CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGICAL STRUCTURISM IN HISTORICAL EXPLANATION

The methodology of structurism that the relational-structurist tradition employs can be formulated as a description of the implicit logic and assumptions of certain explanations rather than of the surface texture and actual content of those writings. Structurist historians do not necessarily give the same explanations for the same kinds of phenomena and processes. Methodology operates at a deeper level than concrete explanations for explanations vary also, of course, according to the content and use of theory, the particularities of evidence, and differences in the questions being asked. There are indeed variations in the kinds of explanations that these writers have developed. Nevertheless, it is my contention that there is a deep methodological unity between them that sets them apart from those who adopt individualism and holism and which strongly influences the kinds of explanations they give. In Chapter One structurism was briefly outlined. The point of this chapter is to make a more detailed analysis of the work of some historians, work which contains, I believe, versions of methodological structurism even though no historians, to my knowledge, employ this term to describe their methodology. In order to demonstrate the explanatory role of structurism in certain writings some discussion of its content will help focus the analysis.

I MENTALITY, SOCIAL STRUCTURE, AND HISTORY

A central problem for socio-historical explanation is the relationship of mental processes and structures (defined in a wide sense) to the observed behavioural phenomena and the economic and social structures of societies. As we have seen in Chapter Two, this problem has moved to the centre of structural historical enquiry in recent decades. Whereas there used to be fairly sharp distinctions between studies of culture, social structure, economies, and politics, such that there were separate disciplines concerned with each one, these divisions have broken down increasingly in recent years. The undermining of the traditional disciplinary boundaries has come largely from anthropology which has always been more "interdisciplinary". Anthropologists have

usually been interested in the question of the relationship of mentality or culture to the wider society. The distinctiveness of humans as cultural beings is the anthropological problem *par excellence.*

What is the general relationship of mentality or culture to society? Is there a general relationship? Does the mental realm play a vital role in social transformation? In order to discuss these questions, we should first raise the question of the meanings of the concepts "ideas", "ideology", "culture", and "mentality". Each of these has been used to help designate a sub-field of historical enquiry or a theory of structure and its history. They are not alternative definitions of the same phenomena. "Ideas" usually refers to publicly stated, recorded, and shared explicit concepts, which are taken to have a history that can be studied. The history of ideas or intellectual history was thus traditionally the study of the development and social influence of certain key concepts in formal philosophical and social scientific discourse. There is often an unexamined assumption of progress in these studies.[1]

"Ideology" usually refers to a constellation of ideas of a socio-political kind that states a world view about history and society and is an impetus and guide to political action. The study of ideology is the study of socially significant systems of ideas, not all of which are explicitly stated and consciously subscribed to; indeed they may remain largely tacit. For theorists of ideology the problem is to account for the origins and political role of these ideational systems, which are usually taken to have a distorting effect on social understanding.[2]

"Culture" is a more encompassing concept than the two former ones but it has several related meanings depending on the intent and theoretical background of the user. Firstly, it traditionally meant formalised artistic expressions of societies and groups -- that is, semi-official or "high" culture. Secondly, it later came to include wider constellations of belief systems, implicit world views, forms of understanding, rituals, and

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1 See F. Ringer, 'The Intellectual Field, Intellectual History, and the Sociology of Knowledge' and the accompanying articles by C. Lewin and M. Jay in *Theory and Society,* Vol.19, No.3, 1990 for a recent debate about intellectual history. The relationship of intellectual history to cultural history and the history of mentalities is discussed in R. Darnton, 'Intellectual and Cultural History' (1980).

2 See the excellent discussion of ideology in J.B. Thompson, *Studies in the Theory of Ideology* (1984).

popular artistic expression. A third meaning is wider still in that it includes forms of productive life, including material products and tools.[3]

"Mentality" seems to be a term that is interchangeable with the second meaning of culture -- that is, it means the "popular" culture of ordinary people; how they understand themselves and the world and how they express themselves through religion, rituals, dress, music, and so on, in short, the external manifestations of mental life, a level of life that is concerned with making sense of the world.[4]

Now to return to our central question of the role of mental life of all kinds in social action and social change, mental life in the "mentality" sense cannot neatly or not even messily be separated from economic, social, and political life; or at least the onus is on those who wish to use such abstractions to show the explanatory significance of doing so. Social, economic, and cultural life can be abstractly defined, to be sure, but are these abstractions helpful in explanation? All these spheres of social life interpenetrate but they are *definable* separately. In modern society these abstractions do have more reality than in traditional society but even there they are not descriptive of radically separate real levels or spheres of structural reality. Culture is certainly not completely coterminous with social structure, economic organisation, or political practice. This is one of the prime distinguishing features of modern society -- the abstraction of spheres of social life and the growing separation of the spheres so that they can be out of phase, as it were, with each other. Traditional societies seem not to be so abstracted.[5] In other words, there does not seem to be a general ahistorical relationship between culture and social structure. Nevertheless, it is generally conceded, even by historical materialists, that the mental sphere plays a vital role in motivating, channelling, and even dominating human agency.

A refusal to draw sharp divisions between supposed branches of the social and historical studies and an anthropological orientation toward action and society have gone

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3 There are excellent discussions of the role of the concept of culture in social theory and arguments about the destinctiveness of culture from social structure in M. Archer, *Culture and Agency* (1988) and M. Mandelbaum, *Purpose and Necessity in Social Theory* (1987).

4 There is now an extensive literature on mentality, which I referred to in note 32 of Chapter Two. See the excellent discussions in R. Darnton, 'The History of Mentalities' (1978) and 'The Symbolic Element in History' (1986); D. La Capra, *History and Criticism* (1985), Ch.3 and *Soundings in Critical Theory* (1989), Ch.5; M Vovelle, *Ideologies and Mentalities* (1990); G.E.R. Lloyd, *Demystifying Mentalities* (1990).

5 Cf Gellner, *Legitimation of Belief* (1974) and Archer, *Culture and Agency* (1988) on the role of culture in social action and transformation.

hand in hand with a structurist methodology. For example, Clifford Geertz is usually considered to be an anthropologist or ethnologist, primarily examining the mentalities of particular societies and groups, especially in Java, Bali, and Morocco, but also in modern western society. But while doing this he has also explored the social, political, and even economic structures of his chosen societies as well as examining their histories. Robert Darnton, while ostensibly a social historian, has been strongly influenced by anthropological understanding, including Geertz's, when studying the mentalities, or structures of understanding, of 18th century France. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie has employed economic, social, psychological, cultural, political, and geographic perspectives and theories to explore the history of French agrarian society from late medieval times to the 19th century. Ernest Gellner, another ostensible anthropologist by institutional location, has written extensively about the processes of the rise of modern capitalist societies and cultures and their relationships with agrarian traditional societies, as well as about social theory and epistemology and the nature of modern society and culture. Similar but differently nuanced claims could be made for the work of Norbert Elias, Peter Burke, Barrington Moore, Philip Abrams, Natalie Zemon Davis, R.S. Neale, Paul Veyne, Alain Touraine, Michel Vovelle and others.

It is no accident that such putative structurists are often either anthropologically located or strongly influenced by anthropology. They see that the social structuring processes which give rise to pervasive structures of material, social, and mental relationships that link large numbers of people together into extensive societies and/or cultures have their origins as much in the beliefs, rituals, and ideologies of people as in the material, political, and geographical connections between them. Anthropology as a mode of thought and enquiry has been in its many manifestations the methodologically and theoretically most comprehensive, subtle, and developed of the social sciences. This is perhaps because of its extensive encounter with "alien" societies, beliefs, and forms of understanding, and consequent necessity of developing ways of reconciling western scientific rationalism with traditional non-scientific forms of explanation and understanding.[6]

In recent decades anthropologists have extended their range to enquire into present western cultures and societies, rightly seeing them as also requiring theoretically rich analysis and interpretation that goes beyond the more traditional approaches of sociology

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6 Cf R. Horton, 'African Traditional Thought and Western Science' (1967) and 'Tradition and Modernity Revisited' (1982); E. Gellner, *Relativism and the Social Sciences* (1985), Ch.3.

and economics. The "current situation" of the anthropologist's own society can be just as "alien" as that of traditional, pre-modern societies. The falsity of the simple "traditional = anthropology" and "modern = sociology" equations in social science has been well understood at last. This new understanding raises the question of the proper object of anthropological enquiry. In the broadest sense it deals with the nature of humans as socio-cultural beings and as such should reject the abstraction of people from their economic, social, and political contexts in order to study only their cultural contexts. The humanness of humans is not just to be found in traditional societies or in culture. An anthropological perspective on any society can bring to bear a combination of hermeneutical interpretation and scientific enquiry.[7]

Historians, too, perforce deal with "alien" societies and events, although this is not always obvious from their writings. The past is indeed another country, requiring explanations of its structural processes no less difficult to formulate, perhaps more so, than those of anthropologists examining living "alien" societies. The adoption of an ethnographic attitude by all historians (as well as sociologists) would help to improve their explanations for it would serve to limit the present-centric distortions of theoreticism and so-called "common sense". Of course historians must always be tied to the present and to a particular milieu but an attempt critically to quarantine the particular viewpoints of the milieu is essential if the realities of "alien" times and places are to be investigated.[8] But it is the very possibility of this quarantining that the relativist philosophers and theorists have rejected. While they too have supported an ethnographic attitude they have claimed that all investigations are subjective. The structurists do not agree with this although they are sympathetic to it. Objectivity is still fundamental to their work. For them social reality is not deconstructed by the theorist but persists in spite of the theorist. Nevertheless, social reality is *constructed* in and through the activities of structuring agents who have conscious and tacit understandings of the nature of their social and cultural milieu which help to constitute their structuring activity. Activity is constrained, though, by the prior existing structures (including cultures) that agents operate within to reproduce and transform their social life.

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7 The tasks, methodologies, and socio-political significance of anthropological discourse are explored in J. Clifford and G.E. Marcus (eds), *Writing Culture* (1986); and P. Rabinow, 'Humanism and Nihilism' (1983) and 'Discourse and Power' (1985).

8 For discussions of anthropological history see the references in note 30 of Chapter Two.

Even economic historians can be ethnographic and structurist. Insofar as they are methodologically warranted in their focus on the economy, they should employ theories of the relationship of economic action, institutions, and processes to the wider social, political, and cultural context. None of the putative structurist writers discussed in this chapter ignores or brackets the economic aspects of the totality and none of them adopts a present-centred attitude of projecting some narrow notion of capitalist economic rationality onto the past, a central feature of neo-classical economic history, as I pointed out in Chapter One.

II THE PROBLEM OF MODERNITY AND MODERNIZATION

The broad problem of the character of modernity and its preceding states and of the broad process of modernization is a central preoccupation in one form or another of many of those who have been concerned to construct structurist explanations. Whether it be, for example, Ladurie's early modern reformation and the origins of rural capitalism; Geertz's socio-cultural change in post-colonial Indonesia and Morocco; Darnton's pre-revolutionary breakdown and loss of mental, economic, and social legitimacy of the Ancien Régime; Moore's origins of capitalism and the modern working class; Hobsbawm's development of the capitalist world imperial system and of bourgeis society between the 18th and the 20th centuries; or Gellner's interest in disenchantment and social change in Christian and Islamic civilizations; they are concerned to study the processes of social and cultural dislocation attendant upon the rise and/or penetration of modern rationalism and capitalist relations in complex traditional societies. Indeed, these concerns are the heart of the contemporary social anthropological and historical sociological discourses for they began in a context of the new European and American imperial expansion and the triumph of bourgeois modernity in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Prior to that, European interest in "primitive" peoples tended to be Darwinian or physiological in focus and Euro-centric in its attempt positively to demonstrate the biological and cultural superiority of the white races. Gradually through the 20th century anthropology and historical sociology have come to focus increasingly on the problems of the universality of the structures of humanity's socio-cultural arrangements and the great transformation of traditional into modern.

III AGENCY, POWER, AND REALISM

Thus a central theme recurring in the work of structurist historians is the role of human agency in social structuring processes. The idea of agency is an essential notion in

methodological structurism and is closely allied to the idea of social realism. Rather than focussing on the motivation, behaviour, and power of individual persons or the holistic systems in which people supposedly are enmeshed, structurists focus on the dynamic processes of structuring action. Such individual and collective action has as its largely unconscious object the reproduction and maintenance of structures and occasionally their transformation. The concept of "agency" is very different from the various individualist concepts of the person and of action, such as rationalism and behaviourism, which emphasise abstracted individual autonomy, and from structuralist and functionalist concepts which emphasise the structural determination of action such that its only apparent role is carrying and instantiating the social relations and meanings of the totality.

