Radical Anthropology Journal

2007–2013

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Issue #1 — 2007

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Who we are and what we do

Radical Anthropology is the journal of the Radical Anthropology Group.

Radical: about the inherent, fundamental roots of an issue.

Anthropology: the study of what it means to be human.

Anthropology asks one big question: what does it mean to be human? To answer this, we cannot rely on common sense or on philosophical arguments. We must study how humans actually live — and the many different ways in which they have lived. This means learning, for example, how people in non-capitalist societies live, how they organise themselves and resolve conflict in the absence of a state, the different ways in which a 'family' can be run, and so on.

Additionally, it means studying other species and other times. What might it mean to be almost — but not quite — human? How socially self-aware, for example, is a chimpanzee? Do nonhuman primates have a sense of morality? Do they have language? And what about distant times? Who were the Australopithecines and why had they begun walking upright? Where did the Neanderthals come from and why did they become extinct? How, when and why did human art, religion, language and culture first evolve?

The Radical Anthropology Group started in 1984 when Chris Knight's popular 'Introduction to Anthropology' course at Morley College, London, was closed down, supposedly for budgetary reasons. Within a few weeks, the students got organised, electing a treasurer, secretary and other officers. They booked a library in Camden — and invited Chris to continue teaching next year. In this way, the Radical Anthropology Group was born.

Later, Lionel Sims, who since the 1960s had been lecturing in sociology at the University of East London, came across Chris's PhD on human origins and — excited by the backing it provided for the anthropology of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, particularly on the subject of 'primitive communism' — invited Chris to help set up Anthropology at UEL. Since its establishment in 1990, Anthropology at UEL has retained close ties with the Radical Anthropology Group.

RAG has never defined itself as a political organisation. But the implications of some forms of science are intrinsically radical, and this applies in particular to the theory that humanity was born in a social revolution. Many RAG members choose to be active in Survival International and/or other indigenous rights movements to defend the land rights and cultural survival of hunter-gatherers. Additionally, some RAG members combine academic research with activist involvement in environmentalist,

anti-capitalist and other campaigns. For more on the Radical Anthropology Group, see www.radicalanthropologygroup.org.

Radical Anthropology is edited by **Stuart Watkins** and **Dave Flynn** for the Radical Anthropology Group. They also write a blog at http://despairtowhere.blogs.com.

Thanks to **Kevin CookFielding** for help with the design and layout, and to **Martin K.** for organising the printing. Pictures in David Graeber's article and on the cover are by **Chris Knight**. Pictures of the Himba woman in Camilla Power's article come from www.askadavid.org.

On the cover: The journal's logo was designed by **Kevin CookFielding**. It represents the emergence of culture (dragons feature in myths and legends from around the world) from nature (the DNA double-helix, or selfish gene). How this could possibly have happened has long been of especial interest to the Radical Anthropology Group. The dragon is a symbol of solidarity, especially the blood solidarity that was a necessary precondition for the social revolution that made us human. For more on this and related themes, see Radicalanthropologygroup.org

Subscriptions

Radical Anthropology is an annual journal and will appear every October.
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RA is also available free via our website: www. radicalanthropologygroup.org.

We are armed...

... only with peer-reviewed science. So says the rather brilliant banner that features on the cover of our first issue. The picture was taken at the Climate Camp against the third runway at Heathrow Airport in August of this year. So in this context, the banner obviously refers to the link between independent, peer-reviewed climate science, and the environmental movement that draws strength from its findings. It is here where the battle between science and its discontents takes on its full political importance for the human species. In the case of Darwinists versus creationists and scientists versus postmodernists, it was possible to think that maybe the debates were of purely academic significance. The issues raised by climate science should have shattered that illusion. But we believe that all social activism should arm itself with science, and that scientists should join the social activists. Let us try to explain why.

It can hardly be denied that we live in a troubled world. Even those of us lucky enough to live in a part of the world not actually in a warzone, or where there is access to such human essentials as food and clean water, go through our lives in a constant state of worry about our future. If we are not actually threatened at any one time by the terrorism and crime we are supposed to be most concerned about, we feel anxious and depressed about our future both as individuals (will I have a pension?) and as a species (will there be a planet worth living on?).

The examples could be expanded, but a list of woes is rarely enough to move people to do very much about it. This may be because they think that human life always has and always will be like this. Or, if they fancy themselves more political or radical, because we no longer live in an age of revolutions, or because, with the rise of globalisation, our room for manoeuvre is more limited. Or because previous movements for change have ended in disaster. No amount of philosophical dispute or pub-table arguments can resolve such issues. But if we turn instead to the subjects that have made such concerns their special object of study, we should be delighted to find that, to at least some extent, the answers to these questions are already in. Human societies, in fact, have *not* always been dominated by conflict and

violence, prioritised material gain over other aspects of our humanity, run economic life according to market principles, worked for wages or for bosses, or been ruled by misery and exploitation. Revolutions have not always ended in disaster. Egalitarian societies in fact still exist — although they, too, face the constant threat of annihilation by capitalist powers.

