively in relation to the environment. These two modes of determination of systems change are theoretically incompatible. Plog states that differentiation 'refers to evolution from multi-functional role structures to more special ones' (1974, p. 62) while also stating that 'changes in the loci of resources being utilized by an adaptation and experimentation with new resources may account for changes in differentiation' (ibid., p. 64). On the one hand, then, systems change becomes teleological, an inbuilt capacity towards change in the direction of increased differentiation; and at the same time change occurs as a result of environmental adaptation. The effectiveness of the one would appear to preclude that of the other.

Systems theory and cultural evolution

Binford asserted that White's cultural evolutionism (1959) had 'laid the theoretical basis for a logicodeductive science of culture' (Binford, 1972, p. 110) and this involved viewing culture as an extrasomatic means of adaptation. He argued that evolutionary change was change occurring within maximizing systems which included the adaptation of social systems to their environments, the more efficient use of resources and energy flux. Concomitantly, 'evolutionary processes are one form of ecological dynamics' (ibid., p. 106). The unit of evolutionary relevance is not changes in parts of social systems which, according to him, may be given a functional explanation, but changes in the integrated system as a whole. Evolution thus takes place as a result of the interaction of the total social system with its environmental field, and adequate explanations 'must make reference to forms and kinds of selective pressures operative in concrete environments' (ibid., p. 109). For Binford, if statements are to be explanatory rather than descriptive, this requires the formulation of evolutionary laws to relate relationships between the environmental field and the socio-cultural system. The search is for universal processes underlying different empirical sequences of societal change, and the reason for this change is environmental adaptation.

Flannery's linkage of systems theory with a cultural evolutionary perspective is important because he is prepared to view change as arising from within as well as from outside the system. He criticizes

'prime mover' explanations, concentrating attention on one or a few variables and proposing multivariate causality. For him, an adequate explanatory framework requires us to distinguish between: (1) the processes of evolutionary change; (2) the mechanisms by means of which these processes take place; (3) the socio-environmental stresses which serve to activate the mechanisms (Flannery, 1972, p. 409). According to Flannery, the processes and mechanisms are universal features of evolutionary development not only in human societies but in all living systems, whereas different selective stresses may be specific to any particular trajectory or evolutionary sequence. Social evolution is to be understood in terms of increasing segregation or differentiation and centralization or integration. Two possible mechanisms are discussed, promotion and linearization, corresponding to the twin processes of segregation and centralization. Promotion is the mechanism by means of which an institution or lower level office such as chiefdomship moves to a higher position in the total system with expanded and generalized functions. It results in increasing segregation of the system. Linearization or the expropriation of lower order by higher order controls leads to increasing centralization of the system. Segregation, then, is the agent of change.

For Flannery, each member of an evolutionary series (e.g. chiefdom or state) forms a set of structural conditions for further segregation to a higher level of institutions, functions, offices etc. These become, as it were, crystallized at various stages or levels of complexity of articulation by centralization processes. Segregation cannot proceed unabated for the social system would simply tear itself apart from the centrifugal tendencies of promotion mechanisms. In the long run the trend to increasing segregation cannot be stopped as more complex forms of social organization develop as a result of the failure of the simpler forms to fulfil their functions effectively. The new offices and institutions are more flexible than those they replace. So segregation is viewed as a process of development and maturation. It is beneficial and may serve to cure internal 'pathologies' subjecting the system to stress:

> In a multivariant model, we might see the state evolving through a long process of centralization and segregation, brought about by countless promotions and linearizations, in response not only to stressful socio-environmental conditions but also to stress brought on by internal pathologies.
>
> (Flannery, 1972, p. 414)

The use of the term pathology indicates quite clearly the biological analogy that Flannery wants to make and also serves to indicate that a failure of internal system function is a quite extreme condition contrary to an assumed norm of systemic compatibility or, translated into social terms, a normative consensus existing between individuals. It is adaptation to socio-environmental stresses that, for Flannery, as for Binford, provides the overall meaning and direction for evolutionary change. Without it there would be no reason for the segregation and centralization processes. Evolution permits an increasing degree of efficiency and control over the environmental field. If any particular social system is unable to adapt through segregation it is no longer able to maximize its environmental control and resultant energy yield and must be extinguished in the long run. Societies, or those that survive, attain new and higher levels of adaptive efficiency and are able to compete more successfully with their neighbours.

Sanders and Webster reiterate the point that environmental stimuli are 'basic causes of cultural evolution' (1978, p. 251). The model they use outlines various possible evolutionary trajectories from egalitarian societies to states conditioned by the permutation of environmental variables and assumes that population growth occurs, that rates of growth remain constant, and that this is a necessary precondition for evolution (ibid, p. 297). Adaptation simply accommodates people to their environment and permits the development of societal growth and higher order social structures.

SOCIO-CULTURAL EVOLUTION: CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT

The 'new' archaeology has generally been regarded as marking a revival of explicit interest in evolutionary theory on the part of archaeologists, rather than the largely implicit adherence to vague notions of social evolution found in much of the traditional archaeological literature. The connection made by Binford and Flannery (among others) between the conception of society as a functional system and evolutionary change of such systems through time is thus understandable. However, evolutionary perspectives have *always* played an important role in the discipline, used for example to explain artefact change (see chapter 4, p. 80). A recent survey of American archaeologists carried out in the mid-1970s listed 'the rise of civilisation' and 'sociocultural evolution' as among the top research interests (Schiffer, 1978, p. 154). The

literature on evolution continues to grow (e.g. Bintliff (ed.), 1984; Cohen, 1983; Dunnell, 1980; Foley (ed.). 1984; Flannery and Marcus (eds), 1983; McGuire, 1983; Segraves, 1982; Van de Leeuw (ed.), 1981; Wenke, 1981 - to mention only a few examples in the more recent literature).

Social evolution: a nineteenth-century view

The current popularity of evolutionary theory in archaeology seems to be indicative of the discipline being unable to break free from the shackles of its nineteenth-century origins. It is striking how little the level of conceptualization of the social has really altered over the last 120 years.

A general unity of conceptualization underpinned the evolutionary schemes developed during the nineteenth century by Spencer, Morgan and Tylor, among, others, irrespective of the details of the various frameworks advocated (Smith, 1973, pp. 27-8). This can be summarized by the following seven points:

1   A totalizing holism. The primary object of study was the entire history of humanity. Culture with a capital C was writ large and conceived as essentially unitary.
2   Gradualism. Social change was conceived to be an incremental and cumulative process without significant discontinuities or ruptures in the historical process.
3   Universality. Change was a generic and natural process shaping humanity and social institutions.
4   Potentiality. Change was conceived as being endogenous and an inherent feature within human societies.
5   A directional trajectory. Social change was neither cyclical nor random but conceived as a unified process leading to human fulfilment.
6   A deterministic perspective. Change being both irreversible and inevitable led from the simple to the complex, from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous.
7   A causal reductionism. Change was at all times and in all places subject to the same causal laws which conferred an underlying logic to the total social process.

Most of these features occur in one form or another in varieties of twentieth century evolutionary theory.

After Spencer became an evolutionist in the early 1840s he wrote sociology as the history of societal evolution. There was no alternative

to this since not to consider the social life of human beings as an all-embracing developmental totality would entail the abandonment of large areas of social life as being random and arbitrary. For Spencer, evolution was a unitary process and the theory he advocated covered all types of natural processes from the development of animal species, the maturation of the embryo and the evolution of the solar system, to the development of human society. He did not so much start from the phenomena to be explained as from an ethical and metaphysical position to be established. This was the doctrine of the universality of natural causation and its inevitable corollary, the doctrine that the universe and all things in it have reached their present forms through physically necessitated successive stages (Peel, 1971, p. 132). The source of evolutionary change was derived from an inverted account of Malthus' account of population increase: 'from the beginning population has been the proximate cause of progress . . . It forced men into the social state; made social organisation inevitable; and has developed the social sentiments . . . It is daily pressing us into closer contact and more mutually dependent relationships' (Spencer, 1852, cited in Peel, 1971, pp. 138-9). Population pressure is only a proximate cause and the ultimate source of change Spencer invokes is the inevitable differentiation of human society from homogeneity to heterogeneity: 'from the law that every active force produces more than one change, it is an inevitable corollary that through all time there has been an ever-growing complication of things' (Spencer, 1972, p. 47). Spencer did not just produce a totalizing history; his conception was, quite literally, cosmic. Everything could be reduced to a unitary process.

While the contemporary literature on evolutionary theory in archaeology is not quite so all-embracing as the framework adopted by Spencer and other nineteenth-century evolutionists, the 'explanatory' perspective remains surprisingly similar. European social evolution, from the neolithic to the Iron Age, according to Bintliff, can be explained in terms of

> the relative balance between population density, resource availability and extraction efficiency (cultigens, technical skills). It is suggested that imbalances lead to regular or cyclical 'crashes' of population and linked political superstructure; that dramatic rises in *absolute* population density produce cumulative increases in the surpluses of food, raw material and manpower capable of supporting social hierarchies and complex division of labour; that high levels *of absolute* population density produce authoritarian potential and conflict resolution needs that are met by the elaboration of leadership roles.
>
> (Bintliff, 1984, p. 29).

Bintliff endorses fully the role of population increase as the causative agent in social evolution, asserting that the archaeological record is entirely in keeping with Malthus' postulate of relentless population increase (Bintliff, 1984a, p. 174). Population density, resource availability and extraction efficiency, together with population increase, 'cause' social evolution.

Segraves (1982) similarly asserts the relation of population pressure to available natural resources as a cause of evolutionary change (1982, p. 294) and claims that 'people's "beliefs" and even their value systems as a whole will ultimately change as the mutual and reinforcing feedback between population size and technical and economic organization presses the system in a new direction' (ibid., p. 297).

Such examples indicate how little this evolutionary theorizing has moved beyond Spencer's speculations. Over and over again, the same old 'mechanisms' and 'processes' are drawn out of the hat. And if environmental adaptation, population pressure, resource extraction efficiency and the like are not stressed, then equally reductive explanatory mechanisms are drawn upon. Cohen, for example, states quite unequivocally that 'evolutionary changes in organizations of social relations are exogenic' (1983, p. 164) and that change may be explained solely in terms of boundary-cultural relations of inter-societal dependence for harnessing goods and resources.