"Agency" in general has two related meanings. Firstly, it is the relatively autonomous power that an entity or part of a system has to produce an effect -- that is, to be an agent of a change or phenomenon. Secondly, it is the power that a person has to act on behalf of another, according to a certain remit or instruction, to try to bring about a result or outcome desired by the principal. The concept of "social agency" combines elements from these two definitions so that it means, firstly, the power that persons in general have to be the active, change-inducing, relatively autonomous component within social structures that pre-exist each individual or group. All complex systems that are characterised by evolutionary or historical forces, such as ecosystems, insect and animal societies, and human societies, have agents for change within them. Secondly, it means that people individually and collectively are agents on behalf of "social principals" that take the form of pre-existing structures, norms, institutions, and so on, which require actively to be reproduced if they are to survive. However, the process of intended social reproduction gives rise to gradual and sometimes sudden transformations because of the necessity to reproduce the material basis of society by transforming the environment. This is the inherent non-subjective teleology within social systems. The duality of social agency is apparent from this -- people both *reproduce* and *transform* their social structural environment, as well as transforming their geographical/ ecological environment.

Thus "social agency" implies the ability of persons to choose courses of action and, acting upon their choices, to bring about certain structural changes because of their capacity to do so. [9] Nevertheless, choice is clearly not unconstrained and neither is action

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[9] On agency as the ability to choose alternative courses of action and to act upon those choices see, for example, D. Davidson, 'Agency', Ch 3 of his *Essays on Actions and Events* (1980); H.G. Frankfurt, 'Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person' (1982); C. Taylor, 'What is Human Agency?' (1977).

and its consequences. The constraints upon choice and action are the structural boundaries (ideological, cultural, social, political) of consciousness and action. Consciousness, choice, and action are, by necessity, largely oriented toward social reproduction. Transformation is usually the unintended consequence of attempted individual and collective reproduction rather than of unconstrained, freely acting, self-conscious political movements. Nevertheless, the latter force has on occasion brought about great upheavals, the ultimate results of which were largely unpredicted.

Therefore, agential persons should be conceptualised as beings with *collective* social structuring power who work upon pre-existing materials and within largely pre-existing patterns and relationships. A concept of social action is needed that does justice to the socially constructing power of subjective persons and the uneven distribution and effectiveness of their power. Indeed, the distribution of power is so uneven that many ordinary people believe that they have no power either to control their own lives or to influence social situations. For much of human history they have been virtually right in this belief -- i.e. social structures have correctly appeared to dominate their lives completely.

However, it is important to make several points about social power. Firstly, power is indeed unevenly distributed so that in all societies most people have little power to control and alter their own life patterns and a few people have a great deal of power to control their own lives, and the lives of others, and to manipulate and transform social situations and structures. The social embeddedness of power seems undeniable.

But, secondly, most people do not understand that they actually and potentially have more power than they believe they have; that is, they have a distorted consciousness of the collective strength of their social position and influence. This distortion is a result of three main things: social control through the pervasiveness of ideologies (including idealism, structuralism, and functionalism) that have the effect of hiding the possibility of social power and blocking its realisation; social autonomism which has precipitated irrational individualist action often resulting in the strengthening of repressive social structures; and a failure by all people until very recent

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On agency as structuring capacity see, for example, J. Piaget, *The Principles of Genetic Epistemology* (1972) and *Psychology and Epistemology* (1972); R. Harré, 'Architectonic Man: On the Structuring of Lived Experience' (1978) and *Social Being* (1979); A Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory* (1979), Ch .2., and *Social Theory and Modern Sociology* (1987), Ch.9; and R. Bhaskar, *The Possibility of Naturalism* (1979), Ch.3.

times to understand the mechanisms of social transformations that result from intended social reproduction. This internal dialectic of social life springs from the *necessity* for social production and reproduction through transformation of the physical and social environment.

Thirdly, following from the last point, ordinary people do have the potential for *collective* structuring power, a potential that history reveals has been realised in semi-conscious and fully-conscious group and class actions at many moments in history. At such moments ordinarily powerless individuals take on great structuring power through their collective action, the outcome of which is usually unpredictable but certainly socially transformative.

Therefore it is essential to uphold the notion of general human agency and social power against those who would argue that very few if any people are agents. Agency and power are not human characteristics that have to be manifested constantly in order to exist, as the behaviourists have incorrectly argued. They are *capacities* which may be manifested only at rare moments. On the other hand, all people unintentionally, constantly, and gradually do structure the social and geographical world in their daily lives so in that sense human power is always being exercised. People have the power -- the ability, the capacity -- to be agents both consciously and unconsciously.

So, there are several kinds of social action all of which can have some intended effects and some unintended results and which exhibit the variability of power. Firstly, there is personal interaction in small group situations, which are partly structured by that short-lived interaction. Secondly, there is collective or group action in which individuals act in shared patterns to achieve individual goals. Thirdly, there is patterned action in which individuals act in routinised shared patterns to achieve individual goals. And fourthly, there is political action which has as its deliberate aim the maintenance or transformation of the structures and patterns of a society and culture in which all other action takes place. Political action can be individual or group-based or class-based. All kinds of social action have intended and unintended results and people are also often unable to realise their goals through social action. The unrealised consequences of intentions and aims should be an important component of the explanation of social interaction. **10**

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10 See the explication of this point in A.O. Hirschman, *The Passions and The Interests* (1977), p. 131.

Concepts of human structuring agency and power imply the existence of real structures of rules, roles, and relations that are the emergent results, objects, and conditions of human choice, action, and thought. But this implication has to be defended against those ontological individualists who argue for either instrumentalist or phenomenological ideas of structure. In both cases structure is a mental construct, existing only in the thought of observers and/or actors. Nevertheless, these theorists concede that the *idea* of structure has a powerful influence upon action, even if its independent reality cannot be established.[11]

A realist social ontology can be based upon two arguments. Firstly, there can be a transcendental argument about society's necessary existence prior to and independent of individual and collective understandings at any particular moment. A transcendental argument takes the form of a regress from an assertion of certainty about the world to an assertion that something else which is unknown must be indispensable for that certainty to be the case. Given that behaviour is patterned and ordered and social relations and roles are apparently institutionalised and more or less stable there must be sets of rules that govern it. These rules, roles, and relations do not depend on either knowledge of them by particular individuals or the existence or actions of particular individuals. That is, they cannot be reduced to consciousness or to individuals. But they do depend for their continued existence on *collective* socially productive interactive behaviour. Society does not exist prior to social interaction in general but is the historical product of it. Nevertheless, there has never been a primordial moment when society was "awaiting" creation or emergence.

The second argument for social reality says that causal power rather than physical being or sensory apprehension is the vital index of existence. But the causal power does have to result in empirical effects before we can ascribe reality to it. In this case, social power is real if it results in observable human actions, utterances, and institutionally organised patterns of behaviour and production. The way to establish at least in theory the existence of social power is to argue that actions spring in large part from knowledge and beliefs about social structures and situations that are shared by groups

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11 For arguments for an instrumental concept of structure see J.S. Coleman, 'Social Structure and a Theory of Action' (1976) and 'Rational Actors in Macrosociological Analysis' (1979); and G. Homans, *Social Behaviour: Its Elementary Forms* (1961), and 'What do We Mean by Social "Structure"?' (1976). On the phenomenological concept of structure see T. Luckmann (ed), *Phenomenology and Sociology* (1978 .

of people. Intersubjective social knowledge and beliefs about the real coercive power of social rules, roles, and relations structure behaviour into strong behavioural patterns. Moreover, rules, roles, and relations structure behaviour and knowledge independently of consciousness, decisions, or choices. Freedom to choose does not mean freedom to act. Therefore, rules, roles, and relations are amongst the causes of behaviour and so must be real. (In Chapter Four I will flesh out this argument for social realism.)

IV THE DEVELOPMENT OF STRUCTURIST METHODOLOGY

While the terms "structurism" and "structuration theory" have only recently been extensively articulated and contrasted with versions of individualism and holism, there have been several earlier attempts to articulate such a position. It is not true, as has recently been claimed,[12] that "structuration theory" originates in the writings of Anthony Giddens. The central idea of structurism and structuration theory -- that humans are the reproductive and structuring agents of the social world -- had its origins in the European Enlightenment. We can find it in rudimentary form in the thought of the Scottish Historical School. As with most aspects of the social sciences, the influence of Karl Marx and Max Weber was pervasive in the early development of structurist methodology and theory. Marx's famous aphorisms in *The Theses on Feuerbach* and *The German Ideology* about the centrality of human praxis and in *The Eighteenth Brumaire* that it is men who make history but not under conditions of their own choosing are canonical statements but were not explicated in any detail by him. For Marx it was social classes as institutionalised collective structural actors who, acting largely in their collective material interests, were the prime agents of social history. Much of his work embodies this idea, especially those texts such as *The Eighteenth Brumaire* that analyse complex episodes and eras of rapid social change. The methodology is less immediately obvious in his accounts of long-run macro structural change such as of the origins and development of capitalism, but there too it can be uncovered as in the 'Pre-Capitalist Formations' section of *The Grundrisse.* Marx's historical materialism is not a form of deterministic methodological holism but contains an early (perhaps the earliest) version of methodological structurism.

Weber, being a scientific social theorist whereas Marx had been a radical social critic, extensively developed theories of rational action, the forms of social organisation of action, and the interrelationship of action, consciousness, and structure. He advocated a

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12 I.J. Cohen, *Structuration Theory* (1989), p. 1.

combination of hermeneutical interpretism and causal explanation in his explicitly methodological writings, and he was opposed to a historical materialist theory of structure and history. But in some of his works of social structural history, such as *The Agrarian Sociology* and *General Economic History*, we can see a form of structurist methodology being employed. Perhaps most importantly, Weber inspired a broad stream of socio-historical enquiry that has centred on the power of ideational/cultural frameworks for structuring individual and collective action rather than Marx's emphasis on ideologies as forms of false consciousness about real material interests. Nevertheless, in recent years the complementarities rather than contradictions of their methodologies and macrosocial theories have begun to be well understood.[13]

Weber's contemporary Georg Simmel was one of the first thoroughly to think through the problem of the boundaries of the domain of sociology as a distinct science. His argument remains of fundamental importance to the articulation of a structurist framework. He extensively defined and defended the notions of "society" and "sociation" as the basis of comprehending the relationship of individuality and society. Society for him is a structure that is both the emergent product and the presupposition of social interaction. In his book *Sociologie* he wrote that

> The concept of "society" has two denotations which scientific treatment must keep strictly distinct. The first designates society as the complex of societalized individuals, the societally formed human material as it has been shaped by the totality of historical reality. The second denotes society as the sum of those forms of relationship by virtue of which individuals are transformed into "society" in the first sense of the term. ... When using "society" in the first sense, the social sciences indicate that their subject matter includes everything that occurs in and with society. But when using the term in the second sense, social science indicates that its subject matter is the forces, relations, and forms through which human beings become sociated. Studied separately, these forces, relations, and forms show society in the strictest sense of the term. And this, of course, is not altered by the fact that the content of sociation (that is, the special modifications of its material purpose and interest) often if not always determines its specific form. ...
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> There is no such thing as society "as such"; that is, there is no society in the sense that it is the condition for the emergence of all these particular phenomena. For there is no such thing as interaction "as such" -- there are only specific kinds of interaction. And it is with their emergence that society too emerges, for they are neither the cause nor the consequence of society, but are, themselves, society. The fact that an extraordinary multitude and variety of interactions operate at any one moment has given a seemingly autonomous historical reality to the general concept of society. [14]

A little later in the book he dealt with the problem of the individual/social relationship:

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13 Cf K. Lowith, *Max Weber and Karl Marx* (1982); R.J. Antonio and R.M. Glassman (eds), *A Marx-Weber Dialogue* (1985); N. Wiley (ed), *The Marx-Weber Debate* (1987).

14 G. Simmel, *Essays on Sociology, Philosophy and Aesthetics* (ed. K.H. Wolff) (1959), pp. 318-320.

The processes of consciousness which formulate sociation -- notions such as the unity of the many, the reciprocal determination of the individuals, the significance of the individual for the totality and of the others and vice-versa -- presuppose something fundamental which finds expression in practice although we are not aware of it in its abstractness. The presupposition is that individuality finds its place in the structure of generality, and, furthermore, that in spite of the unpredictable character of individuality, this structure is laid out, as it were, for individuality and its functions. The nexus by which each social element (each individual) is interwoven with the life and activities of every other, and by which the external framework of society is produced, is a causal nexus. But it is transformed into a teleological nexus as soon as it is considered from the perspective of the elements that carry and produce it -- individuals. For they feel themselves to be egos whose behavior grows out of autonomous, self-determined personalities. The objective totality yields to the individuals that confront it from without, as it were; it offers a place to their subjectively determined life-processes, which thereby, in their very individuality, become necessary links in the life of the whole. It is this dual nexus which supplies the individual consciousness with a fundamental category and thus transforms it into a social element. [15]

Simmel was a highly original and insightful thinker who was partly responsible, along with Weber, for founding sociology as a separate discipline in Germany before the Great War. But there is not and never has been a school of Simmelian sociology as there has been with Marx and Weber, perhaps because he made no strong intervention in the methodological debates over positivism and hermeneutics of the time and because the potential of a structurist framework was neglected in those debates. His influence waned until the 1960s, when there was some revival of it in America, and in the 1980s his contribution to the sociology of modernism has been appreciated anew as has his contribution in *The Philosophy of Money* to the conceptual foundations of economic theory.