Pre-eminent among such subjects is anthropology. If what you want is a theory of how humans have lived, and how they might live, and how they bring about and

think about change, then anthropology is the most promising place to start looking for one. To use the phrase of one of our contributors to this issue, David Graeber, the "fragments" of such a radical anthropological theory already exist. There is, to continue with Graeber's argument, an obvious affinity between radical and anthropological thought since both have, as he puts it, a "keen awareness of the very range of human possibilities" (Graeber 2004: 13). Anthropologists sit on a "vast archive of human experience, of social and political experiments no one else really knows about" (2004: 96). And yet it refuses, for the most part, to talk about it. Anthropology, says Graeber, seems like a discipline "terrified of its own potential" (2004: 97). It could so easily, instead, be an "intellectual forum for all sorts of planetary conversations" and make common cause with social activism for the sake of human freedom (2004: 105).

This, then, is the ambition of this journal — to act as just one forum for this planetary conversation. We start, of course, relatively modestly, with two lengthy essays, and one short opinion piece. But we begin appropriately — for in this first issue we feature representatives of what are, for us, the two most exciting trends in the whole of anthropology. The first is David Graeber, and we've already heard from him in this editorial. Read more in his sparkling and original essay on page 6. The second, we state rather less modestly, is the school of anthropology of which this is the journal, and some of whose arguments are brilliantly summarised in the essay by Camilla Power (see page 17) and a further editorial by *RA* (page 26). If Graeber's project can be glossed as 'what ethnography can tell us about political practice and human freedom", Power's is "what the modern science of human nature can tell us about the same problem". These themes will be continued in Issue 2, with contributions from linguist Noam Chomsky and social anthropologist Jerome Lewis.

To extend this conversation, we cordially invite letters, articles and book reviews for future issues. Please write to us at the address in the box (bottom left), or email stuartrag@yahoo.co.uk.

Reference: Graeber D. (2004).
Fragments of An Anarchist Anthropology.
Chicago: Prickly Paradigm.

Revolution in Reverse

David Graeber *is an anthropologist at Goldsmiths College, University of London. In his previous books, particularly* Towards An Anthropological Theory of Value *and* Fragments of An Anarchist Anthropology*, he has spelt out his view of the need for a link between radical politics and anthropology. Here, building on his ethnographic work with direct action activists, he argues that although theories of revolution today seem unrealistic and old-hat, revolutionary practice is in good health. We need, therefore, new theoretical tools. Can anthropology point the way?*

All power to the imagination." "*Be realistic, demand the impossible...*" Anyone involved in radical politics has heard these expressions a thousand times. Usually they charm and excite the first time one encounters them, then eventually become so familiar as to seem hackneyed, or just disappear into the ambient background noise of radical life. Rarely if ever are they the object of serious theoretical reflection.

It seems to me that at the current historical juncture, some such reflection wouldn't be a bad idea. We are at a moment, after all, when received definitions have been thrown into disarray. It is quite possible that we are heading for a revolutionary moment, or perhaps a series of them, but we no longer have any clear idea of what that might even mean. This essay then is the product of a sustained effort to try to rethink terms like realism, imagination, alienation, bureaucracy, and revolution itself. It's born of some six years of involvement with the alternative globalisation movement and particularly with its most radical, anarchist, direct action-oriented elements. Consider it a kind of preliminary theoretical report.

I want to ask, among other things, why is it that these terms — which for most of us seem rather to evoke long-since forgotten debates of the 1960s — still resonate in those circles? Why is it that the idea of any radical social transformation so often seems "unrealistic"? What does revolution mean once one no longer expects a single, cataclysmic break with past structures of oppression? These seem disparate questions, but it seems to me the answers are related. If in many cases I brush past existing bodies of theory, this is quite intentional: I am trying to see if it is possible to build on the experience of these movements and the theoretical currents that inform them to begin to create something new.

Here is the gist of my argument:

1. Right and left political perspectives are founded, above all, on different assumptions about the ultimate realities of power. The right is rooted in a political ontology of violence, where being realistic means taking into account the forces

of destruction. In reply the left has consistently proposed variations on a political ontology of the imagination, in which the forces that are seen as the ultimate realities that need to be taken into account are those (forces of production, creativity...) that bring things into being.

2. The situation is complicated by the fact that systematic inequalities backed by force — structural violence — always produce skewed and fractured structures of the imagination. It is the experience of living inside these fractured structures that we refer to as "alienation".

3. Our customary conception of revolution is insurrectionary: the idea is to brush aside existing realities of violence by overthrowing the state, then, to unleash the powers of popular imagination and creativity to overcome the structures that create alienation. Over the 20th century it eventually became apparent that the real problem was how to institutionalise such creativity without creating new, often even more violent and alienating structures. As a result, the insurrectionary model no longer seems completely viable, but it's not clear what will replace it.