Our aim, in the sections that follow, is not to provide a detailed descriptive review of the uses of evolutionary theory to explain societal change in the archaeological record. Instead we wish to identify and criticize some of the fundamental assumptions (found in both nineteenth- and twentieth-century uses of evolutionary theory) underlying the use of an evolutionary perspective, of whatever particular kind, in both social theory and the archaeological literature. All forms of social evolutionary theory, we contend, involve one or a number of the following four features which undermine their validity for an understanding of social change: (1) a spatialized view of time; (2) essentialism and reductionism; (3) problematic connections with biological evolution; (4) ethnocentrism. We shall consider each of these in turn.

Spatialized time

One of the primary justifications for evolutionary theories has always been the claim that they are ideally suited to the study of long-term change over long time spans. Evolutionary theories

depend upon a particular conception of time: time as spatial, uniform and abstract; time as a measurable empty duration, or container utterly separate from the human activities that take place in this flow of time (see Chapter 5). Time is supposedly a continuous whole, a spatialized matrix for action. This time is repeatable, vacant, a commodified time utterly different and opposed to lived human time, the time of action and human practice. Such time allows and permits the production of a homogeneous history, a history that claims to be the history of the whole of humanity. It provides justification for the 'equal' treatment of human culture at all times and in all places: the comparative method. Such time permits general classificatory stages to be developed. It allows culture to be compressed into evolutionary sequences.

A qualitative view of substantial human time which would recognize difference is replaced by quantitative classificatory time. So, all 'tribes' are considered to be equal and hierarchically placed in relation to 'chiefdoms', 'bands' or 'states', History is asserted to be an intelligible unity and continuum, a longitudinal totality made up of logical progression or developments in which there is a continuous concretization of particular social forms. Spatial time becomes equated with change such that in most evolutionary theories the terms time and change become more or less interchangeable. A succession of societal forms in the distance of spatial time invites ethnocentric evaluation and a constitution of the other: the savage, the primitive. Spatial time lends justification to the idea of necessity in the historical process, that things could not be otherwise, they had to happen this way. But people do make history in accordance with an awareness of history, of the humanity of history; that history is a contingent and not a necessary process.

Essentialism, reductionism and social typologies

As well as a spatialized view of time, and partly as a concomitant of it, social evolutionary theories are characterized, by either essentialism or reductionism or both. These features permit and encourage its ethnocentrism. Although evolutionary theories are ostensibly about change in spatial time, by means of a reductionist line of argument they contradict this emphasis and instead assert stability - the static developmental processes or essential characteristics of social forms that are supposed to induce change.

Beneath the transformations in social and political systems evolutionary theories attempt to reveal stability, and paradoxically

this is always considered to be primary when dealing with social change. Evolutionary theories seek out and attempt to elevate to the status of generalities or laws supposedly irresistible processes, iron constraints on human action and underlying tendencies that transcend history. This is an attempt to reveal the essential features moving beneath and governing individual events and the thick empirical layers of the archaeological record. Everything is to be boiled down, reduced and fitted to one single totalizing framework which presupposes some underlying continuity, whether emergent, divergent, progressive, regressive, cyclical, lineal or multilineal, in the relationship between past and present. The archaeologist becomes an investigator who pores over the past, sorting out the essential from the inessential, the necessary from the merely contingent, the wheat of process from the chaff of event. Ultimately the past becomes domesticated in its essentialist, continuous inevitability. But this inevitability is at the same time an intellectual construct, a form of power which in the attempt to produce a totalizing history reduces that history to the shadow world of essence, of economic and behavioural process.

When the term evolution is used in any discussion (unless merely used as a grandiose term for change - one of the most frequent uses, or abuses of the term) what is implied is one or a series of developmental and cumulative processes that lead somewhere. Axiomatic authority is invariably given to the reality of the term evolution. Exactly why this term is supposedly beneficial in understanding change is rarely explicitly questioned. Emphasis is instead placed on processes: is this or that process evolutionary? does such and such a trait have evolutionary potential? In this manner the validity of an evolutionary framework becomes internally safeguarded. Archaeological research becomes a strategy of recognizing what is evolutionary as distinct from what is not, what is necessary rather than what is merely contingent.

Evolutionary theories have generally relied upon typologies of social forms: band, tribe, chiefdom, state (Service, 1962) and many other variants. These have had an enormous impact upon archaeological research with various attempts being made to identify and define these stages in terms of the archaeological evidence (see chapter 2). There have been those who have questioned the validity of such typologies (Dunnell, 1980; Yoffee, 1979); but others are still claiming the general utility of a typological model and it is still very influential as a way of thinking about the past. The use of such typological frameworks creates a view of history as an overall intelligible unity and continuum History itself becomes

a continuous process of concretization of abstract, paradigmatic stadial forms. It is also always an approximation - 'we haven't got it quite right yet.' Bintliff, the major contributor to the volume *European Social Evolution* (1984), claims that 'the overall sequence [in the Bronze and Iron Age] is strongly comparable to the neo-evolutionist model of band/big-man/tribe/chiefdom/early state module' (1984, p. 30). He asserts the reality of developmental stages and claims that 'the totality of archaeological data for the European Bronze Age points to the dominance of small scale chiefdom organisation throughout Europe' (1984a, p. 158). The mass of archaeological data has been reduced to order with the 'recognition' of a chiefdom-type social organization. The concrete and the particular become subsumed in terms of an abstract category permitting the ordering and classification of the data, a reduction to its essentials. Any that don't quite fit become merely contingent to the model being used.

Such a typological framework systematically excludes *difference* and instead asserts *identity*. Identity is always the primordial term. Although each documented chiefdom or hunter-gatherer band is distinct from any other chiefdom or band, in an evolutionary framework these differences become subsumed and relegated as secondary or contingent. Hence all instances of hunter-gatherer social organization become relegated to the classificatory stage 'band'. This is a reductionist search for the 'essential'. The supposed identity of all hunter-gatherer societies permits a classificatory distinction separating them from other forms of human social organization divided into other categories, e.g. chiefdom or state. However, difference is not to be derived from the supposed identity of differential social forms - it makes these abstract categories possible in the first place. The concomitant of this is that a notion of difference, difference between forms of human social organization, deconstructs any possibility of erecting rigid social categories such as a 'band'. Bands, tribes etc, have no identity, no reality whatsoever. What is primary is not the sameness of human societies but their uniqueness. In order to be posited at all the notion of band presupposes both an abstract identity and a difference from some other abstract identity such as a chiefdom. Differences between forms of human social organization both permit the abstract identities of bands and chiefdoms to be posited and, at the same time, deconstruct the possibility of these abstractions having any analytical significance.

A typology of social stages is an attempt to create self-sufficient and exclusive categories. These are intended to order history

FIGURE 6.1 A Bronze Age chieftain
Source: Modified from C. Burgess (1980). Reprinted by permission of J, M. Dent
&Sons.

conceptually. They also order it normatively. Plural differences between societies become reduced to abstract forms, which in turn support a normative hierarchy of good and bad. Any empirical instance of an actual society undermines the efficacy of any such typology. Social typologies are not only theoretical fictions, they are also idealist fictions. Notions such as 'band' provide semblances of conceptual unity, permitting and yet simultaneously preventing and moulding thought. They promote a vision of homogeneity in the archaeological record. The complexity and variability in the archaeological data becomes ordered, fixed and shaped according to an ideal model created from the 'detached' subject position of the observer. The identity of social forms is only possible and discoverable by fitting them into a diachronic totalizing framework: an inexorable succession of stages allows the multitudes of different social forms to be divided into abstract phenomena, their necessary characteristics to count as a band etc, to be separated from contingent detail, and such a division is made according to the degree to which societies approach modernity.

Biological and social evolution

One particular aspect of the use of essentialist and reductionist frameworks in evolutionary theory is the relationship posited between social and biological evolution, which merits some more detailed discussion. Despite the fact that notions of social evolution developed before the publication of Darwin's *Origin of the Species* (1859), it is in biology that evolutionary processes have been most successfully defined through work on the concepts of natural selection and adaptation. Any use of the term evolution after the publication of Darwin's work in the social sciences in general, or in archaeology in particular, has not been able to avoid some kind of conceptual connection with biological evolutionary theory. In practice most authors writing about social evolution have made explicit links between social evolution and biological evolution. We wish to make two main points in this section: firstly, that any author adopting the term 'evolution' cannot avoid some kind of homology between biological and social processes or the term would become redundant. Secondly, any notion of biological evolution is fundamentally incompatible with an attempt to understand the social.

Biology and technology

Childe, throughout his work, asserted a position of technological determinism in relation to a requirement for populations to adapt

to their natural environments and this provided not only a fundamental principle but also an ontological vindication and justification for archaeology. A perspective in which societies were viewed as being involved in an endless series of technologically governed environmental adaptations gave a 'clue' for the analysis of the archaeological record and a way of reducing its complexity to 'an easily comprehensible order' (Childe, 1947, pp. 71-2). This order was for Childe an evolutionary order in which social evolution was deemed to form a logical progression from biological evolution, while retaining many essential features in common.

> Prehistory is a continuation of natural history. . . there is an analogy between organic evolution and progress in culture. Natural history traces the emergence of new species each better adapted for survival, more fitted to obtain food and shelter, and so to multiply. Human history reveals man creating new industries and new economies that have furthered the increase of his species and thereby vindicated its enhanced fitness.   (Childe, 1936, p. 13)

The bulk of *Man Makes Himself,* as with almost all Childe's works, is devoted to empirical description and discussion of culture sequences and, in this book, such sequences are characterized as being punctuated by a series of revolutionary developments which result in denser population concentrations supposedly illustrating the higher degree of adaptive fitness of technical innovations: the neolithic revolution, the urban revolution and the 'revolution in human knowledge' with the advent of literacy. Innovations (e.g. the arch, bronze, the seal, irrigation and bricks in the urban revolution) are explicitly likened by Childe to biological mutations (Childe, 1936, p. 228). In *Social Evolution,* Childe claimed that a Darwinian framework could not only be transferred from biological to social evolution, but was 'even more intelligible in the latter domain than in the former' (1951, p. 175), and that rigorous processes of selection operated on cultural innovations in the same manner as natural selection (ibid., p. 177). Cultural evolution, like biological evolution, could best be represented as 'a tree with branches all up the trunk and each branch bristling with twigs. . . differentiation - the splitting of large homogeneous cultures - is a conspicuous feature in the archaeological record' (ibid., p. 166). However, cultural evolution is to be at least in part distinguished from organic evolution because of the property of 'convergence' between different cultures brought about through diffusion of techniques and knowledge (ibid., p. 168).