Jean Piaget's genetic epistemology and psychology has been a major contribution to the development of structurist methodology and theory. Piaget's book on *Structuralism* (1968) is perhaps the most important text in the development of structurism before those of Giddens (his importance is unacknowledged by Giddens) because of his emphasis on the genesis and transformation of structures and the duality of the structure/structuring relationship. Piaget wrote that

if the character of structured wholes depends on their laws of composition, these laws must of their very nature be *structuring*: it is the constant duality, or bipolarity, of always being simultaneously *structuring* and *structured* that accounts for the success of the notion of law or rule employed by structuralists. [16]

The central problem, then, for this approach to structures, is that of "*construction* and of the relationship between *structuralism* and *constructivism*".[17] Far from the subject's

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15 *Ibid.*, pp. 354-5.

16 J. Piaget, *Structuralism* (1968), p 10.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

disappearing or dying in this sort of structuralism, as some post-structuralists have asserted, rather it is decentred. That is, for Piaget,

> the subject's activity calls for a continual "de-centring" without which he cannot become free from his spontaneous intellectual egocentricity. This "de-centring" makes the subject enter upon, not so much an already available and therefore external universality, as an interrupted process of coordinating and setting in reciprocal relations. It is the latter process which is the true "generator" of structures as constantly under construction and reconstruction. The subject exists because, to put it very briefly, the being of structures consists in their coming to be, that is, their being "under construction". ... *There is no structure apart from construction,* either abstract or genetic. ... The problem of genesis is not just a question of psychology; its framing and its solution determine the very meaning of the idea of structure. The basic epistemological alternatives are predestination or some sort of constructivism. [18]

The contemporary development of structurist sociological methodologies in Anglophone countries owes a good deal, often unacknowledged, to the pervasiveness of the ideas of Marx, Weber, and Piaget, in particular. Somewhat outside this macrosociological stream, the ongoing work of Rom Harré has also been influential. He has concentrated on the social psychological roots of micro social interactions that have produced small-scale webs of social situations and episodes. He has drawn upon the social constructionist, dramaturgical, and phenomenological streams in social psychology, as developed by, for example, Schutz, Mead, Goffman, and Burke. But Harré has stepped back from propounding a macrosociological approach on the mistaken phenomenological grounds of the supposed unreality of macrosocial entities.[19] Roy Bhaskar, an erstwhile student of Harré's, does not share Harré's ambivalence about either the reality of macro social structures or the duality of the structure/individual relationship. He has extensively explored the importance of the interrelationship of concepts of structure, structuring agency, realism, and science at a high level of abstraction.[20]

The contribution of Anthony Giddens to articulating the "Structurationist Paradigm" was discussed in the previous chapter and need not be repeated. From the point of view of the explicit development and exemplification of an empirical-historical methodology the work of Philip Abrams and Norbert Elias is more valuable. Abrams has not only espoused a form of structurism in the crucial book *Historical Sociology* but also

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18 *Ibid.*, pp. 139-141.

19 See the Bibliography for some of the relevant work of Harré. One of those influenced by Harré is the social psychologist John Shotter. The Bibliography has some references to his work.

20 See the Bibliography for Bhaskar's work.

employed it in sociological analyses.[21] Norbert Elias' figurational notion of society can also be seen as a form of structurism for he posits the nexus between individual consciousness and action and prior social figurations as fundamental to society.[22]

There are also important contemporary French contributors to the development of versions of structurism. Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of "practice" and "habitus" and his work on the problem of social reproduction are relevant here[23] as are Alain Touraine's studies and theorisation of the dynamic interrelationships of action, consciousness, structures, and history.[24]

V STRUCTURIST HISTORIOGRAPHY

I now need to demonstrate my claim that structurist methodology, as formulated through the foregoing discussion, informs the work of many structural historians. I shall try to do so in two ways; firstly by briefly discussing particular works and, secondly, by discussing the entire corpus of two exemplary historians.

Many examples of historical writing could be considered as employing methodological structurism, including the following. Firstly, Robert Darnton's work on 18th century France has been particularly concerned with the social roles of mentalities and other more articulated and systematic ideologies in structuring actions, behavioural patterns, production, and social hierarchies.[25] Being a historian, he is not directly concerned with drawing general theoretical conclusions (nor with applying general theories for that matter) about social and cultural structures and change. Rather, he sees the task as more hermeneutical and empirical but this does not prevent him from striving for objective explanations of structuring processes.

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21 Some of Abrams' work is listed in the Bibliography.

22 See the Bibliography for references to the work of Elias.

23 See the Bibliography for references to the work of Bourdieu.

24 See the Bibliography for references to the work of Touraine.

25 See the Bibliography for Robert Darnton's writings. Discussions of his work include R. Chartier, *Cultural History* (1988), Ch. 4; D. LaCapra, *Soundings in Critical Theory* (1989), Ch. 3; and M. Mah, 'Suppressing the Text' (1991).

Secondly, Barrington Moore in *Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt*[26] attempted to construct a multi-levelled analysis of structural changes and, moreover, one that charted the interpenetration of the economy, class structure, politics, and culture. A complex of moments of social reality -- personality, action, ideology, culture, and structure -- were examined through theories of how these multiple realities intersected to produce the phenomena of socio-political consciousness and behaviour by the working class of Germany in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Thirdly, in a somewhat different manner Eric Hobsbawm's work, including his three-volume *magnum opus* on the history of the modern world from the late 18th to the early 20th centuries -- *The Age of Revolution*, *The Age of Capital*, and *The Age of Empire* -- and his historical studies of labouring classes, analyse the layered complexity of society and the causal interrelationships of actions, events, and structures.[27] Both Hobsbawm and Moore pay close attention to the causal relationships over time between macro "levels" of the social totality, but although their analyses of these relationships are informed partly by some of the concepts of historical materialism this theory does not determine their empirical findings about the hierarchy of social forces and motivations in particular instances.

A fourth example, and another of those partly inspired by Marxism, that of R.S. Neale, also shows how a version of Marxism can be at once a pervasive influence on explanation but at the same time a non-determining one. Some of his writings, especially *Bath 1680-1850: A Social History* and *Writing Marxist History*,[28] contain a combination of a materialist understanding of society, a set of Marxist categories about class, production, and ideology, and detailed empirical and interpretive enquiries into processes of class structuring and the production of material and mental culture. These enquiries reveal the complex structuring process of early modern England undergoing transformation from an agrarian-aristocratic society to an industrial-bourgeois one.[29]

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26 Barrington Moore, *Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt* (1978). For a thorough discussion see D. Smith, *Barrington Moore: Violence, Morality, and Political Change* (1983).

27 E. J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution, Europe 1789-1848* (1962), *The Age of Capital, 1848-1875* (1975), *The Age of Empire, 1875-1814* (1987), *Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour* (1964), and *Captain Swing* (with George Rudé) (1973). See E. Genovese, 'The Politics of Class Struggle in the History of Society: An Appraisal of the Work of Eric Hobsbawm' (1984).

28 R.S. Neale, *Bath 1680-1850: A Social History* (1981) and *Writing Marxist History: British Society, Economy and Culture Since 1700* (1985).

29 Historical materialism as a general theory of history is ultimately incompatible with methodological and sociological structurism because, as I have indicated, structurism precludes the

Of course it is possible to be a theoretically explicit historian, even an applied historical sociologist, and not be influenced to any significant extent by Marxism. This is the case with the historical writings of Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Norbert Elias, Reinhard Bendix, Ernest Gellner, and Charles Tilly, for example. Bendix, Gellner, and Tilly have been strongly influenced by Weber.

Ernest Gellner's philosophical writings are inseparable from his anthropological and sociological concerns. His work as a whole provides a good example of an attempt to combine these aspects of modern western thought into one synthetic framework for understanding the origins and complexity of modernity as a great divide from traditional society. *Thought and Change; Saints of The Atlas; Muslim Society; and Plough, Sword, and Book* all carry forward this project of grasping the essential constellation of structures and ideas that set the modern world apart from the traditional.[30]

The final brief example is Charles Tilly, a long-term defender of what amounts to structurism and a sophisticated employer of social theory drawn from different sources, including Weber and perhaps more so Durkheim.[31] But he has also opposed the use of broad ahistorical categories and theories, such as "modernization". He has been particularly concerned with the pivotal role of sudden collective acts, such as riots and revolts, which he has examined for their long-run ideological and structural causes and consequences.

There are several others who could be cited as also among those who have offered similar analyses of socio-historical processes employing such multi-levelled, multi-momented perspectives. At their best, all these writings show, I believe, that a social structural historiography that strives to be empirically and theoretically adequate to the complexities and multiple realities of society also expresses intuitively grasped truths

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idea of a fundamental cause of historical change or human motivation which is ahistorical. No matter how a historical materialist theory is couched or hedged about it must remain, if it is conceptually coherent, a general theory of society and history. Nevertheless, there are many historians influenced by Marxism, including those just mentioned, who do not employ such an ahistorical theory and so it certainly seems to be possible to be a methodological structurist while drawing upon concepts developed by Marx. This of course begs the question of the materialist status or otherwise of Marx's theory. The significance of historical materialism will be discussed in Chapter Five.

30 See the Bibliography for Gellner's works.

31 See the Bibliography for some of Tilly's main historical and methodological writings.

through insight and interpretation. The power to compel assent depends on both kinds of criteria, as I have tried to argue above when discussing the relevance of hermeneutics to science. Let me now try to establish this point in greater detail by examining at some length the work of Clifford Geertz and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie.

VI CLIFFORD GEERTZ -- The Scientific Cultural Hermeneutics of Structures

Overview of the Work of Geertz

Clifford Geertz is one of the most widely respected anthropologists and sociologists of recent decades. Born in San Francisco in 1926 he was educated at Antioch College and Harvard University where he studied in the Department of Social Relations, headed by Talcott Parsons. He held positions in several American Universities, including MIT, Berkeley, and Chicago, before becoming a Professor at the Institute of Advanced Study, Princeton, in 1970, where he has remained. In 1973 he wrote that the American University system, which at that time was "under attack as irrelevant or worse", had been for him a "redemptive gift" by providing an ideal setting for scholarly work.[32]

Geertz's work shows the influence of several streams of ideas prevalent in 20th century social thought. Perhaps the strongest influences came, firstly, from functionalist sociology and anthropology, especially via the writings of Malinowski and of Parsons' idiosyncratic new synthesis of functionalism and Weberian macro sociology. Secondly, there was also Weber's sociology of religion. Thirdly, there was a strong influence from the stream of ethnography that had been influenced by Wittgensteinian ordinary-language philosophy as espoused by Ryle, Winch, and Evans-Prichard. Fourthly, there was a strong influence from the semiotic theories of Kenneth Burke and Suzanne Langer. And finally there was the influence of hermeneutic theory as developed by Ricoeur and others. But it cannot be said that Geertz's work belongs to a particular school. In fact he has rejected various labels and has attempted to develop a new synthesis of the social sciences, as we shall see.[33]

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32 Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973), p. ix.

33 Geertz has discussed his career and influences on his work in 'Recollections of an Itinerant Career' (1988).

In trying to come to grips with Geertz's entire corpus, six main aspects of his work can be identified. These are not discrete categories but aspects of an integrated evolving approach, which is focused on the general problems of understanding and explaining social order via understanding the role of meaning in social life and, more particularly, on explaining the complexities of modernization.

The first aspect is his early Javanese anthropology and socio-economic studies, published in the years 1956-65. These writings were partly the result of fieldwork in Java in 1953-4 and 1957-8 and together were a self-conscious attempt to provide an interdisciplinary analysis of a society. As he wrote in *Agricultural Involution* (1963), he tried to "establish a fruitful interaction between biological, social, and historical sciences".[34] This involved examining the religion, culture, manners, social structure, economic system, and ecological interaction of a Javanese town and the history of all these over the previous century or so. Not all the works of this period on Java achieve all these integrated aims at once but they do all attempt an integrated analysis to some extent. For example, his earliest essays on the contemporary Javanese economy in the years between 1956 and 1959 gave a central place to the role of religion, culture, and social structure in influencing economic behaviour.