5. One response has been the revival of the tradition of direct action. In practice, mass actions reverse the ordinary insurrectionary sequence. Rather than a dramatic confrontation with state power leading first to an outpouring of popular festivity, the creation of new democratic institutions, and eventually the reinvention of everyday life, in organising mass mobilisations, activists drawn principally from subcultural groups create new, directly democratic institutions to organise "festivals of resistance" that ultimately lead to confrontations with the state. This is just one aspect of a more general movement of reformulation that seems to me to be inspired in part by the influence of anarchism, but in even larger part, by feminism — a movement that ultimately aims to recreate the effects of those insurrectionary moments on an ongoing basis. Let me take these one by one.

Part I: "be realistic..."

From early 2000 to late 2002 I was working with the Direct Action Network in New York—the principal group responsible for organising mass actions as part of the global justice movement in that city at that time. Actually, DAN was not, technically, a group, but a decentralised network, operating on principles of direct democracy according to an elaborate, but strikingly effective, form of consensus process. It played a central role in efforts to create new organisational forms. DAN existed in a purely political space; it had no concrete resources, not even a significant treasury, to administer. Then one day someone gave DAN a car. It caused a minor crisis. We soon discovered that, legally, it is impossible for a decentralised network to own a car. Cars can be owned by individuals, or they can be owned by corporations, which are fictive individuals. They cannot be

owned by networks. Unless we were willing to incorporate ourselves as a nonprofit corporation (which would have required a complete reorganisation and abandoning most of our egalitarian principles), the only expedient was to find a volunteer willing to claim to be the owner for legal purposes. But then that person was expected to pay all outstanding fines, insurance fees, provide written permission to allow others to drive out of state, and, of course, only he could retrieve the car if it were impounded. Before long the DAN car had become such a perennial problem that we simply abandoned it.

Direct action: cutting holes in the fabric of reality

It struck me there was something important here. Why is it that projects like DAN's — projects of democratising society — are so often perceived as idle dreams that melt away as soon as they encounter anything that seems like hard material reality? In our

case it had nothing to do with inefficiency: police chiefs across the country had called us the best organised force they'd ever had to deal with. It seems to me the reality effect (if one may call it that) comes rather from the fact that radical projects tend to founder, or at least become endlessly difficult, the moment they enter into the world of large, heavy objects: buildings, cars, tractors, boats, industrial machinery. This in turn is not because these objects are somehow intrinsically difficult to administer democratically; it's because, like the DAN car, they are surrounded by endless government regulation, and effectively impossible to hide from the government's armed representatives. In America, I've seen endless examples. A squat is legalised after a long struggle; suddenly, building inspectors arrive to announce it will take ten thousand dollars worth of repairs to bring it up to code; organisers are forced to spend the next several years organising bake sales and soliciting contributions. This means setting up bank accounts, and legal regulations then specify how a group receiving funds, or dealing with the government, must be organised (again, not as an egalitarian collective). All these regulations are enforced by violence. True, in ordinary life, police rarely come in swinging billy clubs to enforce building code regulations, but, as anarchists often discover, if one simply pretends they don't exist, that will, eventually, happen. The rarity with which the nightsticks actually appear just helps to make the violence harder to see. This in turn makes the effects of all these regulations — regulations that almost always assume that normal relations between individuals are mediated by the market, and that normal groups are organised hierarchically — seem to emanate not from the government's monopoly of the use of force, but from the largeness, solidity, and heaviness of the objects themselves.

When one is asked to be "realistic", then, the reality one is normally being asked to recognise is not one of natural, material facts; neither is it really some supposed ugly truth about human nature. Normally it's a recognition of the effects of the systematic threat of violence. It even threads our language. Why, for example, is a building referred to as "real property", or "real estate"? The "real" in this usage is not derived from Latin *res*, or "thing": it's from the Spanish *real*, meaning, "royal", "belonging to the king". All land within a sovereign territory ultimately belongs to the sovereign; legally this is still the case. This is why the state has the right to impose its regulations. But sovereignty ultimately comes down to a monopoly of what is euphemistically referred to as "force" — that is, violence. Just as Giorgio Agamben famously argued that from the perspective of sovereign power, something is alive because you can kill it, so property is "real" because the state can seize or destroy it. In the same way, when one takes a "realist" position in International Relations, one assumes that states will use whatever capacities they have at their disposal, including force of arms, to pursue their national interests. What "reality" is one recognising? Certainly not material reality. The idea that nations are human-like entities with purposes and interests is an entirely metaphysical notion. The King of France had purposes and interests.

"France" does not. What makes it seem "realistic" to suggest it does is simply that those in control of nationstates have the power to raise armies, launch invasions, bomb

cities, and can otherwise threaten the use of organised violence in the name of what they describe as their "national interests" — and that it would be foolish to ignore that possibility. National interests are real because they can kill you.

The critical term here is "force", as in "the state's monopoly of the use of coercive force." Whenever we hear this word invoked, we find ourselves in the presence of a political ontology in which the power to destroy, to cause others pain or to threaten to break, damage, or mangle their bodies (or just lock them in a tiny room for the rest of their lives) is treated as the social equivalent of the very energy that drives the cosmos. Contemplate, for instance, the metaphors and displacements that make it possible to construct the following two sentences:

> *Scientists investigate the nature of physical laws so as to understand the forces that govern the universe.*
>
> *Police are experts in the scientific application of physical force in order to enforce the laws that govern society.*

This is to my mind the essence of rightwing thought: a political ontology that through such subtle means, allows violence to define the very parameters of social existence and common sense.