Much of the recent literature on social evolution in archaeology differs remarkably little from Childe. Connections between biological and social evolution generally remain on the same level of a vague general analogy:

> Divergence from a common ancestor is one of the fundamental aspects of biological evolution, and it has undoubtedly played a major role in the evolution of a bewildering variety of human cultures with which the anthropologist is confronted. Each of those cultures also has a complex series of legacies from its evolutionary past, perhaps reinterpreted and integrated with adaptive innovations.
>
> (Flannery, 1983, p. 2)

Or, again:

> In the process of both biological and societal evolution we witness a progressive differentiation of structure and a corresponding specialization of function: 'Wherever we look we discover evolutionary processes leading to diversification and increasing complexity.'
>
> (Segraves, 1982, p. 292, citing Prigogine, Allen and Herman, 1977, pp. 5-6)

Adaptation and natural selection

In Childe's work or in books such as *The Cloud People* (Flannery and Marcus (eds), 1983) and *European Social Evolution* (Bintliff (ed), 1984) notions of biological evolution, vaguely translated into social terms, seem to play very little theoretical role whatsoever and are entirely swamped in the morass of empirical detail. In most social evolutionary theories adaptation is usually called upon to play the major explanatory role but there is no counterpart in social theory of Darwinian evolutionary theory. Societal adaptation always has to do double service as both cause and consequence of change. This can only lead to tautology when the concept of adaptation is used to explain or account for the existence of particular traits. To say that adaptive traits are present in a society or that those traits present are adaptive adds nothing to our understanding. Arguments normally amount to little more than saying that those traits present in a society are adaptive, therefore those traits are present; or those societies that survive are adaptive, therefore they survive. As Giddens notes, if it were the case that there were some sort of generalized motivational impulse for

human beings progressively to "adapt" more effectively to their material environments, there would be a basis for sustaining evolutionary theory. But there is not any such compulsion' (Giddens, 1984, p. 236). Cohen, however, does suggest one such 'compulsion': that in small-scale societies direct producers have an interest in reducing unpleasant labour or toil and so will accept innovations that reduce toil and/or increase productivity (Cohen, 1978, pp. 302-7). Such an argument overlooks entirely the nature of 'toil' as socially constituted in the first place and that in hunter-gatherer societies at the bottom of the evolutionary ladder toil seems to be very limited. In societies characterized by forms of class exploitation there is anyway no necessary correspondence between development of the productive forces and reduction of labour time. When one reads attempts to provide accounts of why adaptation occurs the level of reductionism involved often becomes almost absurd. Socio-cultural systems, for example, may be portrayed solely in terms of feeding behaviour (just who or what is feeding is rather unclear!):

> More complex sociocultural systems tend to be more generalized in their overall feeding behaviour by virtue of their particular feeding specializations. This gives them a versatility when intersystem competition occurs. They can better exploit new energy sources, but also the complex sociocultural systems persevere because success in the long run goes to the specialist who can harness the greatest number of kilocalories.
>
> (Gall and Saxe, 1977, p. 264-5)

Dunnell (1980, p. 77) notes that although the archaeological literature is full of references to adaptation and adaptive process, it tends to be rather short on selection. Although critical of cultural evolutionary theories Dunnell wants to reinstate modern biological evolutionary theory, suggesting that 'evolution is a particular framework for explaining change as differential persistence of variability' (ibid., p. 38). This entails that biological evolutionary theory involving natural selection, mutation, drift etc. should be translated in terms of the archaeological record: for example style and function can be defined in terms of natural selection (Dunnell, 1978). Even if human beings are indeed animals and subject to processes of natural selection in an equivalent manner to badgers, hedgehogs or guinea-fowl, this by no means implies that any adequate explanation or understanding of social totalities, institutions or material culture patterning can be achieved by reference to either natural selection or adaptation. Most social and

material practices have no demonstrable physical survival value for human populations whatsoever (see Shanks and Tilley, 1987).

Societies, unlike individual organisms, do not have any clear-cut physical parameters or boundaries, nor do societies have conscious problems of self-maintenance or a need to adapt. Individuals may have these characteristics but they cannot be validly anthropomorphized in terms of entire social totalities. Furthermore, evolutionary theories must apply to some unit, a society or a cultural system, and here again there is a problem. Is British society of 1987 a society or cultural system in just the same sense as a group of palaeolithic hunter-gatherers? Clearly not, and this leads one to reject any totalizing account of change framed in terms of basic processes supposedly good for all times and places. Societies construct their own social reality and the reproduction of societies entails far more than physical, biological reproduction.

Ethnocentrism

Although evolutionary theory logically need not involve ethnocentrism and in Darwin's biological theory of natural selection there is no such implication, theories of social evolution in practice have always been riddled with ethnocentric evaluations. By ethnocentrism is meant the manner in which a group identifies with its own socio-cultural individuality and creates a privileged and central image of itself in relation to others. This normally involves an explicitly or implicitly defined valorization of the achievements, social conditions etc. of a group (the in-group) with which the individual or author identifies himself or herself and a reference to other groups (the out groups) which are usually defined, conceptually constituted and evaluated by reference to the in-group adopting specific concepts, norms, measures of difference and criteria (figure 6.2). Ethnocentrism in one form or another is likely to be found in all societies and in the discourses those societies produce.

The Enlightenment and the colonial encounter

A very significant 'discovery' of the eighteenth century was the idea of progress which emerged as a consistently reiterated feature of social philosophies on a grand scale, permeating all aspects of social and political thought (Sklair, 1970, ch. 2). Scientific progress, material progress and moral progress were all conceived as being inextricably linked in an overarching conception of the
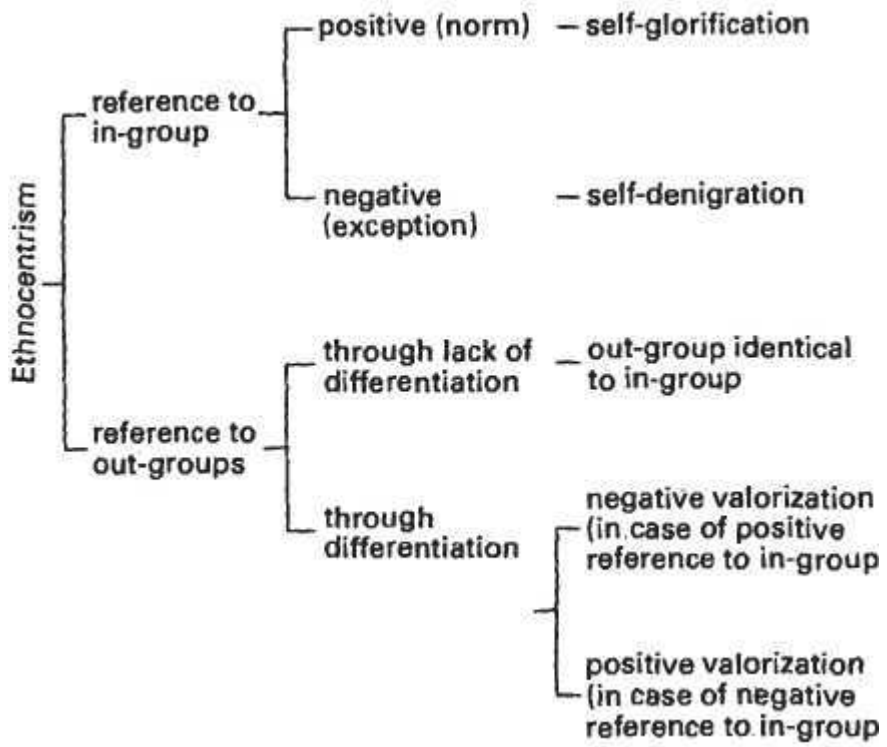
FIGURE 6.2 Forms of ethnocentrism, after Preiswerk and Perrot
Source: From R. Preiswerk and D. Perrot (1978).

growing perfection of human society which was both natural and inevitable. The social evolutionary theories of the nineteenth century gave substance and justification to the notion of progress as providing the dominant classification and explanation of social institutions and the history of humanity.

Evolutionary theories were shaped during the period of British world dominance and the consolidation of empire, a world shaped and given significance by a confident and ascending middle class and a perceived equation between scientific and social progress. The nineteenth-century evolutionary schemes of Spencer, Morgan and Tylor, among others, did not so much start from the phenomena to be explained but from an ethical and metaphysical principle to be established. For Spencer the goal to which evolution led was perfection, and in terms of human society progress led to civilization, the conditions of origin for this process being savagery and ignorance. A natural outcome of social evolution was the displacement of less developed societies by those that had differentiated further along the road to perfection:

> in a struggle for existence among societies, the survival of the fittest is the survival of those in which power of military cooperation is the greatest, and military cooperation is that primary kind of cooperation which prepares the way for other kinds. So that this formation of larger societies by the union of smaller ones in war, and thus destruction or absorption of the smaller ununited societies by the united larger ones, is an inevitable process through which the varieties of men most adapted for social life supplant the less adapted varieties.
>
> (Spencer, 1967, p. 78)

It would be difficult to find a more clearly articulated rationalization for the British imperial subjection of the colonies. This was, after all, a natural and inevitable process.

Like Spencer, Tylor and Morgan were leading exponents of the progressionist argument that all societies and institutions go through a gradual and natural process of development. While Spencer used the biological organism as a useful analogy for social analysis, Tylor and Morgan favoured the development of science as an appropriate model. Just as sciences pass through stages utilizing erroneous theories (e.g. alchemy), human societies develop through the thrusting aside of false and inadequate knowledge. Societies low on the scale of evolutionary development possess a high degree of ignorance, superstition and error. Evolution occurs because, at least in the long run, logic and rationality must prevail: 'it is a law

of human progress that thought tends to work itself clear' (Tylor, 1881, p. 341). Morgan's stages of savagery, barbarism and civilization were the product of a process of historical generalization, but history could not have happened otherwise. The evidence showed that 'the principal institutions of mankind have been developed from a few primary germs of thought; and the course and manner of their development was predetermined . . . by the natural logic of the human mind and the necessary limitation of its powers' (Morgan, 1963, p. 18). Analysis was facilitated by the study of primitive 'survivals' which provided both proof and examples of the stages leading toward civilization. To Tylor in particular, cultural similarities and differences in artefacts or customs were of no significance and 'little respect need be had in such comparisons for date in history or for place on the map' (Tylor, 1871, vol. I, p. 6). Archaeology played no significant role in the development of these theories, but was occasionally harnessed to provide the necessary historical back-up, and general conceptions of evolution were adopted (e.g. Lubbock, 1865).