In the 1950s the study of economic underdevelopment had become a major geo-political, strategic, and academic problem, especially in the United States with its Cold War climate of opinion. On the whole, approaches to the problem of how to stimulate development were less narrowly economistic than they later became and more influenced by social, psychological, and cultural theories, including the work of Weber and Parsons, particularly Parsons' interpretation of Weber. While Geertz was never really part of the Modernization School of theory centred on the work of Hoselitz, Moore, Higgins, Stigler, and others, there was some influence on his early work from this school. Some of his earliest writings were published in their journal, *Economic Development and Cultural Change*. The School took the general line, as the title indicates, that economic development could not be explained or promoted without reference to cultural change. But their understanding of and use of the simplistic traditional/modern dichotomy and their theories of culture, the role of entrepreneurship, and importance of free enterprise capitalism in promoting the welfare of economically underdeveloped peoples, were not followed by Geertz to any great extent. While they adopted a western or Americo-centric perspective that tended to divide the world into a few simple categories, Geertz took a

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34 Geertz, *Agricultural Involution: the Process of Ecological Change in Indonesia* (1963), p. xviii.

more local ethnographic or nativist point of view. He wrote in *Peddlers and Princes* (1963) that

> the method of anthropology -- intensive, first-hand field study of small social units within the larger society -- means that its primary contribution to the understanding of economic development must inevitably lie in a relatively microscopic and circumstantial analysis of a wide range of social processes as they appear in concrete form in this village, or that town, or the other social class; the theoretical framework of the economist almost inevitably trains his interest on the society as a whole and on the aggregate implications for the entire economy of the processes the anthropologist studies in miniature. (p. 4)

Thus he produced a series of writings on Javanese cultural anthropology in this period, including *The Religion of Java* (1960) which was the definitive work up to that time. However, his writing was not without significant traces of the dominant American socio-economic theories of the time, notably functionalism, modernization theory, and even the Rostowian "take-off" concept. Nevertheless, he was critical of and sceptical about the usefulness of these theories. I shall say more about his use of theory in a moment.

A new phase in Geertz's published work began in 1959 with the results of his Balinese research. He first did field work in Bali in 1957-8 and that began a continuing interest in and engagement with Balinese society, culture, and history. The Balinese research served partly as a foil or comparison with the Javanese work, such as in *Peddlers and Princes* (1963), and he later added a Moroccan perspective. But it is Bali with which Geertz is most closely associated. His Balinese writings and themes contain the quintessence of his interpretive, historical anthropology, his anthropological methodology, and his theory of society. These themes are interwoven in, for example, his seminal essays 'Person, Time, and Conduct in Bali' (1966) and 'Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight' (1972) and his book *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth Century Bali* (1980).

Geertz opened a third part of his work with his field work in Morocco in 1964-66. This interest resulted in two of his most important works, *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia* (1968) and later with Hildred Geertz and Lawrence Rosen, *Meaning and Order in Moroccan Society* (1979), as well as informing many of his subsequent writings. *Islam Observed* is an ambitious attempt to "lay out a general framework for the comparative analysis of religion and to apply it to a study of the development of a supposedly single creed, Islam, in two quite contrasting civilizations". (p. v) This is a task of Weberian proportions and reminiscent of Weber's sociology of religion but not on the same scale.

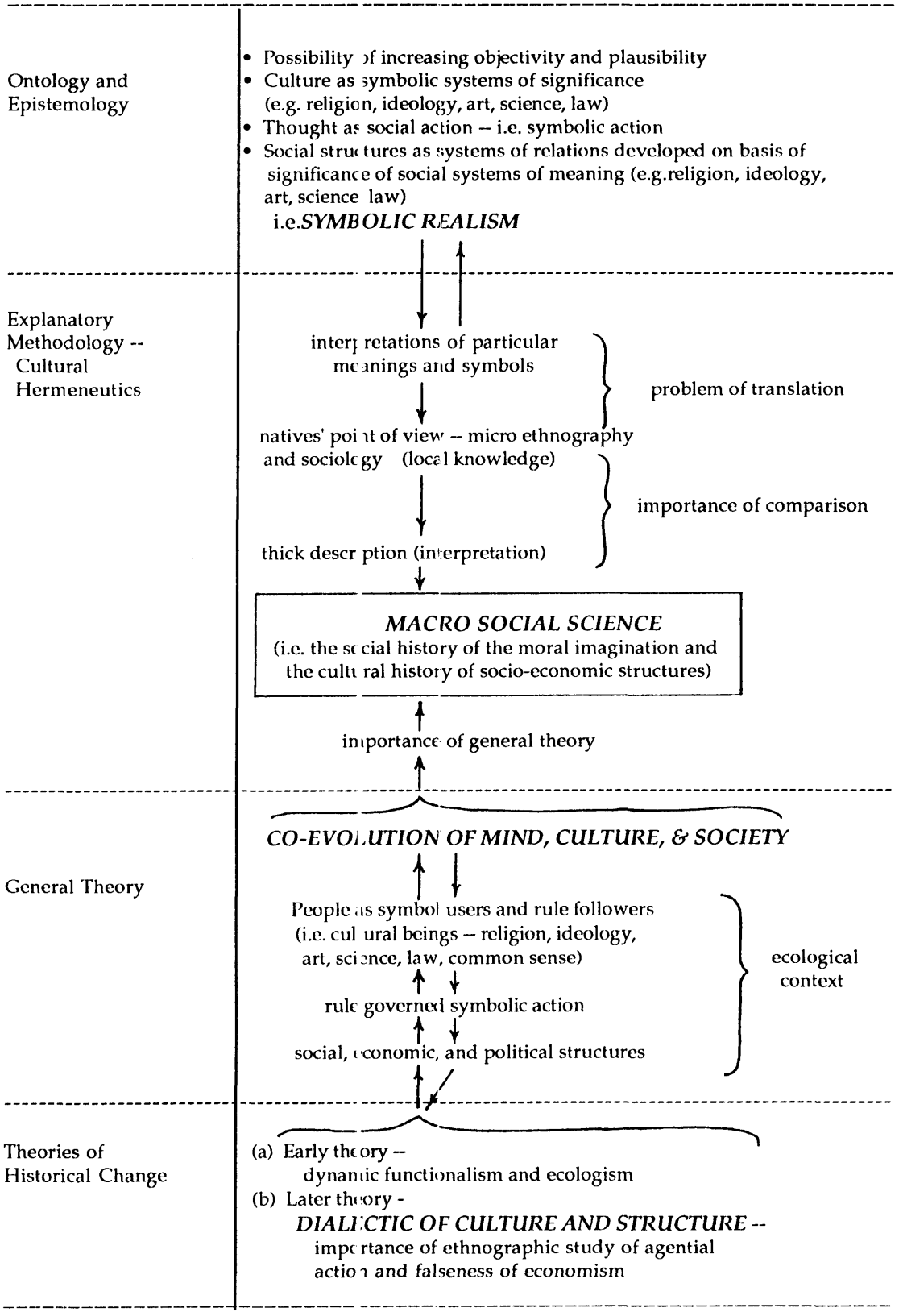
Overlapping with the Javanese, Balinese, and Moroccan aspects of Geertz's work can be found a fourth aspect -- generalised writings on the broad problem of economic development and underdevelopment in what came to be known as "The Third World" or what he sometimes referred to as "The New States". Indeed, this was always part of Geertz's perspective even when writing in fine ethnographic detail about his three source cultures. But he always remained the ethnographically-oriented observer, building from the particular village to the global situation rather than the reverse. As an anthropologist, he wrote in *Islam Observed*, he was attempting to "discover what contributions parochial understandings can make to comprehensive ones, what leads to general, broad-stroke interpretations particular, intimate findings can produce". (p. vii)

Now we come to the fifth and perhaps most important, aspect of his work for, as he said, he was not content to remain at the parochial level but rather was concerned to discuss very general issues to do with human nature and its relationship with culture and society. So we can label this aspect as discussions of the problem of the methodology of interpretive anthropology, cultural hermeneutics, the cultural concept of humankind, and the culturalist concept of society. Such discussions were first published as early as 1962 and have remained a central theme through his work ever since, the best example being his central essay on 'Thick Description' (1973).

Finally, there is a sixth and related theme -- discussions of modern western thought, its relationship with other cultures, and problems of the philosophy of social scientific knowledge. Here the central works are some of the essays collected in *Local Knowledge* (1983) and the lectures in *Works and Lives* (1988).

Looking at Geertz's work as a whole it is possible to discern a coherent structure in his thought such that each aspect -- philosophy, methodology, theory, and empirical enquiry -- is closely interconnected with the whole, as in Figure 3.1. Like all such summarised reconstructions of the thought of particular writers and schools it must be understood that this diagram makes Geertz's work seem very coherent and systematic -- more so than it really is perhaps -- and idicates an apparent hierarchy of ideas

Figure 3.1 The Structure of Geertz's Thought



and implications that are not all well delineated and traced out in his work. And of course even if such a reconstruction is well warranted in his work it doesn't mean that this structure of ideas sprang well-formed and complete from his mind in one creative act. It must be remembered that such a *post hoc* reconstruction attempts to establish a coherent model or system of ideas with which to grapple in a critical way. Nevertheless, Geertz's corpus of work does naturally have an unusually high degree of coherence, which he has himself written about on occasion; and this makes this reconstruction a fairly objective one.

Geertz's Philosophical and Methodological Framework

As Figure 3.1 indicates, he has attempted to steer a course between the poles of objectivism and relativism in his philosophy of explanation. The powerful idea that we can never, as anthropologists, historians, sociologists, or common sense observers, fully apprehend and understand another culture, society, or era as the native does seems to lead to relativism, but this is not to say that we cannot apprehend and describe at all. He believed that it is not only possible but essential to marry hermeneutics and social science and that many writers do so. To write "the social history of the moral imagination" is to try, he said, to penetrate the tangle of hermeneutical involvements,

> to locate with some precision the instabilities of thought and sentiment it generates and set them in a social frame. Such an effort hardly dissolves the tangle or removes the instabilities. Indeed,... it rather brings them more disturbingly to notice. But it does at least (or can) place them in an intelligible context, and until some cliometrician, sociobiologist, or deep linguist really does solve the Riddle of the Sphinx, that will have to do. [35]

Any strong version of relativism quickly reduces to absurdity for it at least implies the impossibility of understanding anything but ourselves and that is then also impossible because of the lack of shared language and reference. Consciousness, whether of self or other, is impossible without language for it is language that structures and develops in symbiosis with consciousness. Language is quintessentially social so the possibility of social understanding and knowledge arises from the existence of language. Language is a (perhaps the) fundamental social structure without which human consciousness and existence would be impossible. So we can be confident that at least substantial degrees of both personal and interpersonal social understanding and knowledge are not only possible but necessary to human existence. It is this ontological platform that has to be built upon, a platform that can be called *symbolic realism.*

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35 Geertz, 'Found in Translation' (1977), in *Local Knowledge* (1983), p. 45.

The ontology of symbolic realism is a central idea in Geertz's work. We encounter it in his ethnographic, socio-economic, and methodological writings. By "symbolic realism" is meant the dualistic idea that, firstly, language is a real structure of symbols that exists independently of any person's consciousness, thought, and utterances, and secondly, being symbolic, language is representative on many levels of an autonomous reality that it attempts to grasp. Language is real in the sense of objectivity but it does not create the external reality that it represents. Language grows out of reality. Nevertheless, reality is only apprehendable via language, but reality can be represented in many ways and on many levels by many forms of language. Furthermore, social reality, unlike natural reality, is the reproduced and transformed product of historical social interaction carried out in a context of social understandings which are mediated linguistically or symbolically. For Geertz, forms of social interaction grow out of systems of social relations that are at the same time organised as forms of symbolic meaning, such as religion, ideology, art, science and law. "In the last analysis, then, as in the first," he wrote in the Introduction to *Loca Knowledge*,

> the interpretive study of culture represents an attempt to come to terms with the diversity of the ways human beings construct their lives in the act of leading them. (p. 16)

Geertz subscibes to a sort of weak relativism that is actually better labelled as "localism" or, as he also put it, seeing things "from the native's point of view" because meaning is socially constructed.[36] But that is not the only point of view. The complexities of the social world must be seen in all their complexity.[37] A social science based on an ontology of symbolic realism and localism *à la* Geertz requires hermeneutical interpretation of systems of meanings through examining the symbolic representations and the cultural conduct of people who carry and reproduce these meaning systems. Meanings are not just to be found in forms of cultural expression. If social, economic, and political life is also cultural life any sharp distinctions between them are ruled out. He approaches all forms of social explanation ethnographically. So we can say that for him social science relies upon socio-cultural hermeneutics to make a "thick description" of episodes, situations, and the complex meanings embedded in and helping to determine social life. Ethnography is faced with "a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted in to one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and

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36 Geertz, 'The Uses of Diversity' (1986), p. 262.