The left, on the other hand, has always been founded on a different set of assumptions about what is ultimately real, about the very grounds of political being. Obviously leftists don't deny the reality of violence. Many leftist theorists have thought about it quite a lot. But they don't tend to give it the same foundational status.

Instead, I would argue that leftist thought is founded on what I will call a "political ontology of the imagination" — though I could as easily have called it an ontology of creativity or making or invention. Nowadays, most of us tend to identify it with the legacy of Marx, with his emphasis on social revolution and forces of material production. But really Marx's terms emerged from much wider arguments about value, labour, and creativity current in radical circles of his time, whether in the worker's movement, or for that matter various strains of Romanticism. Marx himself, for all his contempt for the utopian socialists of his day, never ceased to insist that what makes human beings different from animals is that architects, unlike bees, first raise their structures in the imagination. It was the unique property of humans, for Marx, that they first envision things, then bring them into being. It was this process he referred to as "production". Around the same time, utopian socialists like St. Simon were arguing that artists needed to become the avant garde — or "vanguard", as he put it — of a new social order, providing the grand visions that industry now had the power to bring into being. What at the time might have seemed the fantasy of an eccentric pamphleteer soon became the charter for a sporadic, uncertain, but apparently permanent alliance that endures to this day. If artistic avant gardes and social revolutionaries have felt a peculiar affinity for one another ever since, borrowing each other's languages and ideas,

it appears to have been insofar as both have remained committed to the idea that the ultimate, hidden truth of the world is that it is something that we make, and could just as easily make differently. In this sense, a phrase like "all power to the imagination" expresses the very quintessence of the left.

To this emphasis on forces of creativity and production, of course the right tends to reply that revolutionaries systematically neglect the social and historical importance of the "means of destruction": states, armies, executioners, barbarian invasions, criminals, unruly mobs, and so on. Pretending such things are not there, or can simply be wished away, they argue, has the result of ensuring that left-wing regimes will in fact create far more death and destruction than those that have the wisdom to take a more realistic" approach.

Obviously, this dichotomy is very much a simplification. One could level endless qualifications. The bourgeoisie of Marx's time, for instance, had an extremely productivist philosophy — one reason Marx could see it as a revolutionary force. Elements of the right dabbled with the artistic ideal, and 20$^{\text{th}}$-century Marxist regimes often embraced essentially rightwing theories of power.

Nonetheless, I think these are useful terms because even if one treats imagination" and "violence" not as the single hidden truth of the world but as immanent principles, as equal constituents of any social reality, they can reveal a great deal one would not be able to see otherwise. For one thing, everywhere, imagination and violence seem to interact in predictable, and quite significant, ways.

Let me start with a few words on violence, providing a very schematic overview of arguments that I have developed in somewhat greater detail elsewhere.

Part II: on violence and imaginative displacement

I'm an anthropologist by profession and anthropological discussions of violence are almost always prefaced by statements that violent acts are acts of communication, that they are inherently meaningful, and that this is what is truly important about them. In other words, violence operates largely through the imagination.

All of this is true. I would hardly want to discount the importance of fear and terror in human life. Acts of violence can be — indeed, often are — acts of communication. But the same could be said of any other form of human action, too. It strikes me that what is really important about violence is that it is perhaps the only form of human action that holds out the possibility of operating on others without being communicative. Let me put this more precisely. Violence may well be the only way in which it is possible for one human being to have relatively predictable effects on the actions of another without understanding anything about them. Pretty much any other way one might try to influence another's actions, one at least has to have some idea who they think they are, who they think you are, what they might want out of the situation, and a host of similar considerations. Hit them over the head hard enough,

all this becomes irrelevant. It's true that the effects one can have by hitting them are quite limited. But they are real enough, and the fact remains that any alternative form of action cannot, without some sort of appeal to shared meanings or understandings, have any sort of effect at all.

Unlike animals, we first raise our projects in our imaginations

What's more, even attempts to influence another by the threat of violence, which clearly does require some level of shared understandings (at the very least, the other party must understand they are being threatened, and what is being demanded of them), requires much less than any alternative. Most human relations — particularly ongoing ones, such as those between longstanding friends or longstanding enemies — are extremely complicated, endlessly dense with experience and meaning. They require a continual and often subtle work of interpretation; everyone involved must put constant energy into imagining the other's point of view. Threatening others with physical harm, on the other hand, allows the possibility of cutting through all this. It makes possible relations of a far more schematic kind: ie, 'cross this line and I will shoot you and otherwise I really don't care who you are or what you want'. This is, for instance, why violence is so often the preferred weapon of the stupid: one could

almost say, the trump card of the stupid, since it is the form of stupidity to which it is most difficult to come up with any intelligent response.