The evolutionary schemes of the nineteenth century provided a picture of continuous and sustained endogenous growth gratifying to the Victorian consciousness, making it possible to look down benignly on the lowly savage (in some more literary works elevated to the status of the noble savage). The social functions of anything that was superstitious or supposedly irrational could only be recognized provided they were someone else's beliefs, or a mere relic and a transitory feature of Victorian society. This provided a means of being both relativist and non-relativist at the same time, 'of admitting that many diverse modes of organising and interpreting social life might have something to say for them, and might play vital roles in the lives of human beings, while continuing to maintain the absolute validity of one such mode - the positivist' (Burrow, 1966, p. 263). The social order of laissez-faire capitalism became validated in terms of an inevitable all-embracing process. It represented the highest point humanity had reached and, if not perfect, was nearly so. If Marx (1859) was to dissent from all this, socialism was only around the corner, predicated on the growing contradictions between the social relations and forces of production.

Evolution and progress

The ethnocentrism apparent in nineteenth-century evolutionary thought hardly needs to be spelled out in detail. What is possibly

not so readily apparent is the presence of ethnocentrism as an underlying theme in varieties of mid-twentieth-century and contemporary evolutionary schemes.

The stadial perspectives of Childe (1951), Fried (1967) and Service (1975) are, in essentials, only refinements of Morgan's scheme. Steward's multilineal approach (1955) with its societal typologies shares many of the assumptions of the stadial models, while the primacy given to adaptation is clearly reminiscent of Spencer. White stated in the introduction to *The Evolution of Culture* that his position did not 'differ one whit in principle from that expressed in Tylor's *Anthropology* in 1881' (White, 1959, p. xi). White dealt with the entire history of humanity as Tylor had done but this history was now primarily a history of technological progress. Human culture was a means of adaptation and developed as the efficiency of energy capture increased. This was the 'law' of cultural evolution and culture was progressive, permitting a steadily increasing control over the forces of nature. Furthermore the process of cultural evolution was *sui generis:* people were swept up in a cumulative process of exponential growth which was impossible to control. Steward's multilineal evolution was not, according to him, concerned to develop an a priori scheme but 'deals only with those limited parallels of form, function and sequence which have empirical validity' (1955, p. 19). He considered that cultural laws or regularities could only be founded on the detailed consideration of comparative sequences. However, the differences between simple and complex societies could not be conceptualized as being solely quantitative (an increase in size etc.) but, more fundamentally, were qualitative in form, involving new types of societal integration. Steward suggested that 'progress must be measured by definable values' (1955, p. 13). In his perspective progress was a necessary component of change, an 'attribute' of development. Quoting Kroeber (1948, p. 304), Steward goes so far as to list three criteria for the measurement of progress:

1   'The atrophy of magic based on psychopathology.'
2   'The decline of infantile obsession with the outstanding physiological events of human life.'
3   'The persistent tendency of technology and science to grow accumulatively.'

<div align="right">(Ibid., p. 14)</div>

Such statements would have been readily embraced by any Victorian social theorist! A point very similar to the first has been

made by Habermas in his attempt to develop a revised version of historical materialism in evolutionary terms (Habermas, 1979). Drawing on Piaget's theories of cognitive development in children Habermas proposes that homologies may be found between ego development and the evolution of world views. In small-scale societies thought is bound up with myth and it is only with the transition from archaic to developed civilizations that there is a break from mythological thought towards accounts of the world with 'argumentative foundations' (ibid., pp. 104-5). The modern world, for Habermas, is more enlightened than the 'primitive'. Traditional cultures form closed and non-reflective worlds compared with contemporary rationality which brings with it potentiality for Change. Small-scale societies are composed of individuals who have not yet undergone the 'learning processes' that bring enlightenment. The highest forms of human rationality turn out to be those of the contemporary West.

Childe always maintained a rigid separation could be held between facts, values and interpretations, expressing this as early as the epilogue to *The Danube in Prehistory* (1929) in which he maintained that he had always attempted to consign to separate paragraphs interpretations of data as opposed to their factual description (1929, p. 418; cf. Childe, 1936, p. 2). Approaching history in a 'humble and objective manner' meant that, paradoxically, a notion of progress was both objective and scientific and non-objective and irrational. On the one hand to ask whether hydroelectric power represents progress in relation to, say, a neolithic technology could only be to Childe a meaningless question involving dubious value judgements; one could still ask, on the other hand, 'what is progress?' Childe's answer to the latter was that the historical record itself was a record of progress and that archaeology, given its long time scales, was ideally suited to document this record of progress, illustrating 'improving technical skill, accumulating knowledge, and advancing organization, for securing a livelihood' (Childe, 1936, p. 34). The traditional periodization of archaeology in terms of the technological stages of stone, bronze and iron, broadly correlated with hunter-gatherer, agricultural and urban economies, provided unassailable proof of progress (ibid., p. 35), and this coloured all Childe's interpretations. Prehistoric hunter-gatherers certainly lived in no Garden of Eden:

> Faced with the terrifying fact of death, their primitive emotions shocked by its ravages, the bestial-looking Mousterians had been

roused to imaginative thinking. They would not believe in the complete cessation of earthly life, but dimly imagined some sort of continuance thereof in which the dead would still need material food and implements. The pathethic and futile tendency of the dead, [is] thus early attested.

(Ibid., p. 55)

Elsewhere he writes: 'getting food and shelter and indulging in sexual intercourse . . . were presumably alone available to lower palaeolithic savages' (Childe, 1944, p. 114).

In *Progress and Archaeology* (1944) and *Social Evolution* (1951) Childe admits the occurrence of certain 'dark ages' in which technical progress seems to have halted, even declined. Such periods are brushed aside as merely temporary phases (1944, p. 109) in an overall cumulative development leading up to the twentieth-century pursuit of scientific knowledge (ibid., p. 115). History itself is defined by Childe as progress and science as the mode of thought in which progress culminates. Consequently history becomes the unfolding of scientific rationality and it therefore becomes possible to make the claim that present-day reality is reason itself: i.e. it is reasonable, ordered in accordance with rationality. So the capitalist market system with its division of labour and treatment of labour as a commodity is rational(ity). It is also possible to claim that a 'scientific' history represents actual history. Reason and contemporary reality become identified; subject is collapsed into object, object into subject.

Sahlins and Service (1960), in their well-known attempt to reconcile the positions of White and Steward, coined the terms general and specific evolution. General evolution, or White's conception, was considered by them to be 'the central, inclusive, organizing outlook of anthropology, comparable in its theoretical power to evolutionism in biology' (ibid., p. 44). This entailed the 'determination and explanation of the successive transformations of culture through its several stages of overall progress' (ibid., p. 29). Evolution was, of course, a necessarily good thing and if it had not taken its course the 'civilized', industrial West would never have come into being and distinguished itself from other cultures.

Parsons, in his paper on 'evolutionary universals in society' (Parsons, 1964), was concerned to develop a generalized analytical theory and remained opposed to any view that evolutionary theory should be historical in the sense of historicism. Hence he only adopts, tacitly, a two-stage model of social growth: the 'primitive' and the 'modern'. He shuffles the evolutionary cards so as to

distinguish between evolutionary *universals* and evolutionary *prerequisites.* An evolutionary universal is identified as being 'a complex of structures and associated processes the development of which so increases the long-run adaptive capacity of living systems in a given class that only systems that develop the complex can attain certain higher levels of general adaptive capacity' (ibid., pp. 340-1). Evolutionary prerequisites are universal elements in all human societies and Parsons lists four of these, their presence marking a minimum for a society to be considered truly human: technology, language, kinship and religion. He identifies six evolutionary universals:

1   Social stratification.
2   Cultural legitimation of differentiated social functions.
3   A bureaucratic organization or the institutionalism of the authority of office.
4   A money and market complex.
5   Generalized universal norms, i.e. a formal legal system.
6   A democratic association or a liberal, elected leadership.

The first two of these evolutionary universals are of primary importance for societies to 'break out' from a primitive stage of social organization. The rest have served to promote advanced industralization, our present social order. Now, as Gouldner (1970, p. 367) is quick to point out, what all this implies is that capitalist America happens, conveniently, to embody all those evolutionary universals which, according to Parsons, have ever been invented. Furthermore, the communist nations are structurally unsound, inherently unstable, an evolutionary dead end:

> I must maintain that communist totalitarian organization will probably not fully match 'democracy' in political and integrative capacity in the long run. I do indeed predict that it will prove to be unstable and will either make adjustments in the general direction of electoral democracy or ... 'regress' into . . . less advanced and politically less effective forms of organization.
>
> (Parsons, 1964, p. 356)

In part, this is because 'those that restrict [the markets and money system] too drastically are likely to suffer from severe adaptive disadvantages in the long run' (ibid., p. 350). Had Parsons not assigned technology to the status of an evolutionary prerequisite but to an evolutionary universal, the socio-political conclusions

that he draws regarding the relative merits of American and Soviet society might not have been so readily forthcoming.