37 See Geertz, 'Culture and Social Change: the Indonesian Case' (1984), p. 523.

inexplicit".[38] Grasping and rendering these is a difficult task of semiotic translation so that it is like

> trying to read (in the sense of "construct a reading of") a manuscript -- foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherences, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behavior. [39]

The methodology of social science must be, then, a combination of micro-ethnography, thick description, and macro-empirical-historical enquiry that attempts to transcend ethnocentrism. We are not trapped in our own culture, unable to grasp others in their complexity. There must and can be a degree of objectivity and universality. Indeed, the value of being able to understand diversity is that it allows us to understand ourselves as well as the social world. It is the asymmetries, he said,

> between what we believe or feel and what others do, that make it possible to locate where we now are in the world, how it feels to be there, and where we might or might not want to go. To obscure those gaps and those asymmetries by relegating them to a realm of repressible or ignorable differences, mere unlikeness, which is what ethnocentrism does and is designed to do ... is to cut us off from such knowledge and such possibility: the possibility of quite literally, and quite thoroughly, changing our minds. [40]

For the ethnographer as for all social enquirers there are fundamental problems of translation and the use of theory While we undoubtedly share our humanity and we all have languages there is a persistent worry that we might not be able to understand those whose languages (in both the linguistic and cultural senses) we do not share. Translation is problematic in social science as well as in everyday life. To be at all possible translation must involve immersion in the thought world of the society whose language and culture are being translated. For Geertz this has meant the necessity for micro-ethnography -- studying the small-scale social life of villages, local customs and culture, and local political and economic activities -- in order to build up to macro analyses. But he is not advocating a simple empiricism of fact gathering:

> The bulk of what I have eventually seen (or thought I have seen) in the broad sweep of social history I have seen (or thought I have seen) first in the narrow confines of country towns and peasant villages. A number of people ... have questioned whether this sort of procedure is a defensible one. ... of course ... it is invalid. ... Anthropologists are not ... attempting to substitute parochial understandings for comprehensive ones, to reduce America to Jonesville or Mexico to Yucatan. They are attempting (or, to be more precise, I am attempting) to discover what contributions

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38 Geertz, 'Thick Description' (1973), p. 10.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

40 Geertz, 'The Uses of Diversity' (1984), p. 264.

parochial understandings can make to comprehensive ones, what leads to general, broad-stroke interpretations particular, intimate findings can produce. I myself cannot see how this differs, save in content, from what an historian, political scientist, sociologist, or economist does, at least when he turns away from his own version of Jonesville and Yucatan and addresses himself to wider problems. We are all special scientists now, and our worth, at least in this regard, consists of what we are able to contribute to a task, the understanding of human social life, which no one of us is competent to tackle unassisted....

Like all scientific propositions, anthropological interpretations must be tested against the material they are designed to interpret; it is not their origins that recommend them. [41]

Here the role of theory takes its necessary place for it is theory that enables generalisation and sets a framework for employing concepts developed from particular cases for other cases and for making sense of particular cases in the first place. As he said in *Peddlers and Princes* (p. 142), particular local studies of economic development enable more intensive probing of general dynamics and of the social and cultural context in which development occurs. The "gross dichotomies and over-systematic ideal types" that have been employed in development studies can be got behind and some greater flexibility introduced. But this doesn't imply an atheoretical "every case is diferent" attitude. A balance must be sought between broad categories and local variations. (pp. 146-7) *Peddlers and Princes* attempted to achieve this by developing a middle-range sociological theory of development, which I shall say something about in a moment.

Geertz's book *Negara* contains perhaps his most sustained theory-building attempt. There he wished to attempt to construct a framework for studying the structural history -- ecological, ethnographic, sociological -- of the Indic-Indonesian civilizational form. In order to do that he had to have an appropriate model of socio-cultural processes in such civilizations. In constructing this theoretical model he employed a combination of some knowledge of developmental sequences of civilizations elsewhere, an ideal typical formulation isolating central features of the form, and detailed ethnographic analysis of a current case that is assumed to have a familial resemblance to other cases.[42] But he put the ethnographic component at the centre of the theory-building process. Having constructed a model of the negara or theatre state as a political order it could be applied experimentally. The model is

a conceptual entity, not a historical one. On the one hand, it is a simplified, necessarily unfaithful, theoretically tendentious representation of a relatively well-known sociocultural institution: the nineteenth century Balinese state. On the other, it is a guide, a sort of sociological blueprint, for the construction of representations, not necessarily or even probably identical to it in structure, of a

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41 Geertz, *Islam Observed*, p. vii.

42 Geertz, *Negara: the Theatre State in 19th Century Bali*, p. 6.

whole set of relatively less well-known but presumably similar institutions: the classical Southeast Asian Indic states of the fifth to fifteenth centuries. [43]

The use of such theoretical models is essential in shaping structural history or historical sociology, which of course amount to the same thing. Historical enquiry can only be done from the present but that does not mean there is an inevitably linking past and present.

Geertz's General Theories of Society and History

The ethnographic and an hropological methodology of social explanation implies the rejection of various forms of reductionist arguments. That is, the complexity of societies and their history cannot be grasped by an oversimplifying theory that tries to see everything in economic, or social class, or cultural terms. The following slightly artificially articulated passages serve to convey what we can call Geertz's ***anthropological-ecological model and theory of complexity.***

What we [the authors of *Meaning and Order in Moroccan Society*] all hold is not any particular interpretation of any particular aspect of Moroccan society, ... any overarching "theory of society", or even any shared attitude toward the moral and political implications of what we imagine we found out (save, of course, that there are some). What we all hold is the view that the systems of meaning, whether highly explicit like Islam or rather less so like hospitality, in terms of which individuals live out their lives constitute what order those lives attain. We see social relationships as embodying and embodied in symbolic forms that give them structure, and we are concerned to identify such forms and trace their impact. (p. 6)

The interplay of environment and culture is one of the basic themes to which anthropologists have devoted themselves. If their studies have established anything, it is that the environment is no mere given, no neutral constant, no passively enduring condition. Rather, it is an integral part of man's life-world, as deeply shaped by social conditions as social conditions are mediated by it. The natural setting is more than a context to adapt to, a store of resources to draw on, or a stage on which the drama of social life is played out; the ways in which a civilization works out its relation to its setting over a long period of time makes the environment a vital aspect of that civilization itself. To explore the irrigation of land use patterns of people of bled Sefrou is to explore how its inhabitants use the available resources, how they make the resources a part of their own social drama, and how their ecological adaptations relate to other aspects of their culture. (p. 8)

What is perhaps the central theme of his work -- the necessity to take the complexity of social reality seriously and not reduce it to simple formulae -- is strongly evident in many of his works. The anthro-ecological model ties together the personal, ecological, cultural, social, economic, and political aspects of human life in such a way as to make sense of each of them within what seems at first glance to be a holistic frame, which is probably what Geertz would call it but what should more accurately be described as a *structurist* frame. From his earliest work in the mid-1950s onwards he has been concerned to examine the interconnections between these traditionally defined but often

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43 *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

abstracted aspects of the totality in order to explain economic and social change, cultural phenomena, and the nature of humanity.

The anthro-ecological model has several components. First there is the idea of people as cultural beings whose actions, behaviour, and interrelationships are culturally structured. Peoples' actions are rule-governed and employ symbolic forms as well as being symbolic. That is, the outward forms of actions and utterances, whether they be formal structures such as religion, law, and science or artistic expression or political ideology or just so-called common sense, are all symbolic in that they are culturally embedded forms that symbolise structures of belief and meaning.

Secondly, rule governed symbolic actions and interactions structure the world of economic, social, and political institutions. Social structures are systems of relations and interactions developed on the basis of the significance of systems of meaning such as religion, ideology, science, law, common sense, and art.

Thirdly, systems of meaning, social structures, and forms of social interaction all take place within a physical, ecological, and geographical context which sets certain limits, at least temporarily, to social arrangements and economic development.

And finally, Geertz rejected the idea of long-run determination by any of the aspects of the social totality. That is, he rejected culturalism, materialism, and economism, in favour of the idea of the *co-evolution* of mind, culture, and society with none being historically determinant.

This implies of course the rejection also of an overarching general theory of structural history. But the anthro-ecological theory of society establishes certain parameters for theorising social change in general and for developing theoretical understandings of the history of particular societies and social forms. Partly under the influence of structural functionalism, the dominant approach in 1950s American sociology and developed primarily in the Harvard Department of Social Relations where Geertz had studied, he employed a synthesis of dynamic functionalism and ecologism in his early Javanese writings. The essential features of this theory were, firstly, a revision of functionalism to make it more capable of dealing with social change. He did this by developing an analytical distinction between culture and social structure and treating them as independent variables that have mutual interdependence. They can then be seen as capable of a wide range of forms of integration with each other rather than just simple

isomorphism. This then gives the possibility of incongruity and tension between them and with the pattern of motivation so that transformations in any of them can occur.

The second feature is the idea that the dynamic interactions between culture, structure, and motivation occur always within an ecological framework. By "ecosystem" he meant "the material interdependency among the group of organisms which form a community and the relevant physical features of the setting in which they are found".[44] An ecological enquiry investigates "the internal dynamics of such systems and the ways in which they develop and change" in order to see not what is there but what is happening. (p. 3) And what is happening "is a patterned interchange of energy among the various components of the ecosystem as living things take in material as found from their surroundings and discharge material back into those surroundings as waste products". (p. 3) The inclusion of people in an ecosystem does not change the basic relationships. But an ecological social analysis is not reductionist for it tries to determine "the relationships which obtain between the processes of external physiology in which man is, in the nature of things, inextricably embedded, and the social and cultural processes in which he is, with equal inextricability, also embedded". (pp. 5-6)

Geertz later dropped the functionalist aspect of his theory of social change as the local ethnographic and social orientation became more central in his work. In *The Social History of an Indonesian Town* (1965) he studied the interaction of ecological, economic, social structural, and cultural factors over a period of a century or so in order to discover the processes of social change. In order to do that he carried out a "theoretically controlled analysis" and constructed several arguments about the historical processes. In other words this is not a "history" in the orthodox, traditional sense of history writing but a work of what could be called "historical sociology" or more accurately "social history" in the structural sense defended throughout this dissertation.

The central theoretical argument of Geertz's analysis in that *Social History* book and in much of his work is based on the idea that

> all societies, unrealized ones included, have a characteristic order, a particular sort of structure, even if that order and structure are incomplete, contradictory, and ... vague and inconstant in outline.
>
> To discover and present that order, or a reasonable approximation of it, I have had recourse to a somewhat unusual sort of analysis of the main conceptual categories in terms of which the

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44 Geertz, *Agricultural Involution*, p. 3.

inhabitants of the Modjokuto of 1952-1954 themselves perceived their society -- of the principles of social grouping. (p. 8)

Here we have perhaps the clearest statement of Geertz's methodology and general theory that inform all his work. A society and its history are investigated ethnographically in the present to reveal the structure of order, employing a general theory that links local understandings, culture, social structure, economy, and ecology, and present with past. *The Social History of an Indonesian Town, Islam Observed, Meaning and Order in Moroccan Society,* and *Negara,* are the central texts of Geertz's corpus of work for they are the synthetic places where all the aspects of methodology, theory, and empirical enquiry come together to produce works of scientific structural history. The empirical validity of his arguments or explanations in those texts is a separate question. The importance of the texts for helping to establish a domain framework for structural history enquiry is independent of such validity.

Geertz's Explanations of Structural Change

Now that we are able to grasp the intellectual apparatus that Geertz has brought to bear upon the task of explaining particular socio-cultural phenomena and processes of change and the more general problem of attempting to unravel, from particular cases, the very knotty problems of the nature of people and their historical social arrangements and dynamics, we can appreciate the particular explanations of structural change that he has developed. Consider very briefly the following summarised examples.

Involution and Modernization in Indonesia

Much of Geertz's early work up to the mid-60s was concerned with the problem of the post-independence economic development of Indonesia. In *Agricultural Involution* (1963), *Peddlers and Princes* (1963) and *The Social History of an Indonesian Town* (1965), he attempted to explain the contemporary structural processes occurring in parts of Java and Bali, to compare them, and come to some conclusions about their significance for Indonesia as a whole. He argued using Rostow's concept of "take-off", that Indonesia was in a pretake-off phase -- between having lost its traditional equilibrium and not yet having attained the dynamic equilibrium of an industrial society.[45] Following the Weberian prescriptions that economic development is inevitably part of broader changes in society and that development or modernization is fundamentally a process of economic rationalisation brought about by entrepreneurs, and based on his two case studies of a

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45 Geertz, *Peddlers and Princes* (1963), p. 4.