There is, however, one crucial qualification to be made. The more evenly matched two parties are in their capacity for violence, the less all this tends to be true. If one is involved in a relatively equal contest of violence, it is indeed a very good idea to understand as much as possible about them. A military commander will obviously try to get inside his opponent's mind. It's really only when one side has an overwhelming advantage in their capacity to cause physical harm that this is no longer the case. Of course, when one side has an overwhelming advantage, they rarely have to actually resort to actually shooting, beating, or blowing people up. The threat will usually suffice. This has a curious effect. It means that the most characteristic quality of violence — its capacity to impose very simple social relations that involve little or no imaginative identification — becomes most salient in situations where actual, physical violence is likely to be least present.

We can speak here (as many do) of structural violence: that systematic inequalities that are ultimately backed up by the threat of force can be seen as a form of violence in themselves. Systems of structural violence invariably seem to produce extreme, lopsided structures of imaginative identification. It's not that interpretive work isn't carried out. Society, in any recognisable form, could not operate without it. Rather, the overwhelming burden of the labour is relegated to its victims.

Let me start with the household. A constant staple of 1950s situation comedies, in America, were jokes about the impossibility of understanding women. The jokes, of course, were always told by men. Women's logic was always being treated as alien and incomprehensible. One never had the impression, on the other hand, that women had much trouble understanding the men. That's because the women had no choice but to understand men: this was the heyday of the patriarchal family, and women with no access to their own income or resources had little choice but to spend a fair amount of time and energy understanding what the relevant men thought was going on.

Actually, this sort of rhetoric about the mysteries of womankind is a perennial feature of patriarchal families: structures that can, indeed, be considered forms of structural violence insofar as the power of men over women within them is, as generations of feminists have pointed out, ultimately backed up, if often in indirect and hidden ways, by all sorts of coercive force. But generations of female novelists — Virginia Wolfe comes immediately to mind — have also documented the other side of this: the constant work women perform in managing, maintaining, and adjusting the egos of apparently oblivious men — involving an endless work of imaginative identification and what I've called interpretive labour. This carries over on every level. Women are always imagining what things look like from a male point of view. Men almost never do the same for women. This is presumably the reason why in so many societies with a pronounced gendered division of labour (that is, most societies), women know a great deal about what men do every day, and men have next to no idea about women's

The world looks different from a cop's point of view

occupations. Faced with the prospect of even trying to imagine a women's perspective, many recoil in horror. In the US, one popular trick among high school creative writing teachers is to assign students to write an essay imagining that they were to switch genders, and describe what it would be like to live for one day as a member of the opposite sex. The results are almost always exactly the same: all the girls in class write long and detailed essays demonstrating that they have spent a great deal of time thinking about such questions; roughly half the boys refuse to write the essay entirely. Almost invariably they express profound resentment about having to imagine what it might be like to be a woman.

It should be easy enough to multiply parallel examples. When something goes wrong in a restaurant kitchen, and the boss appears to size things up, he is unlikely to pay much attention to a collection of workers all scrambling to explain their version of the story. Likely as not he'll tell them all to shut up and just arbitrarily decide what he thinks is likely to have happened: "you're the new guy, you must have messed up — if you do it again, you're fired." It's those who do not have the power to fire arbitrarily who have to do the work of figuring out what actually happened. What occurs on the most petty or intimate level also occurs on the level of society as a whole.

Curiously enough it was Adam Smith, in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1761), who first made notice of what's nowadays labeled "compassion fatigue". Human beings, he observed, appear to have a natural tendency not only to imaginatively identify with their fellows, but also, as a result, to actually feel one another's joys and pains. The poor, however, are just too consistently miserable, and as a result, observers, for their own self-protection, tend to simply blot them out. The result is that while those on the bottom spend a great deal of time imagining the perspectives of, and actually caring about, those on the top, it almost never happens the other way around. That is my real point. Whatever the mechanisms, something like this always seems to occur, whether one is dealing with masters and servants, men and women, bosses and workers, rich and poor. Structural inequality — structural violence — invariably creates the same lopsided structures of the imagination. And since, as Smith correctly observed, imagination tends to bring with it sympathy, the victims of structural violence tend to care about its beneficiaries, or at least, to care far more about them than those beneficiaries care about them. In fact, this might well be (aside from the violence itself) the single most powerful force preserving such relations.

It is easy to see bureaucratic procedures as an extension of this phenomenon. One might say they are not so much themselves forms of stupidity and ignorance as modes of organising situations already marked by stupidity and ignorance owing to the existence of structural violence. True, bureaucratic procedure operates as if it were a form of stupidity in that it invariably means ignoring all the subtleties of real human existence and reducing everything to simple pre-established mechanical or statistical formulae. Whether it's a matter of forms, rules, statistics, or questionnaires, bureaucracy is always about simplification. Ultimately the effect is not so different from the boss

who walks in to make an arbitrary snap decision as to what went wrong: it's a matter of applying very simple schemas to complex, ambiguous situations.