Valorization: from 'simple' to 'complex'

In the 'new' archaeology the term 'progress' is rarely used. It has become conceptually shifted into the realm of adaptation and relative adaptive efficiency. Nevertheless ethnocentric valorization is hardly missing and one of the primary arenas in which this takes place is in discussions of societal complexity. A string of examples are readily to be found in almost any recent publication; here we identify just a few from Marcus's conclusions to *The Cloud People: Divergent Evolution of the Zapotec and Mixtec Civilizations* (Flannery and Marcus (eds), 1983). 'Low population density could be seen as a factor *delaying* divergent evolution [in the Archaic period]' (Marcus, 1983, p. 356; our emphasis). It is implied that evolution has reality as a process, is inevitable and that a high population density is necessarily a good thing: 'The development of urban centres in the Mixteca Alta seems to have *lagged a few centuries behind the Valley of Oaxaca'* (ibid., p. 357; our emphasis). Urbanization is positively valorized:

> Even if we grant the *rise* of the Oaxaca peoples from band-level hunters and gatherers to state-level stratified societies, this *rise* is insufficient to explain the differences between Mixtec and Zapotec culture ... If we are genuinely interested in understanding individual Mesoamerican cultures, we cannot ignore drift, adaptive divergence, convergence, and parallel evolution while concentrating single mindedly on *advance through stages of sociopolitical organization.*
>
> (Ibid., p. 360; our emphasis)

Later 'stages' of social evolution are positively evaluated. Bands may eventually 'rise' to the status of a state or a civilization; the latter can only 'decline' or 'fall'.

The direction in which evolution is invariably depicted as leading is from the simple to the complex. The terms simple and complex in evolutionary discourses also imply the absent presence of two other strongly normative related concepts: respectively, the superior and the inferior. Both complexity and simplicity are multidimensional concepts and they cannot be defined except with reference to some entity or social form. They are relative, not fixed, terms. In evolutionary theories 'complex' is invariably associated with the state or those social forms which are gratuitously labelled civilizations. Any

use of terms such as 'complex', 'civilization' or 'state' - they are virtually interchangeable in the literature on evolution - is inevitably predicated on the basis of its difference from its absent other, the uncivilized (savage), the simple, the non-state. Such a notion of complexity is ideologically loaded. Despite the fact that differentiation can be argued to exist in all societies from the palaeolithic to the present, this differentiation only counts in the case of a limited number of societies which become labelled complex. Furthermore complex does not imply better organized, better adapted, having better societal self-maintenance etc. (witness Chernobyl). Nevertheless the complex always becomes valorized vis a vis the simple, its polar opposite. As Rowlands points out,

> the significance of these categories of social life owe their origin to European deliberation on the important innovations marking the beginnings of modernity. Projected backwards such categories can be explored historically in order to address the degree of similarity and difference that provides us with an understanding on their contemporary unique forms ... A universal monologue on the nature of social complexity has ... been successfully disseminated from its original European power base.
>
> (Rowlands 1986 pp. 1-2)

Such a perspective permits a situation in which the 'simple' or the 'savage' is not only temporally distant in evolutionary frameworks from the West but is also transposed spatially in contemporary anthropological discourse which has a persistent tendency to place the societies that anthropologists study in a time other than the present of the anthropological researcher (figure 6.3; see Fabian, 1983, pp. 3Iff). Temporal and spatial distanciation reinforce each other.

The schemes of 'explanation' in evolutionary theories easily slip into ideologies of self-justification or assert the priorities of the West in relation to other cultures whose primary importance is precisely to act as offsets for our contemporary 'civilization'. Genuine difference and radical incompatibility of social forms become relegated in terms of schemes which permit the evaluation of social life and the celebration of one social form *vis a vis* others. This 'knowledge' is a political act, a form of power. Societies become classified in an evaluative hierarchy judged implicitly or explicitly by their degree of deviation from ours. Hence complexity is elevated in relation to simplicity, differentiation in relation to homogeneity, the urban form in relation to the rural and so on. Levi-Strauss has cogently noted that
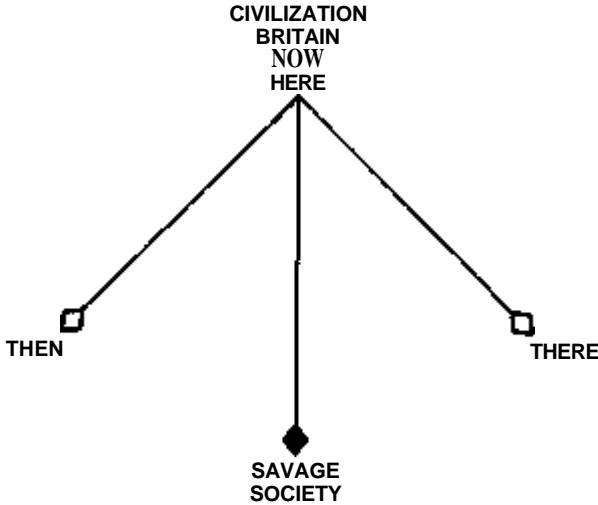
**FIGURE 6.3   Contemporary time/space distanciation and the constitution
of the primitive, after Fabian**
Source: **From J. Fabian (1983), pp. 3Iff.**

'if the criterion chosen had been the degree of ability to overcome
even the most inhospitable geographical conditions, there can be
scarcely any doubt that the Eskimos, on the one hand and the
Bedouins, on the other would carry off the palm' (Levi-Strauss,
1975, p. 113).

MARXISM, STRUCTURAL MARXISM AND
EVOLUTIONARY CHANGE

Marx's materialist conception of the historical process has been
subject to a very large number of specific interpretations both by
writers favourable to his work and by those deeply critical of it.
Here we shall not be concerned to attempt to review in any detail
Marx's vast corpus of writings and subsequent developments but
wish, rather, to draw out a few key features of Marx's conception
of social change and that employed more recently in structural
Marxist literature while analysing, in particular, the manner in
which this work has influenced archaeological theorizations of
change.

Technology: between Marx and Childe

Neither Marx nor Engels attempted to outline at length a systematic exposition of their theory of historical change. There can however be little doubt that Marx's account of social change asserted the primacy of the economic within a general developmental evolutionary framework. The major area of debate has been, and is, to exactly what extent the economy 'determines' and/or 'dominates' the social. Some passages in Marx support very clearly a reductionist form of simple techno-environmental determinism, for example his comments in *The Poverty of Philosophy:* 'the hand mill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam mill, society with the industrial capitalist (Marx, 1936, p. 92).' Marx's most explicit comments on change occur in the 1859 'Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy'* in which contradiction between the productive forces and the social relations of production is viewed as being the general mechanism of societal change. This is based on an assertion of a privileged economic causality determining the entire structure of society:

> In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness ... At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production . . . From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure.
>
> (1968, pp. 20-1)

In Marx's conception, the economic base of society provides 'the real foundation on which arises a legal and political superstructure'. If this economic base changes, then the superstructure will also. In other words the base is assigned a privileged causality in relation to the superstructure, and the base and superstructure correspond to each other. The actual dynamics promoting change are located in a contradictory relation between the forces of production (labour power, land, tools, raw materials, technical knowledge and organization of production) and the social

relations of production (relations between people in the production process which result from working on and with materials using specific technologies). Beyond a certain conjuncture the social relations of production act so as to restrict the further development of the forces of production and this will ultimately result in conflict between classes composing the relations of production becoming social revolution. This specific conception of historical change (at least partially contradicted elsewhere in Marx's writings) was coupled by Marx and Engels to an evolutionary conception of the historical process in which various stages or 'epochs' in the development of human society are outlined as specific modes of production: tribal, ancient or slave, feudal, capitalist and socialist (Marx and Engels, 1970, pp. 43-56), with an asiatic form being added later to the list.

Childe's interpretation of Marxism was in terms of the provision of a technological model for the understanding of social evolution, a model which he reiterated over and over again:

> The way people get their living should be expected in the long run to 'determine' their beliefs and institutions. But the way people get their living is determined on the one hand by environment . . . on the other by science and technology.
>
> (Childe, 1979, p. 93)

Although Childe indicates by his use of the term 'determine' that social change may not be rigidly determined by technology and the environment in any immediate and automatic fashion, technological development did amount to firmly conditioning possible courses of social trajectories.

> The environments to which societies are adjusted are worlds of ideas, collective representations . . . these worlds of knowledge must each have been, and be, conditioned by the whole of society's culture and particularly its technologies.
>
> (Childe, 1949, pp. 22-3)

Here Childe is clearly willing to allow some room for the social construction of reality, but in the last analysis, archaeology reveals:

> the progressive extension of humanity's control over external nature by the invention and discovery of more efficient tools and processes. Marx and Engels were the first to remark that this technological development is the foundation for the whole of history, conditioning and limiting all other human activities. . . If science and technology

are to progress, the relations of production must be adjusted accordingly.

(Childe, 1947, pp. 69, 73)

Technological determinism and the requirement for environmental adaptation become the essential motors of the historical process.

Structural Marxism and the economic/non-economic relation

It can be argued that when Marx, in the 1859 'Preface' (cited above), writes about the economic as *a foundation* on which arises a juridico-political superstructure, to which definite forms of social consciousness *correspond,* no unmediated and direct economic causation is, in fact, implied (Hindness and Hirst, 1975, p. 16). The manner in which the economic/non-economic relation may be theorized in relation to processes of social change constitutes a major part of what has been termed a 'structural Marxist' problematic. Comparatively recent work within Marxism and anthropology has attempted to build open and extend basic Marxian concepts and elucidate Marx's conception of social structure with reference to contemporary structuralist thought (Althusser, 1977; Althusser and Balibar, 1970; Godelier, 1972, 1977, 1978; Poulantzas, 1973; among others). Poulantzas outlines a threefold classification of Marxist concepts:

1   Marxism provides a theory of history and historical change insofar as its concepts can be considered to be transhistorical, i.e. applicable to all historically documented social forms such as mode of production, social relations of production, forces of production, labour or praxis, social formation and different structural levels within any particular social formation (economic, political, ideological).
2   Marxism utilizes specific sets of concepts in order to analyse each particular mode of production (tribal, ancient, asiatic, feudal, capitalist, socialist) as theoretically constituted in general theory; for example commodity relations, exchange and use value in the capitalist mode of production.
3   Marxism analyses particular structures or structural levels or regions within each mode of production; for example the ideological and political structures constituting the feudal or ancient mode. (Poulantzas, 1973, pp. 11-23)

For Althusser, the social totality or social formation is conceived as:

1   A complex unity of specific levels or 'instances', minimally the economic, ideological and political, constituting a 'structure in dominance'. It is not to be conceived in terms of a radical distinction between an economic base, conceived as an 'essence', and an ethereal superstructure that simply reflects the base and is ultimately reducible to it.

2   The levels or instances are relatively autonomous of each other. The economic instance is made up of a mode or modes of production constituted by an articulation between the social relations and forces of production. The former are always dominant hence a simple techno-economic determinism is avoided.