Javanese and a Balinese town, he proposed the following six hypotheses for further testing:

1. Innovative economic leadership (entrepreneurship) occurs in a fairly well defined and socially homogenous group....
2. This innovative group has crysta lised out of a larger traditional group which has a very long history of extra-village status and interlocal orientation....
3. The larger group out of which the innovative group is emerging is one which is at present experiencing a fairly radical change in its relationship with the wider society of which it is part....
4. On the ideological level the innovative group conceives of itself as the main vehicle of religious and moral excellence within a genera ly wayward, unenlightened, or heedless community....
5. The major innovations and innovational problems the entrepreneurs face are organisational rather than technical....
6. The function of the entrepreneur in such transitional and pretake-off societies is mainly to adapt customarily established means to novel ends.[46]

The "pretake-off" stage of the eco-social structure of the wet rice growing (Sawah) areas of Java and Bali was characterised as suffering from "involution", brought about by the Dutch imposed culture or cult vation system which caused a dual agricultural economy to develop between export plantation crops and subsistence wet rice growing. "Involution" is a concept that refers to the process of inward over-elaboration of an established form or system so that it becomes rigid. (*Agricultural Involution*, p. 82) He argued that wet rice cultivation as an ecological and social system was able to absorb into the existing pattern of production and land tenure almost all the large additional population that western intrusion indirectly created without a serious fall in per capita income or causing a structural upheaval. (p. 80) From the mid-19th century the Sawah system was characterised by

increasing tenacity of basic pattern; internal elaboration and ornateness; technical hairsplitting, and unending virtuosity. And this "late Gothic" quality of agriculture increasingly pervaded the whole rural economy: tenure systems grew more intricate; tenancy relationships more complicated; cooperative labor arrangements more complex -- all in an effort to provide everyone with some niche, however small, in the overall system. (p. 82)

The dual economy impinged on the pattern of village life, in Geertz's account, to bring about involution there too. The village

faced the problems posed by a rising population, increased monetization, greater dependence on the market, mass labor organization, more intimate contact with bureaucratic government and the like, not by a dissolution of the traditional patterns into an individualistic "rural proletarian" anomie, nor yet by a metamorphosis of it into a modern commercial farming community. Rather, by means of "a special kind of virtuosity", "a sort of technical hair splitting", it maintained the over-all outlines of that pattern while driving the elements of which it was composed to ever-higher degrees of ornate elaboration and Gothic intricacy. Unable either to stabilize the equilibrated wet-rice system it had

46 *Ibid.*, pp. 147-152.

autochthonously achieved before 1830, or yet to achieve a modern form on, say, the Japanese model -- the twentieth-century lowland Javanese village -- a great sprawling community of desperately marginal agriculturalists, petty traders, and day laborers -- can perhaps only be referred to, rather lamely, as "post-traditional". (p. 90)

Comparative Historical Sociology of Islam

Geertz's extended essay *Islam Observed* contains a comparative historical sociology of and attempt to comprehend present Islamic beliefs, practices and significance in Morocco and Indonesia. It was, therefore, an attempt to explain several centuries of cultural change -- of how the past grew into the present. He dismissed four common "strategies", or what we could loosely call methodologies, for approaching the problem -- the indexical, the typological, the world-acculturative, and the evolutionary. (pp. 57-59) They shared the common defect, in Geertz's eyes, of merely describing results of change rather than its mechanisms and not analysing the causes. To uncover causes requires attention to processes. (p. 59) The basic process that he identified in the religious history of Morocco and Indonesia in the past one hundred and fifty years was a progressive increase in doubt about the depth or strength of religious belief. The main causes of this process he identified as being three related developments:

The establishment of western domination; the increasing influence of scholastic, legalistic, and doctrinal, that is to say, scriptual Islam; and the crystallisation of an activist nation state. Together these three processes, none of them yet concluded, shook the old order in Indonesia and Morocco as thoroughly, if not so far as productively, as Capitalism, Protestantism, and Nationalism shook it in the West. (p. 62)

In religion the impact of the west on these countries was first to provoke a strengthening of Islam for that became oppositional to western Christianity -- people were now Muslims as a matter of policy. (p. 65) An "oppositional, identity-preserving, willed Islam" flourished, whose content became scriptualism -- "the turn toward the Koran, the Hadith, and the Sharia". (p. 65) The new movement directed its criticism not toward Christianity but toward the older Islamic doctrines and practices -- Maraboutism in Morocco and illuminationism in Indonesia. (p. 65) This process culminated in our time in a "tense intermixture of radical fundamentalism and determined modernism":

Stepping back in order better to leap is an established principle in Cultural Change; our own Reformation was made that way. But in the Islamic case the stepping backward seems often to have been taken for the leap itself, and what began as a rediscovery of the Scriptures ended as a kind of deification of them. "The Declaration of the Rights of Man, the secret of atomic power, and the principles of scientific medicine" an advanced Kijaji once informed me, "are all to be found in the Koran", and he proceeded to quote what he regarded as the relevant passages. Islam, in this way, becomes a justification for modernity, without itself actually becoming modern. It promotes what it itself, to speak metaphorically, can neither embrace nor understand. Rather than the first stages in Islam's reformation, scriptualism in this century has come, in both Indonesia and Morocco, to represent the last stages in its ideologization. (pp. 69-70)

Geertz as Structurist

Geertz's empirical explanations have proven controversial, especially the involution thesis.[47] But his methodology has been increasingly influential on the social enquiries that are striving to reintegrate the various strands of the social sciences so as to be able to grasp complex structuring processes.[48] Placing the human agent as the centre of social analysis necessitates developing an adequate methodology for and general theories of the conditions, motivations, and structural consequences of agential action. This further necessitates, therefore, an adequate conceptualisation of structure and its generation. Geertz's work provides all these as I have tried to indicate. That is, his methodology directs attention to the complex structuring processes involving all the moments and levels of society. His general theory emphasises the role of mentality in the structuring action of agential people. This is crucial because agency implies choice and power, and choice is reflective thought done out of a background of understandings of self, society, and the world. Understanding is culturally conditioned and constrained so mentality must play a vital social role, even in modern, supposedly rational, society. Human action is empowered partly by the positive, collective integration of mentality and action. Of course it is not often so integrated because of the coercive power of certain social arrangements

VII EMMANUEL LE ROY LADURIE -- The Geology of Structured Historical Totalities

Overview of the Work of Ladurie

Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie is one of the foremost historians in France today. He is widely considered to be the outstanding member of the third generation of that loose grouping known as the "*Annales* School". The "School" was founded in the late 1920s at Strasbourg by Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch who created the journal *Annales d'histoire Economique et Sociale*, which later moved with them to Paris in the mid-30s. After the war the journal was recreated. The "School" was institutionalised in 1947 as the 6th

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47 See the discussion of the involution thesis by J. and P. Alexander, 'Sugar, Rice and Irrigation in Colonial Java' (1978); and B. White, '"Agricultural Involution" and its Critics: Twenty Years After' (1983).

48 Discussions of the importance and influence of Geertz include R.C. Walters, 'Signs of the Times: Clifford Geertz and Historians' (1980); W. Rosebery, 'Balinese Cockfights and the Seduction of Anthropology' (1982); P. Shankman, 'The Thick and the Thin: On the Interpretive Theoretical Program of Clifford Geertz' (1984); M.A. Schneider, 'Culture-as-Text in the Work of Clifford Geertz' (1987); A. Biersack, 'Local Knowledge, Local History: Geertz and Beyond' (1989); D. La Capra, *Soundings in Critical Theory* (1989), Ch.5.

Section (Economic and Social Sciences) of the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes under the leadership of Fernand Braudel, the doyen of the "School" in the post-war decades. But the "School" was still outside the established university system until after 1968 when the 6th Section was recreated as the Ecole des Hautes Etude en Science Sociales and given degree-granting rights.

Ladurie was born in 1929 in Calvados, the son of an official who became Minister of Agriculture in the Vichy Regime. He repudiated his father's politics and as a youth joined the PCF, which he later left. He was educated in a Paris Lycée and the Ecole Normale Supérieure. He taught at Montpellier University in the early 60s and was part of the 6th Section in the late 60s. He became an editor of *Annales* in 1969, a Professor of Geography at the University of Paris VII in 1970-73, and was appointed Professor of History and Modern Civilization at the Collège de France in 1973 in succession to Braudel.

In order to gain a general understanding of Ladurie's work, we need to know something of the *Annales* approach to history and society. When Bloch and Febvre began their work in the 1920s the dominant tradition of historiography in France, as in Britain, America, Germany, and elsewhere, concentrated on the designation and interpretation of singular events and actions, particularly political actions, events, and institutions; elites; and "national characters". Bloch and Febvre wished to reorient historical enquiry toward socio-economic structural change and the history of groups, classes and communities, particularly the long-run history of agrarian societies. Accordingly, historical geography and social theory were important influences on their work, as was psychology because they also wished to study the history of the collective mentalities of communities. In short, they were interested in the history of material, social, and mental *structures*.

But the *Annalistes* were not interested in writing theoretical history. They were resolutely empirical -- what Febvre called "archaeological" -- in their methodology. This is a metaphor that has recurred down the years among *Annalistes* and it seems to mean that they wished to try to investigate and comprehend a civilisation in the totality of all its aspects. Theories of various sorts were employed throughout but always sceptically. They were strongly historicist in their attitudes to the past and to the use of theory. Their aim was to attempt a *total* sifting of all possible evidence in order to try to bring to life the material and mental milieu of a group, community, region, society, or epoch.

"Total history" was strongly espoused and exemplified in the work of Fernand Braudel, editor of *Annales* from 1956 to 1968 and the leading second generation *Annaliste.* His three major works -- *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (2 Vols), *Civilization and Capitalism* (3 Vols), and *The Identity of France* (2 Vols) -- exemplify his and the School's interest in the long-run history of structures. His structures are the virtually unchanging geographic and economic continuities and cycles of the material life of pre-industrial Europe and the world. Braudel was not very interested in either mentalities or politics. The first and second generation *Annalistes* were dismissive of political-event history --*"histoire événementielle"*. Events were important to them only insofar as they carried the deep structures of material life.

Ladurie's early writings[49] were strongly influenced by Braudelean structural history. His youthful period of teaching in Montpellier impelled him towards a life-long interest in Languedoc or what earlier had been known as Occitan or Pays d'Oc, that area of south west France where the Romance language Oc had been spoken until the 19th century and even into the 20th in some places. His first studies were of the social structural and ecological history of that region -- its climatic and agrarian history -- which resulted in a large two-volume *doctorat état thèse* on *The Peasants of Languedoc* (1974), first published in 1966. The following year he published a path-breaking book on the history of climate -- translated as *Times of Feast, Times of Famine* (1972). These works immediately established his reputation as one of the outstanding younger *Annalistes*. The books exemplify the totalising and structuralist approach of *Annalisme* at that time. His book on the peasantry of Languedoc is a massively detailed quantitative study of a whole socio-economic and cultural evolution across a long period of time. He was concerned to establish the connections among geography, economy, social structure, institutions, forms of consciousness, and class struggle. As he said, he had endeavoured in *The Peasants of Languedoc*

> to observe, at various levels, the long-term movements of an economy and of a society -- base and superstructure, material life and cultural life, sociological evolution and collective psychology, the whole within the framework of a rural world which remained very largely traditional in nature. More particularly, I have attempted to analyze, in their multiple aspects, successive phases of growth and decline. These phases, taken together in chronological sequence (lift-off, rise, maturity, and decline), imply a unity and serve to describe a major, organized, secular rural fluctuation spanning eight generations.
>
> To put it more simply, my book's protagonist is a great agrarian cycle, lasting from the end of the fifteenth century to the beginning of the eighteenth, studied in its entirety. I have been able to delineate and to characterize it thanks, naturally, to the price curves, but more particularly thanks to

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49 See the list of Ladurie's main works in the Bibliography.

demographic studies (of taxpayers and of total population), to indices of production and business activity, and to the series of charts reflecting land, wealth, and income distribution. (p. 298)

Associated with his interest in structures, cycles, continuities, and total history Ladurie became an early enthusiastic employer and advocate of large-scale quantification and the use of computer-analysable data. But unlike the parallel development in the 1960s of cliometrics in the United States he did not see the task as being the application of a present-oriented theory to historical data. He was not an econometrician who manipulated data to answer preconceived questions about abstract variables. Rather, one of the main points of quantification was to reveal the *serial* and *cyclical* nature of society over long periods -- the continuities, repetitions, and fluctuations of patterns of behaviour, institutional arrangements, economic relationships, ecological conditions, and so on. It could also reveal hitherto unsuspected *changes* in large-scale collective social phenomena. Against a critic who would say that human beings are neglected in such an approach he wrote in *Times of Feast, Times of Famine* that, if Marc Bloch's dictum that the historian is "like the ogre in the story: wherever he smells human flesh he recognizes his prey" were taken literally,

it would mean that the professional historian would systematically neglect a whole category of serial or qualitative documentation, such as early meteorological observations, phenological and glaciological texts, comments on climatological events, and so on. A strictly human historiography could take such documents into consideration, but never to work out completely and for itself their intrinsic climatic content, only to check some usually minute point in human history or local or specialised knowledge...(p. 191.)