The same goes, in fact, for police, who are after all simply low-level administrators with guns. Police sociologists have long since demonstrated that only a tiny fraction of police work has anything to do with crime. Police are, rather, the immediate representatives of the state's monopoly of violence, those who step in to actively simplify situations (for example, were someone to actively challenge some bureaucratic definition). Simultaneously, police have become, in contemporary industrial democracies, America in particular, the almost obsessive objects of popular imaginative identification. In fact, the public is constantly invited, in a thousand TV shows and movies, to see the world from a police officer's perspective, even if it is always the perspective of imaginary police officers, the kind who actually do spend their time fighting crime rather than concerning themselves with broken tail lights or open container laws.

IIa: excursus on transcendent versus immanent imagination

To imaginatively identify with an imaginary policeman is, of course, not the same as to imaginatively identify with a real one (most Americans, in fact, avoid real policeman like the plague). This is a critical distinction, however much an increasingly digitalised world makes it easy to confuse the two.

It is here helpful to consider the history of the word "imagination". The common ancient and medieval conception, what we call "the imagination", was considered the zone of passage between reality and reason. Perceptions from the material world had to pass through the imagination, becoming emotionally charged in the process and mixing with all sorts of phantasms, before the rational mind could grasp their significance. Intentions and desires moved in the opposite direction. It's only after Descartes, really, that the word "imaginary" came to mean, specifically, anything that is not real: imaginary creatures, imaginary places (Middle Earth, Narnia, planets in faraway galaxies, the Kingdom of Prester John...), imaginary friends. By this definition, of course, a "political ontology of the imagination" would actually be a contradiction in terms. The imagination cannot be the basis of reality. It is by definition that which we can think, but has no reality.

I'll refer to this latter as "the transcendent notion of the imagination" since it seems to take as its model novels or other works of fiction that create imaginary worlds that presumably remain the same no matter how many times one reads them. Imaginary creatures — elves or unicorns or TV cops — are not affected by the real world. They cannot be, since they don't exist. In contrast, the kind of imagination I have been referring to here is much closer to the old, immanent, conception. Critically, it is in no sense static and free-floating, but entirely caught up in projects of action that aim to


PREGNANT
& WORRIED
ABOUT THE
FUTURE

have real effects on the material world, and, as such, always changing and adapting. This is equally true whether one is crafting a knife or a piece of jewelry, or trying to make sure one doesn't hurt a friend's feelings.

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][‘‘Women are always imagining what things look like from a male
point of view. Men almost never do the same for women’’’
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One might get a sense of how important this distinction really is by returning to the ‘68 slogan about giving power to the imagination. If one takes this to refer to the transcendent imagination — preformed utopian schemes, for example — doing so can, we know, have disastrous effects. Historically, it has often meant imposing them by violence. On the other hand, in a revolutionary situation, one might by the same token argue that *not* giving full power to the other, immanent, sort of imagination would be equally disastrous.

The relation of violence and imagination is made much more complicated because while in every case structural inequalities tend to split society into those doing imaginative labour, and those who do not, they do so in very different ways.

Capitalism here is a dramatic case in point. Political economy tends to see work in capitalist societies as divided between two spheres: wage labour, for which the paradigm is always factories, and domestic labour — housework, childcare — relegated mainly to women. The first is seen primarily as a matter of creating and maintaining physical objects. The second is probably best seen as a matter of creating and maintaining people and social relations. The distinction is obviously a bit of a caricature: there has never been a society, not even Engels' Manchester or Victor Hugo's Paris, where most men were factory workers or most women worked exclusively as housewives. Still, it is a useful starting point since it reveals an interesting divergence. In the sphere of industry, it is generally those on top that relegate to themselves the more imaginative tasks (ie, that design the products and organise production), whereas when inequalities emerge in the sphere of
social production, it's those on the bottom who end up expected to do the major imaginative work (for example, the bulk of what I've called the 'labour of interpretation' that keeps life running).

No doubt all this makes it easier to see the two as fundamentally different sorts of activity, making it hard for us to recognise interpretive labour, for example, or most of what we usually think of as women's work, as labour at all. To my mind it would probably be better to recognise it as the primary form of labour. Insofar as a clear distinction can be made here, it's the care, energy, and labour directed at human beings that should be considered fundamental.

The things we care most about — our loves, passions, rivalries, obsessions — are always other people; and in most societies that are not capitalist, it's taken for granted that the manufacture of material goods is a subordinate moment in a larger process of fashioning people. In fact, I would argue that one of the most alienating aspects of

capitalism is the fact that it forces us to pretend that it is the other way around, and that societies exist primarily to increase their output of things.

Part III: on alienation

> *In the 20th century, death terrifies men less than the absence of real life. All these dead, mechanised, specialised actions, stealing a little bit of life a thousand times a day until the mind and body are exhausted, until that death which is not the end of life but the final saturation with absence.*
>
> **Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life***

Creativity and desire — what we often reduce, in political economy terms, to "production" and "consumption" — are essentially vehicles of the imagination. Structures of inequality and domination, structural violence if you will, tend to skew the imagination. They might create situations where labourers are relegated to mindnumbing, boring, mechanical jobs and only a small elite is allowed to indulge in imaginative labour, leading to the feeling, on the part of the workers, that they are alienated from their own labour, that their very deeds belong to someone else. It might also create social situations where kings, politicians, celebrities or CEOs prance about oblivious to almost everything around them while their wives, servants, staff, and handlers spend all their time engaged in the imaginative work of maintaining them in their fantasies. Most situations of inequality I suspect combine elements of both.