3   The totality is asymmetric. It may be dominated by one of its elements but the economy is always 'determinant in the last instance'.

4   Change is not a simple matter of a contradiction between the social relations and forces of production ''but is metonymic and overdetermined. All instances condition each other, and the structure of the whole totality affects the internal and external relations of the instances.

Godelier's conception of the social totality is similar in many respects, but rather than to consider specific points of similarity or difference in the overall conception, we wish to concentrate on the notion of change and the specific theorization of the economic/non-economic relation with reference to pre-capitalist social formations. In small-scale 'tribal' societies institutions and social practices are thoroughly embedded in each other. There simply is no apparent economic 'level' to be distinguished from 'superstructural levels'. In other words, it is difficult to characterize the economy as being either dominant or determinant. However, Godelier argues that kin relations are both infrastructure and superstructure:

> the determining role of the economy, apparently contradicted by the dominant role of kinship, is rediscovered in this dominant role, since kinship functions as, *inter alia*, production-relations. Here the relationship between economy and kinship appears as an internal relationship *without* the economic relationships of the kinsfolk *merging* for all that, with their political, sexual, etc., relationships.
>
> (Godelier, 1972, p. 95)

For Godelier, as for Althusser, the economic 'level' is an independent domain and yet forms an aspect of other areas of social

life at the same time. Both Althusser and Godelier assert the ultimately determining role of the economic which raises the question as to how the 'relative autonomy' of other levels, areas or aspects of the social can be maintained if the economic ultimately holds sway. Both distinguish between primary contradictions providing the motility for structural change and secondary contradictions developing around the primary contradictions. The specific theorizations are different (for a detailed analysis see Goodfriend, 1978) and need not concern us here. The important point is that the primary motor of change is still situated in the economic domain between the productive forces and social relations. For Godelier this is a contradiction *between* structures composing the forces and relations; for Althusser it resides in a single structure composed of the productive forces and relations.

Epigenesis and change

The work of Godelier and, to a lesser extent, of Althusser has had some considerable impact upon archaeological analyses of change, especially through the influence of Friedman (1974, 1975) and Friedman and Rowlands (1978), and we will now examine this specific framework. Situating their work within an evolutionary frame of reference, Friedman and Rowlands adopt a dynamic model of change. Evolution is conceived as a set of 'homoeorhetic' processes in which there is a structurally determined order. The model is epigenetic in that the scheme that they present has no static stages and at any one moment the seeds of future change are contained within the social order. They present an abstract outline of certain 'evolutionary' processes with examples of varied concrete appearances in the archaeological and ethnographic record. As for Godelier, this abstract outline is based on a logic of social relations of production - a designation of the *essential.* The model is an attempt to reveal basic transformational processes forming both necessary and sufficient determinants of social evolution.

   The specific model adopted owes much to Althusser and Godelier and is, of course, a variant of Marx's base/superstructure conception with the social formation being divided into a number of structurally autonomous functional levels. The properties of one level cannot be derived from those of the others. The levels are integrated in a single structure of material reproduction by two types of relations. From the ecosystem upwards there is a hierarchy of constraints determining the limits of functional compatibility between the levels. Such constraints are characterized as being

negative, i.e. they determine what cannot occur rather than everything that does occur. Friedman and Rowlands note that 'positive determination would only exist where we could find necessary and sufficient conditions for the occurrence of a given structure, i.e. where only one set of productive relations could dominate the process of reproduction' (1978, p. 203). Relations of production are the dominant aspects of the social formation. They determine the use to be made of the environment within the limits of the available technology, the division of productive labour and the form of the appropriation and distribution of the social product of labour. In short, they define the rationality of the economic system. The forces of production form the basic techno-ecological conditions of production. These are the objective energy costs of reproduction and the rate of potential surplus. The manner in which the social relations of production relate to the objective conditions of the forces of production determines the long-term behaviour of the system and limits the conditions of its existence. Friedman and Rowlands stress that social formations cannot be conceived as isolated units because social reproduction is a spatial as well as temporal process. Social formations are always linked and 'production for exchange seems to be a constant factor in social evolution' (1978, p. 204). Social evolution becomes a multifaceted and multilineal set of interlinked spatial and temporal transformations between individual social formations. Change comes about because 'dominant relations of production determine a given developmental pathway and functional incompatibilities in the larger totality generate divergent transformations over time' (1978, p. 204). In such a framework traditional archaeological stadial typologies become no more than arbitrary cross-sections through a continuously operating complex of processes.

This framework remains one of the most attractive and sophisticated conceptualizations of societal change to have been used in archaeology, generating many specific studies (e.g. Frankenstein and Rowlands, 1978; Haselgrove, 1982). However, it has a number of shortcomings shared with both functionalist and other evolutionary theories of change which detract from its usefulness. Firstly, the notion of contradiction is simply reduced to *functional incompatibility* between the levels of the social formation; but as we argued in chapter 2, the idea of function and functionality provides, at best, a low-level description of aspects of the social and in no way provides an adequate explanation. Secondly, the characterization of the social formation artificially separates the organizational function of kinship systems in small-scale societies

in organizing production (as the social relations of production) from their ideational and juridico-political components which take place in the sphere of the superstructure. This results in a damaging theoretical barrier being imposed to understanding the relationship between the economic and the non-economic.

Thirdly, the totalizing framework of the model *requires* a reductionist essentialism. It is proposed that history, the social, the relations of production have essences or essential features which operate as their principle of unity irrespective of any particular society. But the timeless universality of this logos (economic process) is dependent on that which it systematically excludes: the contingent, social difference, particularity. The primary essence of history is the dominance accredited to the social relations of production in relation to both the superstructure and the forces of production. While the latter may constrain the social relations, the superstructure appears to have no primary role whatsoever in social transformation. It becomes a pure effect of the dominance of the social relations of production. What does this superstructure consist of? The levels of the social formation in the model (see figure 6.4) clearly boil down to the economic - productive forces and relations - and the rest. What is the remainder, this apparently inessential and contingent left-over? The superstructure, of course, includes law, politics, religion, philosophy, ideology, art, etc., and it is this 'etc.' that is of importance because the 'etc.' implies that we can simply substitute the terms 'society' and 'culture', the social totality as a lived totality apart from abstract economic process. Now this 'etc' would seem to be of fundamental importance for explaining and understanding the nature of social transformations but in the model provided the entire superstructure becomes an unreal set of data, of appearances projected from an underlying economic reality. It is secondary, derivative and ultimately an accidental effect of the economic.

The opposition economy/superstructure requires that the economic be conceived as something natural and prior to the superstructure, to power, ideology and political force. Such, a model would seem to systematically evade or efface the role of subjective labour in constituting the social world and it tends to have the effect of neutralizing the coercive nature of political or superstructural relations. There can be no clear boundary between the economic and the superstructure. The economic cannot occur independently of political force and such force is never likely to be exercised purely for its own sake but for economic reasons. The economic can not be free of the superstructure as an independently
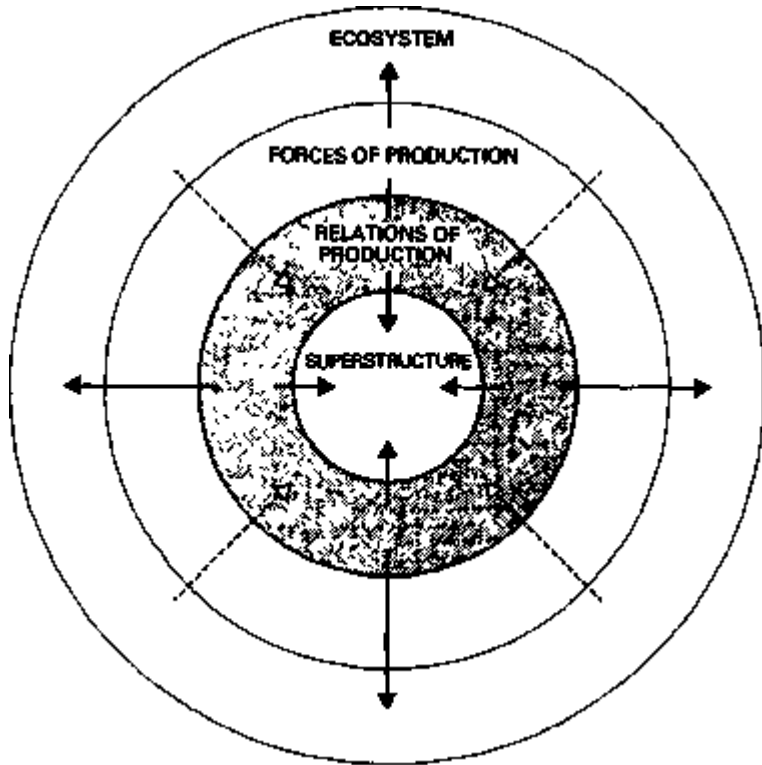
FIGURE 6.4 The 'Local population **model' of Friedman** and **Rowlands**
Notes: The solid line represents dominance; the broken line represents constraints.
Source: i. Friedman and M. Rowlands (1978). Reprinted by permission of
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structuring dominant entity. The nature of labour, the work form itself is inextricably bound up with coercive power and politics. To isolate the economic and present it as dominant is to ignore the composition of the economic itself with politics.

Although the constraints of the productive forces and the ecosystem in the model are proposed as purely negative, in practice this 'negativity' seems to have considerable selective power:

The developmental situation of the chiefdom depends very much on techno-ecological conditions ... In montane areas, for example, where soils are shallow and runoff a major problem, chiefdoms

based on swiddening technology will tend to collapse in the course of their expansion due to decreasing productivity in an economy accelerating surpluses. . . The conditions of local production are a crucial factor permitting [the development of the asiatic state]. Thus, in fertile valleys and riverine plains the evolutionary tendencies of the tribal system are able to work themselves out to their fullest. . . We suggest that the emergence of urban territorial states will occur in techno-economic conditions where there is a combination of effective land scarcity plus the possibility of extreme agricultural intensification . . . Both Cuicuilco and Teotihuacan shared exceptionally good conditions for urban growth, since they were sited on good water sources for irrigation and near obsidian deposits.