Within this context, large-scale and machine-assisted quantification cannot answer questions and solve problems in itself, as the cliometricians sometimes seem to believe, but it opens up new problems by providing long-duration series of data. These days, such an understanding is commonplace but we tend to forget the novelty of computers and the hostility with which they were greeted by many historians and some sociologists in the 60s. Ladurie saw very early their potential. In the essays contained in *The Territory of the Historian* (1979) he vigorously defended and exampled their use.

In the 1970s he developed a parallel stream of work which, while not altering or abandoning his general structural and quantitative orientation, focused on the history of mentalities, or what could be called forms of collective consciousness or semi-conscious cultural structures, and how mentalities have influenced collective behaviour. This has resulted in several powerful works, most notably *Montaillou* (1980), *Carnival in Romans* (1981), and *Love, Death, and Money in the Pays d'Oc* (1984). These are works of great complexity and richness. The first two focus upon particular episodes of social upheaval

and spread out from there to analyse whole milieu. Layers of significance and structure and circles of influence are revealed by a combination of empirical enquiry, theoretical complexity, and hermeneutical insight. The *Love, Death, and Money* book reveals more clearly than elsewhere in his work, and indeed almost more than anywhere else in the *Annales* tradition, the underlying influence of Lévi-Straussian structural anthropology and linguistics. Lévi-Straussian concepts are employed by him to explore the cultural meaning and significance, in the anthropological and literary senses, of an Occitan 18th century novella. As with the other books, his analysis spreads wider and wider to examine the whole social milieu of which the text is both a pregnant signifier and potentially a socially integrative force.

Ladurie's Methodological Foundations

Ladurie has discussed his own explanatory foundations on several occasions and he has taken a strong interest in methodological questions, as have many *Annalistes*. Indeed, the *Annales* movement and the 6th Section were explicitly founded in methodological opposition to established orthodoxy so the basis for their attempted subversion of the history and sociology disciplines had to be articulated clearly.

As the above quotation above from *The Peasants of Languedoc* indicates, Ladurie saw himself as engaging in the writing of total history. What did this mean in practice? It meant at least three things together. Firstly, there was the idea that none of the structural "levels" or "spheres" of an actual society in the general overall sense -- i.e. the economic system of material production and distribution, the form of social interaction and hierarchies (which is more than the class structure), the form of mentality or culture and beliefs, and the form of ecclesiastical and state administrative institutions -- could be grasped, understood, or explained in isolation from all the others. Here a geological rather than archaeological metaphor is central for he saw societies through it as being stratified or, perhaps more accurately, as sedimentary, that is, being an accumulation of layers of institutions, practices, and beliefs. Secondly, there is the idea that total history requires attention to the totality of available empirical evidence (or as much as possible), especially about the economy. Every possible source of data must be combed. Thirdly, the notion of totality includes the structuralist idea of transformations, but in the peculiar *Annaliste* sense of the deep structure of cycles and conjunctures. This leads to the apparent paradox of *"l'histoire immobile"* (or "History That Stands Still") which is actually the title of his Collège de France inaugural lecture in 1973.[50] How could there be history if

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50 Ladurie, *Mind and Method of the Historian* (1981), Ch 1.

there were no change? His short answer is: because there were cycles and conjunctures within a more or less structurally static geo-eco-demographic totality that persisted across many centuries. But this answer is unsatisfactory as it stands. We need to examine his concept of *"l'histoire immobile"* further for it is central to his and to *Annales'* distinctive contribution.

Structural History

The concept of a history that stands still could only apply, if at all, to a particular kind of society -- an agrarian, pre-industrial, traditional society with a Malthusian relationship between environment, technology, and population. France between the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the 18th century was such a "society" but its national integration was almost non-existent. This area and milieu was the particular focus of most of *Annales'* attention. For Ladurie, this society was an *object*, "the statistical dimensions of which, despite some sizeable fluctuations, always tended to return to a fixed level which acted as a ceiling."[51] The rural demographic-ecological system was able to deviate but always reproduce itself in such a way that it returned to the same main parameters. (p. 21) However, this kind of structural continuity obviously did not last. It began to break down after about 1720 and the way he explains why and how it did so is significant for understanding his structurist methodology and the role of theory within his work, as will be revealed in a moment.

Francophone structuralism[52] has had three overlapping streams or locations -- linguistics and anthropology; epistemology and psychology; and social structural history. The *Annales* School historians, most notably Braudel and including Ladurie in his *histoire immobile* incarnation, have embodied this third stream. Braudel argued that such an approach to history was concerned with the *longue durée* of structural continuity as revealed through the cyclical rhythms of material life. Structural history was for him the core of social science. However, the great problem with his work is the difficulty he had in both theorising and explaining structural change and transformation. The role of social agents in the form of powerful individuals, groups, and classes, is extremely minimised, as is the influence of mentalities. Geo-economic structural determinism is the focus of Braudel's totalising work and his achievements in such enquiries are outstanding, notwithstanding its weakness regarding transformation.

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51 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

52 For a discussion of the streams of Francophone structuralism and how the *Annales* school relates to it see my *Explanation in Social History* (1986), Ch.12.

Ladurie's totalistic studies are not so deterministic and, furthermore, he shows in his books on mentalities -- *Montaillou* and *Carnival* in particular -- that the event and the long term, the continuities and the ruptures, must be brought together. As he goes on to say in his inaugural lecture, France after 1720 began to experience a great transformation in its geo-eco-social structure:

> The forces of renovation included the State, the modernized Church, the educational system -- all more repressive and more efficient; a more plentiful money supply; a more sophisticated nobility and bourgeoisie; better-run estates; greater literacy everywhere; a more rational bureaucracy; more active trade; and urbanization at what eventually became an irresistible rate, forcing nations (whose productivity was not keeping pace) to produce more peasants in order to feed the new mass of townspeople. Wisdom or folly -- who knows? But it opened Pandora's box, forcing the agricultural population out of its eco-system, breaking the old medieval norms, unbreached until the death of Louis XIV. The breach stood open through the age of the Enlightenment and of course during the following nineteenth century. In 1328, the French population stood at 17 million; it was 19 million in 1700 -- still about the same. But by 1789, it had reached 27 million and had risen to almost 40 million by the time of the Franco-Prussian war of 1870. In other European countries, the advance was even more rapid. The demographic upswing, accompanied by the disappearance of famine, made it necessary and inevitable that simultaneously there should be some growth in the gross agricultural product -- not to mention the superior methods of transport for grain and foodstuffs. The increase in production of the now generally available fruits of the earth had, if hunger was to be satisfied, to be at least equivalent and probably superior to that of the country's population.[53]

(This passage is not only important methodologically but also theoretically, as I shall show in a moment.)

So, Ladurie's total history is not the deterministic holism of Braudel. It does not transcend all events and transformations. If structural history writing could truly be transcendent of the particular it would perhaps be very satisfying but of course the historical process is not, as he wrote in another essay, entirely logical, intelligible and predictable. [54] Events and ruptures cannot be exorcised even by a totalising "science" that attempts to grasp all within an encompassing framework. But as I have argued, "historical science" is a defensible notion if it is not considered in this quasi-positivist or indeed positivist way. Braudelean structural history, in spite of its great empirical and theoretical strengths, in the end cannot adequately *explain* its object because of its holistic construal of society and its history, and so it fails the basic test of social science. As Ladurie rightly says,

> a trend or a structure can quite easily be unmasked. All that is required is a little patience, a great deal of work and plenty of imagination. But the aleatory transition from one structure to another,

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53 Ladurie, *Mind and Method of the Historian*, p. 25.

54 Ladurie, *The Territory of the Historian*, p. 14.

the *mutation*, often remains, in history as in biology, the most perplexing zone, where chance appears to play a large part. Once one has reached this zone, factors which are often mysterious delineate the poles of necessity within the field of possibilities: once they have surfaced, their existence is obvious -- but a moment before their appearance, they were as unpredictable as they were unprecedented. [55]

In other words, what we have to explain is not structural continuity but structural rupture, and a concentration on continuity not only disguises the ruptures but hinders explanation of them.

Mentalities and Transformations

Thus the structural locatedness but transformative (or what could be called "agential") character of certain ideas, actions, events, groups, and people, were the subject of Ladurie's parallel stream of work, which concentrated on those aleatory transitions that were so hard to explain. *Montaillou* and *Carnival* are excellent examples of such work. The concentration on significant micro-social events and groups does not imply that he was returning to narrative history of events and neglecting structures. The two had to be combined, as in these books. Each deals with a small series of significant events that are upheavals or ruptures in the processes and structures of their place and time. These events are not only narrated from several points of view but investigated for their own deep structures. They are then placed in their complex structural situations and processes -- ecological, economic, political, cultural -- and shown why they are significant both historically and methodologically. That is, in the manner of landslides and tectonic rift forces these ruptures lay bare the geological strata of their societies. Consequently these books are at once narrative stories, historical geographies, anthropological and sociological analyses, and economic and political histories.

In analysing the processes Ladurie concentrated on the role of mentalities in motivating and explaining social change. *Montaillou* deals with the social influence of Albigensianism and the mental world of 14th century peasants in a Pyrenean village. The first half deals with the ecology of the village -- its households and peasant economy. The second half deals with what he calls the "archaeology" of the village, by which he means its mentality or culture in the sense of the beliefs, rituals, customs, social relations, and morality. *Carnival* has a somewhat similar structure but of greater complexity, in keeping perhaps with the greater complexity of a 16th century town with its complicated social structure and powerful economic and religious tensions. Although the violent

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55 *Ibid.*, p. 114.

upheaval that surrounded the carnival of February 1580 was, as Ladurie wrote, a local incident, it is greatly significant for the historian because it

> represents a deep probe into the geological stratifications of a dated culture. It informs us about a specific city and a particular province. More generally speaking, it elucidates the urban dramas of the Renaissance, at the time of the Reformation, the beginning of the Baroque age, and the rise of the Catholic Counter-Reformation. [56]

The combination of such integrated, simultaneous, enquiries into structures, events, and transformations with the use made of theories in Ladurie's work can be seen, I argue, as together providing an example of structurism in the dual methodological and sociological senses. Before discussing that further we need to know something about his use of theory.