The subjective experience of living inside such lopsided structures of imagination is what we are referring to when we talk about "alienation".

It strikes me that, if nothing else, this perspective would help explain the lingering appeal of theories of alienation in revolutionary circles, even when the academic left has long since abandoned them. If one enters an anarchist Infoshop, almost anywhere in the world, the French authors one is likely to encounter will still largely consist of situationists like Guy Debord and Raoul Vaneigem, the great theorists of alienation (alongside theorists of the imagination like Cornelius Castoriadis).

For a long time I was genuinely puzzled as to how so many suburban American teenagers could be entranced, for instance, by Raoul Vaneigem's *The Revolution of Everyday Life* — a book, after all, written in Paris almost 40 years ago. In the end I decided it must be because Vaneigem's book was, in its own way, the highest theoretical expression of the feelings of rage, boredom, and revulsion that almost any adolescent at some point feels when confronted with the middle-class existence. The sense of a life broken into fragments, with no ultimate meaning or integrity; of a cynical market system selling its victims commodities and spectacles that themselves represent tiny false images of the very sense of totality and pleasure and community the market has in fact destroyed; the tendency to turn every relation into a form of exchange, to sacrifice

life for "survival", pleasure for renunciation, creativity for hollow homogenous units of power or "dead time" — on some level all this clearly still rings true.

The question though is why. Contemporary social theory offers little explanation. Poststructuralism, which emerged in the immediate aftermath of '68, was largely born of the rejection of this sort of analysis. It is now simple common sense among social theorists that one cannot define a society as unnatural unless one assumes that there is some natural way for society to be, inhuman unless there is some authentic human essence, that one cannot say that the self is fragmented unless it would be possible to have a unified self, and so on. Since these positions are untenable — since

there is no natural condition for society, no authentic human essence, no unitary self — theories of alienation have no basis. As arguments, all this seems hard to refute. But, if so, how do we account for the experience?

Still, if one really thinks about it, what are academic theorists saying? They are saying that the idea of a unitary subject, a whole society, a natural order, are unreal. That all these things are simply figments of our imagination. True enough. But then: what else could they be? And why is that a problem? If imagination is indeed a constituent element in the process of how we produce our social and material realities, there is every reason to believe that it proceeds through producing images of totality. That's simply how the imagination works. One must be able to imagine oneself and others as integrated subjects in order to be able to produce beings that are in fact endlessly multiple, imagine some sort of coherent, bounded "society" in order to produce that chaotic open-ended network of social relations that actually exists, and so forth. Normally, people seem able to live with the disparity. The question, it seems to me, is why in certain times and places, the recognition of it instead tends to spark rage and despair, feelings that the social world is a hollow travesty or malicious joke. This, I would argue, is the result of that warping and shattering of the imagination that is the inevitable effect of structural violence.

Part IV: on revolution

The situationists, like many '60s radicals, wished to strike back through a strategy of direct action: creating "situations" by creative acts of subversion that undermined the logic of the spectacle and allowed actors to at least momentarily recapture their imaginative powers. At the same time, they also felt all this was inevitably leading up to a great insurrectionary moment — "the" revolution, properly speaking. If the events of May '68 showed anything, it was that if one does not aim to seize state power, there can be no such fundamental, one-time break. The main difference between the situationists and their most avid current readers is that the millenarian element has almost completely fallen away. No one thinks the skies are about to open any time soon. There is a consolation though: that as a result, as close as one can come to experiencing genuine revolutionary freedom, one can begin to experience it immediately. Consider

the following statement from the CrimethInc collective, probably the most inspiring young anarchist propagandists operating in the situationist tradition today:

> *We must make our freedom by cutting holes in the fabric of this reality, by forging new realities which will, in turn, fashion us. Putting yourself in new situations constantly is the only way to ensure that you make your decisions unencumbered by the inertia of habit, custom, law, or prejudice — and it is up to you to create these situations.*
>
> *Freedom only exists in the moment of revolution. And those moments are not as rare as you think. Change, revolutionary change, is going on constantly and everywhere — and everyone plays a part in it, consciously or not.*

What is this but an elegant statement of the logic of direct action: the defiant insistence on acting as if one is already free? The obvious question is how it can contribute to an overall strategy, one that should lead to a cumulative movement towards a world without states and capitalism. Here, no one is completely sure. Most assume the process could only be one of endless improvisation. Insurrectionary moments there will certainly be. Likely as not, quite a few of them. But they will most likely be one element in a far more complex and multifaceted revolutionary process whose outlines could hardly, at this point, be fully anticipated.