(Friedman and Rowlands, 1978, pp. 213, 216, 234, 260)

Friedman and Rowlands appear to want to argue that the economy is both determinant and non-determinant at the same time. While there are vast areas of social life which are dominated by the economy (i.e. in the superstructure) they are still supposedly structurally autonomous. However, positing the social relations of production as *necessarily dominant* clearly sets the limits of the possibility for variation in the relatively non-determined superstructure. Consequently the indeterminacy of this relationships becomes reduced to a mere *supplement* (to use Derrida's term as an exterior addition to what ought to be self-sufficient but is deficient) of that which is dominant. The relationship between the relations of production and the social formation are not contingent, products of specific historical conditions but instead become an a priori necessity in which the conditions for social transformation are known in advance. If the social relations of production are dominant or determinant in *every* type of social formation then their conditions of existence must be deduced independently from any concrete manifestation of social relations. However, in this case, the only reality they would have would be to assure in tautological fashion the existence of the economy as a separate entity with a determining or dominant role.

While the notion of contradiction between levels or instances of the social formation is not explicitly introduced in Friedman and Rowlands's paper, Gledhill and Rowlands (1982) do usefully elevate the concept to an important causative role in social transformation while stating that 'economic and socio-political conditions cannot . . . be separated, and both are equally "material": we cannot understand economic processes in the narrowest sense in isolation, but neither can we argue that real developmental trajectories are determined by purely "cultural" or

"political" processes' (Gledhill and Rowlands, 1982, p. 145). We entirely agree with such a position and the implicit criticism of the earlier model that it makes. What is required is a truly dialectical theorization in which the economic, the political and the cultural are viewed as being linked together in a relation of mutual mediation without any a priori hierarchy of dominance or determination.

BEYOND EVOLUTION: THE SOCIAL TEXTURE OF CHANGE

When considering social change in archaeology over either the long or the short term, evolutionary frameworks appear to be inadequate. The prospect before us is not to invent a new or a better evolutionary framework or model but to abandon the notion of evolution altogether. There is no difficulty in sustaining the reality of a conception, such as White's, that there is a fundamental difference between microlith technology and microchip technology or that energy capture has increased through time, so long as this is devoid of ethnocentric valorization. However, such observations do not take us very far in explaining the social and they certainly do not merit being placed within a totalizing evolutionary framework. It is far better to employ a simpler and far less loaded and contentious concept - 'change'. What we should be thinking in terms of are: social strategies, social transformation, power, ideology, altereity, plurality, relationality, displacement, substitution, difference - all terms that cannot be properly compressed or integrated into an evolutionary framework. Ultimately we may say that history is another term for undecidability.' What this means is that we must regard social change as being an open, polysemous text, a text to be written and interpreted, not something that decides in any degree of finality what we write. Archaeology as a historical science is fundamentally open-ended. Evolutionary theories suggest that history is essentially closed in on itself, residing in a basic set of processes; but there are no such basic processes to be found. Processes exist but they are always different, singular, non-identical with each other. It is this non-identity, this singularity that we should be stressing. Rather than attempting to formulate positions which would once and for all explain the past in an absolute sense, we should be emphasizing that there are no absolutes, no fundamentals to dig down to in order to ground our analyses. The attempt to isolate series of events or essential

elements and processes results in a turning away from history which becomes overlooked. It results in the production of a reductionist and ideological History.

In discussing an alternative theoretical position all we can hope to do is to outline a conceptual strategy for understanding social change in *general.* The level of generality involved will mean that such a perspective will only serve any useful purpose insofar as it is worked through, mediated, modified, and transformed in practice, in the act of trying to understand a particular case of social change.

Contingency and conjuncture

We start from two basic premises: (I) all social life is contingent; (2) all episodes of social change are conjunctural. By stressing the contingent and conjunctural nature of change we hope to avoid the pitfalls of essentialism and reductionism discussed earlier in this chapter. To say that social change is contingent is to adopt the position that history is indelibly a social creation: it has no predetermined teleological essence and there is no deterministic necessity to the working through of the historical process - history could have happened otherwise. Social change is conjunctural in that any particular episode of change depends on the convergence of overlapping sets of circumstances, actions and events which differ in form and nature from case to case according to differences in social context. By social change we specifically refer to the structural transformation rather than the reproduction of the social order. Such episodes of transformation are always *endogenously mediated processes* resulting in ruptures or structural disjunctions. This means that we conceive history as a series of ruptures and discontinuities separated by periods of social reproduction of variable duration. However, both stability and change are part and parcel of structural transformation and reproduction.

We are not dealing with a simplistic either/or distinction in which structural reproduction is conceived in some sense as absolute stability and structural transformation as a totalized set of changes. The difference between one situation and another is a matter of degree. Discontinuities depend on underlying continuities and vice versa. So history is a dialectic of continuity-discontinuity mediated by structural contingency and conjunctural events and circumstances. There is nothing in the archaeological or historical record which suggests that we should privilege or give methodological priority to change, or its conceptual polar opposite, stability. Indeed a radical opposition between the two

terms would seem to be unhelpful because in an obvious manner societies are changing all the time in terms of the actual physical and bodily composition of the population, interactions between individuals, losses and gains in the transmission of knowledge and information, use of specific artefacts, etc. On the other hand, basic structural features of society, values and principles for conduct, may remain unaltered. No society can be absolutely stable, nor will social changes of even the most drastic sort alter every aspect of action, thought and feeling. Stability and change are both relative terms, neither can be conceptualized except in terms of the other, and both reside in all social forms.

It is important to stress that societies do not just exist in motion or action, in human praxis, but also in thought, either at a level of discursive or practical consciousness. In other words social actors always draw on stocks of knowledge and may know to a greater or lesser extent *why* they are acting in any particular manner and be able to justify or rationalize their actions; *or,* alternatively, they may know *how* to act without being able to verbalize the principles on which they are acting. Hence actions may have intended or unintended consequences and in any particular situation one or the other, or both, may provide an important motor for change. Thought and action are thoroughly interwoven and to avoid essentialism we must posit a dialectic between thought and action such that neither stands in relation to the other in a situation of dominance or determination. Social being does not determine consciousness nor can we reverse this Marxian formula. At any particular conjuncture and with reference to a particular set of contingent circumstances one may dominate the other but the nature of this domination, always remaining partial in scope, is a matter of practical demonstration rather than a priori theoretical determination.

The social world while being a practical world of situated action is also a conceptualized world consisting of codes, signs and symbols which are in a constant process of production and reproduction, structuration and destruction. It is always ordered in different societies according to a meaningful scheme and sets of values. Agents act in terms of socially constituted categories involving other persons, institutions and material culture.

Societies do not, of course, exist in isolation - social life involves interaction with and mediation of an environmental field and a social field of other individuals and groups. This 'external' natural and social field exerts influence. It may promote social transformation but such radical change is not automatic; it always

involves an internalization of external factors. The 'risk' of carrying out various possible subsistence strategies and the effects of natural disasters are conceived and transformed within the structures of the social. That usually termed 'economic' has a style - it is itself part of a symbolic referential field. Similarly, contact between qualitatively different kinds of societies, such as hunter-gatherer band groups and socially stratified agrarian groups, or Captain Cook's arrival in Polynesia (Sahlins, 1981, 1985), is mediated by internal structure and signification. Acculturation is never a passive, but always an active and transformative process.

Social change: space and time

Space and time do not merely form containers within which social life is played out but constitute a medium through which social relations are produced and reproduced. Both are social productions and in turn are actively involved in social reproduction and transformation. As we argued in chapter 5 traditional archaeological practices resulting in the formulation of chronologies and periodizations of materials depend upon[1] and presuppose a linear and abstract time. We argue instead that social practice and event have their own rhythms and their own time. Such a perspective questions the validity of traditional archaeological conceptions of time and the implicit identification of time with change which results in the 'problem' of the reality of archaeological periodizations (e.g. Halstatt and La Tene of the European Iron Age) and how transitions might develop between them.

Regarding time as a medium in which social action and change is played out means that societal transformation cannot be conceived as chaotic, as structureless - a point to which we will return below. Social change is not a single movement pervading the entire social totality but is articulated in time and space forming a medium for the restructuring of social relations. Spatiality and temporality form a component of social life in a situational social context in which purposeful human agency is structurally positioned and this positioning serves to shape day-to-day activities and alterations in their form and nature. Space and time are socially produced as concrete material spatialities and temporalities (e.g. the time-space of architectural forms) and as a set of relations between individuals and groups. Such space-time is not abstract and apart from human social existence but dense - filled up with the contents of social existence related dialectically to physical space and physiological

ageing and society's cognitive image of itself as a continuing form. The spaces and times of the natural world (physical geography, passage of the seasons, lunar cycles etc.) and those related to the way the social field is conceptualized are incorporated into the social production of temporality and spatiality and transformed in the process. Social spatio-temporal production incorporates nature and the physical world into a 'second nature' and this socially constituted second nature may be redefined, reinforced, reinterpreted, reproduced or transformed into something qualitatively new. So, the historical sequence is one of contingent and conjunctural spatiality and temporality. Space and time form a medium serving to structure social life and are in turn structured by social relations in a recursive manner (Giddens, 1981; Soja, 1985; Pred, 1985).

But this spatio-temporal medium for social reproduction and transformation is not an indifferent one. The social constitution of time-space is not just a routinized process but one pregnant with contradictions, conflicts and struggles. Space and time form a medium for the networking of power and ideology in relation to competing interests and social strategies of individuals and groups. Power, ideology, contradiction, conflict, space and time can only be understood relationally. Each is infused with and partially encompassed by the others. Furthermore, all these concepts are not neutral but critical categories which can be turned in on themselves and in relation to an analysis of the social production of archaeological knowledge.

Signification, interests and structure

In discussing the nature of change we must make reference to the social-world

1   As constituted a conceptual scheme of signs and codes for the ordering and reordering of human existence.
2   As a determinate patterning of actions and event sequences.
3   As mediated by structures dialectically related to strategies of individual and/or group *interest.*

In other words we are concerned with the linkage between signs, actions and constellations of actions or events, structures and power. People are always inseparable from meaning and from the world. The relationship between subject and object or thought and action is not one of radical opposition, nor of identity, but rather

one of dialectical mediation. Subjects and objects form part of each other, help to constitute each other, but do not collapse into a single unitary entity.