Ladurie's Use of Theory

Like all *Annalistes* Ladurie explicitly and implicitly refused to distinguish between historical enquiry and theory construction and application. Each was necessary to the other. In many places in his work he explicitly employed theories and in several places discussed and defended their relevance. For example, he wrote in *Times of Feast, Times of Famine* that the historian of climate must begin by learning all there is to know from the researches and theories of meteorologists, glaciologists, geographers, biologists, geologists, dendochronologists, archaeologists, and even physicists. There must also be a reciprocation between these scientists and the scientific serialist historian in order to explain climatic history. (pp 20-22)

In his inaugural lecture he wrote of the relationship between history and theoretical social science in the following illuminating way, which is worth quoting at some length:

> Until the last century, knowledge was based essentially on the dialogue between two cultures: the exact sciences and the humanities -- mathematics versus intuition, the "spirit of geometry" and the "spirit of discernment". History, from Thucydides to Michelet, was of course included in the humanities. And then along came the "third culture", unobtrusively at first, but soon becoming visible to all: the social sciences. For a long time, they coexisted quite cheerfully with the historian: in the line running from Marx to Weber, Durkheim and Freud, there was a constant exchange of concepts and much crossing of frontiers between the two. More recently, however, old Chronos came under attack. The social sciences, wishing to preserve a reputation for hardness and purity, began to operate a closed shop against history, which was accused of being a "soft" science. The attack was characterized by a great deal of ignorance and not a little gall on the part of the attackers, who affected to forget that since Bloch, Braudel and Labrousse, history too had undergone a scientific transformation. Clio had stolen the clothes of the social sciences while they

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56 Ladurie, *Carnival in Romans*, p. xvii.

were bathing, and they had never noticed their nakedness. Today at any rate, the move to exclude history seems to be almost over, since it is becoming clear that it has no future. Everyone has eventually bowed to the obvious: it is no more possible to build up a human science without the extra dimension of the past, than it is to study astrophysics without knowing the ages of the stars or galaxies. History was, for a few decades of semi-disgrace, the Cinderella of the social sciences, but it has now been restored to its rightful place. Indeed, it now appears to have chosen just the right moment to withdraw, refusing to become a narcissistic mental activity, rotting away in self-absorption and self-congratulation; while the death of history was being loudly proclaimed in certain quarters, it had simply gone through the looking-glass, in search not of its own reflection, but of a new world. [57]

What theories did Ladurie invent, borrow, employ, and reject? What knowledge and use of social theories do his historical writings display? There isn't the space here to discuss all the various employments and rejections of theory that his work reveals but a few examples will suffice. Firstly, the analysis of the independent peasant household (the *domus*) and of village life that he carried out in *Montaillou* was strongly influenced by the work of Karl Polanyi and A.V. Chayanov (see pp. 353-4). Secondly, *Love, Death and Money in the Pays d'Oc* is an anthropological and sociological work that has been strongly influenced by Lévi-Straussian structuralism (see pp. 401-3). Thirdly, in one of his remarkable regional histories, on the Rouergue (or the modern Aveyron Department in Languedoc) he wrote that neither the theories of Marx nor Weber had anything to teach about its history:

> In 1800, the majority of the Rouergue population consisted of rural proletarians, with a minority of self-employed farmers (about 50,000 to 40,000, according to Béteille). By the end of the nineteenth century, these proportions had been reversed in country areas. Rural society, as organized by the *ostal* system, was becoming not ideal (far from it) but distinctly better balanced and less wretched -- and that, after all, is what matters.
>
> No marks for Marx then, but no marks for Weber either, with his Anglo-Saxon-Germanic obsession with the regenerating and fertilizing effects of Protestantism. The Rouergue was blithely ignorant of such things. Until recently it remained part and parcel of an essentially Catholic culture: the Pope's little acre in the Occitanian south, a Catholic enclave like Poland or Ireland, but more fortunate than either of these. The Rouergue benefited from an appreciable rise in living standards, accounted for by its whole-hearted participation in the career of a comparatively privileged and highly developed country like France. The Catholic culture of the Rouergue produced a remarkable number of local vocations to the priesthood or to convents, thus making it easier for the *ostal* to pass to a single heir, from one generation to another. [58]

And fourthly, there is the example, mentioned above, of the use of a range of scientific theories in his book on *Times of Feast, Times of Famine.* That book comes closest of all his works to being a work of applied theory rather than historical enquiry but even it remains on the level of attempting to explain the complex, fine-grained reality of a real process.

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57 Ladurie, *Mind and Method of the Historian*, pp. 26-7.

58 *Ibid.*, p. 206.

The most important questions about Ladurie as socio-historical theorist concern his basic theory or model of society and of its dynamics. That is, how did he conceptualise the structure of pre-industrial French society in particular and how did he account in theory for its transformations? Another way of looking at these issues is to ask if Ladurie's work contains, as perhaps Braudel's does, a version of historical materialism; or does it contain a rival conception, a form of historical culturalism perhaps? What is the *general* relationship that he sees, if any, between ecology, economy, society, politics, the state, and mentality?

It seems to me that Ladurie does not propose either explicitly or implicitly a general theory of social structural history in the way that some *Annalistes*, Braudel in particular, do. A case can be made that all Braudel's work is informed by a version of historical materialism. He relies upon a kind of half-articulated geographical determinism to explain structural change over long periods.

As I argue in Chapter Five, historical materialism is a *theory* of social history that rests upon a *model* (which is not a description) of society as being structured in "levels", "strata", "layers", or "spheres" that have relative but overlapping autonomy. There are "lines" or "currents" of influence, contradiction, and/or determinism that link the levels in various ways in this model. But what the levels are and how they interrelate is not prescribed in advance by such a general model and so they can be conceptualised in many ways. Historical materialism, then, is a theory, employing this model, which says the material level or levels is/are the prime locus of historical causation in the sense that the impetus for changes on other levels and in the whole social structure comes primarily in the long run from the material aspects of the structure.

Ladurie's work is certainly strongly informed by a dynamic "geological" levels model of society, as the following passage from *Carnival in Romans* shows:

> An isolated incident, the Carnival in Romans illuminates, reflects on the cultures and conflicts of an era. These include strictly urban struggles, municipal problems which set the craftsman and the butcher trade in opposition to the patrician ruling group; traditional peasant agitation moulded into an assault on a system of land-holding that was becoming aggressive, capitalistic; the violent rejection of the government and taxes, both revealing of social conflict. There was also a place for the Catholic, medieval, Renaissance, and soon to be baroque folk traditions of festivity; the bourgeois, semi-learned and semi-egalitarian ideologies drawing inspiration from classical authors... The Carnival in Romans makes me think of the Grand Canyon. It shows, preserved in cross section, the social and intellectual strata and structures which made up a *'très ancien régime'*. In the twilight of the Renaissance it articulates a complete geology, with all its colours and contortions. (p. 338-9)

The passage from page 289 of *The Peasants of Languedoc* quoted above also reveals his debt to the "base-superstructure" model. But he does not take the next step into historical materialism. That is, he does not explain structural change, in any of his writings as far as I can ascertain, by reference to the causal influences of changes in the relatively autonomous material levels of society, such as climate, geography, and technology. On the contrary, he refuses such explanations. The passage from page 25 of *Mind and Method* that I have quoted above (beginning "The forces of renovation...") indicates clearly the contrary. He finds the forces for social transformation in a long list of locations -- such things as the state, church, money supply, nobility and bourgeoisie, literacy, rational bureaucracy, trade, and urbanization. Perhaps it could be said that such a list indicates that there is in fact no explanation offered because if everything is used to explain everything then nothing is explained. I do not believe he is guilty of this but the point here is that when he came to consider the question of *general* explanations of all historical processes he could find none. Each process had to be explained separately, partly by reference to chance events and partly by reference to the overlapping, complex interconnections of the various levels, none of which had priority. The levels model directs attention to the sites of possible determination but does not indicate what those determinations are. The aleatory transitions that he referred to elsewhere could not be explained by some overarching structuralist theory. This can be clearly seen from his detailed studies of structural history and transformations.

Ladurie as Structurist

I think it can be seen from the foregoing discussion that Ladurie's work as a whole contains a form of methodological and sociological structurism. Methodologically, his work contains a notion of the reality of social structure as a complex system of "levels" or sub-structures that causally interrelate with each other. The structure is not a monolithic system with holistic powers of self-generation and self-maintenance. Actions and events by individuals, groups, and classes are the moving force of history. This means that explanations have to be made simultaneously on both the micro and macro levels of society. That is, explanations of actions, events, consciousness, and structural change all require reference to all the others. Sociologically, the theory of society is that social phenomena and social structures have this dual, historical, character and so require an appropriate methodology. Society is an ongoing *structuring* process on all its levels. There is in Ladurie's work a series of overlapping dialectics between continuity and transformation, action and structure, material and mental. Such complexity is the basis of a claim that Ladurie's structurism is moving in the right direction toward being adequate to its object -- the complexity of human society.

VIII STRUCTURISM - TOWARD THE RECOVERY OF HISTORICAL AGENCY IN SOCIAL SCIENCE

At the end of Chapter Two I pointed out how the relational-structurist tradition in history writing employed methodological structurism, which has been summarised in Section VII of Chapter One. In the present chapter I have tried to articulate further the content of this methodology and demonstrate its existence and employment in the work of some historians. But of course, as I emphasised at the beginning of the chapter, methodology does not directly determine the content of theories and explanations, although it does constrain them and it does rule out some theories such as an ahistorical materialist conception of history.

From all this discussion we can draw the following essential points about the structurist methodology for structural history. The methodology emphasises the necessity to study two nodes of causal power -- the conditioning power of social structures of all kinds and the agential power of persons acting collectively. Explanations of structural change and of action must take full account of the complex intercausality of each other. And the full complexity of all the moments of the social process has to be incorporated such that there are no loose ends -- that is, no nomological danglers at the end of causal chains. Neither intentions, nor biological drives, nor social structures, nor cultures, is prior to any of the others. Our conceptual apparatus must be able to integrate them into a coherent framework of circular reasoning that enables explanations of social complexity. At the beginning and the end of the circular reasoning is the human agent, a *historical* actor who is not a heroic moulder of the world, outside history, but embedded in a complex evolving structure of rules, roles, relations, and meanings that must be collectively reproduced in daily life. Through that reproduction process structural transformation and hence history occurs.

IX TOWARD A SCIENCE OF STRUCTURAL HISTORY

The fundamental test of the value of a methodology for socio-historical enquiry is whether it is able to direct theoretical and empirical attention to studying how action, thought, and structure causally interact over time. I have tried to show in Chapter Two and in this chapter how methodological structurism can provide a framework for such explanation. The philosophical assumptions of individualism and holism are unable to support a sufficiently powerful methodology for doing this. Individualists and holists overemphasise one side of the social process to the virtual neglect of the other. They therefore tend to miss half of the causal interconnections. In fact many of the

individualist historians cannot rightly be called *social* or *structural* historians at all because they do not share what should be one of the most important concepts of the domain of structural history, that is, the idea of the reality and irreducibility of social structure. All the others are more or less sociological realists, although most interpretists and some relational-structurists are ambivalent about the degree of objectivity of society.

However, as we have seen, among all those who subscribe to social realism there is a division between holists and structurists. Holists, in turn, are divided between, firstly, systemic holists, who believe society is a powerful, self-regulating, integrated system; and, secondly, cultural holists who believe society is a gestalt of meanings. Both groups seem to have little place for the structuring power of persons and groups. Structurists, on the other hand, do accord a central place to human agency. Society for them is a structure of rules, roles, practices, and relations that causally condition social action and it is the intended and unintended result of past collective structuring action and thought. In practice many social historians have come to see, sometimes only semi-consciously, that this is the right methodological framework. A glance through the issues of recent years of social history journals will reveal this immediately. Nevertheless, holism continues to guide some practitioners, especially some structuralists and traditional historical interpretists. And individualism is still prevalent in empiricist and behaviourist sociology, traditional history, and cliometrics.

Furthermore, explanation for methodological structurists is not a question of developing strictly logically and/or statistically derived conclusions, as it often is for empiricists and sometimes is for Francophone structuralists of the Lévi-Strauss sort. The arguments of, for example, Ladurie, Geertz, Moore, Hobsbawm, Neale, Elias, or Touraine, cannot be reconstructed in nomologically-deductive terms. They contain, rather, a complex web of reasoning that includes imaginative hypotheses, theories, models, metaphors, analogies, inductive empirical generalisations, and deductions. Their aim is neither to give a simple statistical or narrative account nor to give a logically justified account. Rather, their achievement of an increasing degree of plausibility comes from a combination of theoretical richness, empirical complexity, explanatory narrative, and methodological structurism. Structural history done in this way is at least potentially *scientific* because like other sciences it is based on a realist ontology of structures and a commitment to discovering the complex multi-levelled structural reality of the world. The ideas of empiricist objectivity and absolute truth that have been associated with science are by-passed in this better account of science and the questions of experimentation and prediction are irrelevant.

In Chapter Four I shall try to establish that scientificity comes, rather, from a combination of:

a) The employment of a complex *web structure of reasoning,* which is found in all sciences, that links hypotheses, theories, models, metaphors, analogies, and data.

b) The general *adequacy of domain concepts* to their object of enquiry (which can only be established through research).

c) Adoption as a research rationale of the *discovery of structural reality and history.*

d) Adoption of a *combination of coherence and correspondence ideas of truth* such that there is a gradual convergence between them as the structural reality of the world is discovered. Short-term pragmatic coherence is acceptable within the framework of the long-term policy of discovery.

e) The central significance of *empirical evidence,* but evidence that can never be entirely theory-neutral.

As many students of science have shown in recent years, science is not a discourse that either fundamentally aims at or achieves absolute objectivity. Rather, it is a socially constructed and socially relative set of practices, but practices that nevertheless attempt progressively to discover the causal structures of the universe. Whether they are always successful is not very important. Clearly they are not for much of the time, although the fact is the natural sciences have made progress. Rather, the important question here is: what makes a science adequate to its task? I believe I have sketched a way to show how a science of structural history (which must be the core of a wider science of society) can be adequate to its task. The employers of methodological structurism are candidates for the label of 'scientific' structural historians because they go a good deal of the way toward meeting the criteria mentioned above. *Progress* in explaining the history of societies can be and has been achieved by basing the scientific domain on methodological structurism.