The cultural schemes by means of which the social order is constituted are always arbitrary, never the only possibility for the realization of action. As we argued in chapter 3 the individual agent is always positioned in accordance with structure or relational sets of signs providing principles for conduct. Although positioned in the social field individuals do *act* and the consequences of these actions are just as likely to be unintended as intended. Such action is historically situated. It draws upon existing structured; sign systems or conceptual schemes for the ordering of experiences but every manifestation of structure in an action event is a concretization of structure through its effects on social practice. This concretization of structure through action contains within itself the possibility of the reordering or structuration of structures because meanings and principles for conduct become re-evaluated in practice, in the contingent and conjunctural social circumstances of human practical activities. The practical projects of people take place within a context of received structured meanings and signification. However, this meaning and signification becoming concretized in and through action is at one and the same time re-evaluated through the course of this action and may be reproduced or transformed. Action, in other words, is in dialectical relation to structure and situational social context. It begins in structure is mediated by structure, and ends in structure but its realization in the world may result in the rearticulation or transformation of structure.

Power, ideology and change

Power and ideology are integrally linked to the reproduction and transformation of the social order and to structure. While power is intimately involved in both social reproduction and transformation, ideology as a limited material practice and form of power is to be fundamentally linked with societal reproduction (see chapter 3). Power may take on a directly coercive form bolstering social domination in terms of direct physical control of subjects (e.g. military regimes). In social situations in which social control and exploitation are regularized features of life, the maintenance of this control by sheer force alone is likely to be both unstable and inefficient in the long run. In such cases repressive power may rest far more efficiently on some basis of perceived and maintained legitimacy, however achieved.

This form of power not directly involving physical coercion is ideological power which may (1) naturalize the social order through the manipulation of the past making what is mutable appear to be immutable; (2) represent as coherent aspects of the social order which are contradictory; (3) represent that which is partial as universal; (4) represent the social as being a pre-ordained natural order; (5) represent the ideas and modes of organization operating in terms of the specific interests of individuals or groups as being in the interests of everyone. So, in various ways, ideology relates the contingency of the present (social inequality) to a natural and timeless order or to a mythical past. Ideology is the presentation of antithesis, a strategy of social containment. Its structural effect in society is to disperse, conceal, dilute, displace or deny contradictions. Such a structural effect serves the interests of those in positions of social dominance and justifies or provides apologies for the social order. Hence ideology is a specific and limited material form of social practice with structural effects. It is not simply generalizable to 'world view' or to be conceived as 'false consciousness' or as a 'pre-scientific' form of knowledge. Instead it may be regarded as a solution at the level of social consciousness to structural contradictions that cannot be dissipated or resolved in practice.

 - Ideology is neither true nor false. It is a misrepresentation or denial of contradiction. To claim that ideology is a 'solution in consciousness' is not to suggest it merely operates in the realm of consciousness or ideas. Ideology, insofar as it is conceived as a set of ideas embodied in social action, is a real material force in the social contributing to the maintenance or reproduction of society. Although ideological relations may misrepresent contradictions and the concrete social practices operating in terms of these con- tradictions, at the same time they designate a real relation, both material and necessary, rather than purely illusory. As a material form ideology is bound up with, works through, and has definite effects on social practices. It does not appear as some kind of purely gratuitous invention of consciousness intentionally manipulating reality, nor is it the result of a conspiracy on the part of those whose interests it serves. However, the effects of the operation of ideology as a form of power are the concealment of contradictions obviously playing a powerful role in the reproduction of structure mediating social practices. So ideology operates in such a manner as to block the translation of structural contradiction into conjunc- tural struggle between social actors.

Contradiction

Structure, conceived as a set of signs and categories, principles and resources, resulting from and making possible human social experience and action, should not be conceived simplistically as a dovetailing of a harmoniously ordered entity. To the contrary, the principles embodied in structure exist in a relation of contradiction; one may deny or oppose another. *Difference* and contrast required in any sign system invites contradiction but this contradictory relationship between signs and meanings only realizes itself in the social through the practical effects of structure in action and situated event. Signs have, of course, conceptual value by virtue of their contrast to other signs, but in action signs become articulated with respect to the referential meaning of what may be, in any particular instance, the opposing interests of different social strategies. Contradiction may be conceived as a component of the social world giving rise to a potentiality for change in at least two major senses. First, contradiction is an existential part of social being. It is always and will always be present because it is part of what it is to be human. Individual persons may consider themselves to have a continuing identity, irrespective of any particular action or action sequence, and yet can only be to others what they are at a particular time and place. The activities of individuals and groups result in the production of social conditions which, in some respects, constrain and set limits to the possibilities of future actions. These conditions are produced by individuals but become independent of their wills and hence social reality is a contradictory reality. Material production in most cases requires a division of labour, and this must be seen as a result of productive activity and by no means a consciously intended outcome.

A second source of existential contradiction is in the contrast between the 'natural' and the 'cultural' orders:

> the human being as *Dasein,* originates and disappears into the world of Being, the world of nature, yet as a conscious, reflective agent is the negation of the inorganic. The mediator of the contradictory character of human existence is society itself, for only in and through membership of a society does the human being acquire 'second nature'.
>
> (Giddens, 1981, p. 236; cf. Goldmann, 1977, p. 101)

This notion of contradiction as residing in the very nature of social being has to be complemented by a second sense of the term, if we

are to claim that contradiction provides the root of motility in the social order.

Earlier in this chapter we rejected the position that the social order can adequately be conceived as a definite series of structural levels or instances. Such a view is intimately linked with the extensive debate over the concept of contradiction: whether it refers to real or logical opposition; whether logical contradictions can be real (see e.g. Colletti, 1975; Meikle, 1979; Elster, 1978; Larrain, 1983, ch. 4). In accordance with our arguments in other chapters contradiction is not a logical concept nor does it refer to real opposition or conflict. Furthermore, the notion of contradiction does not suggest functional incompatibility between structures, levels or instances of a social formation but refers to opposing principles, drawn on in social action, but which are nevertheless dependent on each other for their existence in any particular type of society (cf. Giddens, 1979, ch. 4).

Contradiction is an opposition between elements of structures residing in practices which presuppose one another and constitute conditions of existence for each other. It is to be conceived not as an opposition between fixed identities but as an internal relation where the identities of each contradictory element depend on each other. These contradictions will differ in nature and form from one society to another. In other words we avoid any essentialist notion of contradiction such as the classic Marxist formula in the 1859 'Preface' where contradiction arises between the forces and relations of production with primacy being given to the former in the determination and working-out of the historical process. We argue, instead, that contradiction is constitutive of the social field as a whole and is never likely to be a simple matter of an opposition between different areas of the economic or between economic and social processes. Contradiction is to be conceived as a reality lying within the very structuring of the social order itself. Adopting such a position it is possible to argue that all societies are contradictory totalities with the contradictions differing temporally between different forms of society. Such contradictions can never by dispelled except in terms of the transformation of the principles structuring the social field as a whole. Following from such an argument it is possible to argue that we can distinguish between primary and secondary contradictions, the former giving rise to and promoting the development of the latter. A primary contradiction is one that presages a new social system. Giddens, for example, argues that the primary contradiction of capitalism is that between private appropriation of

wealth by the few, and a structural principle it presumes which
negates it, socialized production (1979, p. 142). However, the
ranking of contradictions in an evaluative hierarchy of importance
appears to us as a rather dubious and contentious exercise and in
itself may provide little insight into an understanding of why struc-
tural transformations occur. Following Althusser (1977, pp.
106-16) we will suggest that contradictions are always
overdetermined. For example, the contradiction between private
appropriation of wealth and socialized production in capitalist
society is always dependent on the historically contingent and
concrete forms and circumstances in which it takes place. In other
words, the contradiction is inseparable from the overall
structuration of the social order, and from its concrete realization
in human practices.

Structural transformation is likely to occur when there is a
multiplicity of contradictions between structuring principles, each
affecting the other, which may give rise to further contradictions.
However, structural contradiction can only be realized in human
social practices, in situated action. So contradictions in structure,
between structural principles drawn upon by actors in their day-to-
day conduct, result in competing beliefs, evaluations and
rationalizations for socially situated actions. These ultimately alter
the conditions of existence for the form and nature of social
relations, and concomitantly the nature of these relations
themselves change. In other words, contradiction at the level of
structure becomes translated into a conflict of interests between
social actors which ultimately may become transcribed into the
entire social body at any particular historical conjuncture produc-
ing a radical 'break' or rupture in the social process. The outcome
of such a conflictual rupture will be a transformation of the
structures underlying social action. Contradictions, then, are the
precondition for social change, but they do not bring it about.
Change, as discussed above, depends on episodes, conjunctures of
events and conditions which build on each other around
contradiction producing conflicts which may be resolved by social
change.

The accumulation of time in such conjunctures may or may not
involve a standard conception of chronology (see chapter 5). It may
not be chronology which is important but the intersection of
contradiction and event. In other words, meaningful connections
may transcend chronology. Chronology may be crucial to social
change, at points of sudden discontinuity, but for the most part we
may expect it to be irrelevant in pre-capitalist social forms because

of the absence of events which build on each other. Conjunctures, clusterings of events, must be understood in terms of their determinate temporality. The time of the events may overlap, but the time in common between the events may not extend beyond the clustering, the episode.

CONCLUSION: SPECIFICITY AND CHANGE

In considering the nature of social change it is vital to avoid theoretical frameworks which produce a totalizing history, a history of the whole of humanity which does not recognize rupture, difference, non-correspondence between social forms. Any adequate analysis of change must take into account the subjective constitution of the social as an active and differentiated set of strategies involving power, group and individual interest and signification. These cannot be simply reduced to a set of unitary processes.

We must take into consideration that the tempos, times, spaces, nature and form of change in contemporary Western society are fundamentally different from the prehistoric past. Furthermore, societies constitute their own spaces and their own times. Change has to be analysed in all the detail of its specificity. The concepts we have outlined in the final part of this chapter are of necessity general, but their purpose is to allow us to *think historical and contextual specificity* in attempting to understand social reproduction and transformation.

In attempting to understand change we are always faced with issues as to what type and degree of alteration in what is being considered, and why this is thought to be of interest or importance anyway. Ultimately these are practical questions that always presuppose a politics. This issue of the politics of theory is one we address in the next chapter.