In retrospect, what seems strikingly naïve is the old assumption that a single uprising or successful civil war could, as it were, neutralise the entire apparatus of structural violence, at least within a particular national territory: that within that territory, rightwing realities could be simply swept away, to leave the field open for an untrammeled outpouring of revolutionary creativity. But if so, the truly puzzling thing is that, at certain moments of human history, that appeared to be exactly what was happening. It seems to me that if we are to have any chance of grasping the new, emerging conception of revolution, we need to begin by thinking again about the quality of these insurrectionary moments.

One of the most remarkable things about such moments is how they can seem to burst out of nowhere — and then, often, dissolve away as quickly. How is it that the same "public" that two months before, say, the Paris Commune, or Spanish Civil War, had voted in a fairly moderate social-democratic regime will suddenly find itself willing to risk their lives for the same ultra-radicals who received a fraction of the actual vote? Or, to return to May '68, how is it that the same public that seemed to support or at least feel strongly sympathetic toward the student/worker uprising could almost immediately afterwards return to the polls and elect a rightwing government? The most common historical explanations — that the revolutionaries didn't really represent the public or its interests, but that elements of the public perhaps became caught up in some sort of irrational effervescence — seem obviously inadequate.

First of all, they assume that "the public" is an entity with opinions, interests, and allegiances that can be treated as relatively consistent over time. In fact what we call "the public" is created, produced, through specific institutions that allow specific forms of action — taking polls, watching television, voting, signing petitions or writing letters to elected officials or attending public hearings — and not others. These frames of action imply certain ways of talking, thinking, arguing, deliberating. The same "public" that may widely indulge in the use of recreational chemicals may also consistently vote to make such indulgences illegal; the same collection of citizens are likely to come to completely different decisions on questions affecting their communities if organised into a parliamentary system, a system of computerised plebiscites, or a nested series of public assemblies. In fact the entire anarchist project of reinventing direct democracy is premised on assuming this is the case.

To illustrate what I mean, consider that in America the same collection of people referred to in one context as "the public" can in another be referred to as "the workforce". They become a "workforce", of course, when they are engaged in different sorts of activity. The "public" does not work — at least, a sentence like "most of the American public works in the service industry" would never appear in a magazine or paper — if a journalist were to attempt to write such a sentence, their editor would certainly change it. It is especially odd since the public does apparently have to go to work: this is why, as leftist critics often complain, the media will always talk about how, say, a transport strike is likely to inconvenience the public, in their capacity of commuters, but it will never occur to them that those striking are themselves part of the public, or that whether if they succeed in raising wage levels this will be a public benefit. And certainly the "public" does not go out into the streets. Its role is as audience to public spectacles, and consumers of public services. When buying or using goods and services privately supplied, the same collection of individuals become something else ("consumers"), just as in other contexts of action it is relabeled a "nation", "electorate", or "population". All these entities are the product of institutions and institutional practices that, in turn, define certain horizons of possibility. Hence when voting in parliamentary elections one might feel obliged to make a "realistic" choice; in an insurrectionary situation, on the other hand, suddenly anything seems possible.

A great deal of recent revolutionary thought essentially asks: what, then, does this collection of people become during such insurrectionary moments? For the last few centuries the conventional answer has been "the people", and all modern legal regimes ultimately trace their legitimacy to moments of "constituent power", when the people rise up, usually in arms, to create a new constitutional order. The insurrectionary paradigm, in fact, is embedded in the very idea of the modern state. A number of European theorists, understanding that the ground has shifted, have proposed a new term, "the multitude", an entity that cannot by definition become the basis for a new national or bureaucratic state. For me the project is deeply ambivalent.

In the terms I've been developing, what "the public", "the workforce", "consumers", "population" all have in common is that they are brought into being by institutionalised frames of action that are inherently bureaucratic, and therefore, profoundly alienating. Voting booths, television screens, office cubicles, hospitals, the ritual that surrounds them — one might say these are the very machinery of alienation. They are the instruments through which the human imagination is smashed and shattered. Insurrectionary moments are moments when this bureaucratic apparatus is neutralised. Doing so always seems to have the effect of throwing horizons of possibility wide open. This is only to be expected if one of the main things that apparatus normally does is to enforce extremely limited ones. (This is probably why, as Rebecca Solnit has observed, people often experience something very similar during natural disasters.) This would explain why revolutionary moments always seem to be followed by an outpouring of social, artistic, and intellectual creativity. Normally-unequal structures of imaginative identification are disrupted; everyone is experimenting with trying to see the world from unfamiliar points of view. Normally- unequal structures of creativity are disrupted; everyone feels not only the right, but usually the immediate practical need to recreate and reimagine everything around them.

Hence the ambivalence of the process of renaming. On the one hand, it is understandable that those who wish to make radical claims would like to know in whose name they are making them. On the other, if what I've been saying is true, the whole project of first invoking a revolutionary "multitude", and then to start looking for the dynamic forces that lie behind it, begins to look a lot like the first step of that very process of institutionalisation that must eventually kill the very thing it celebrates. Subjects (publics, peoples, workforces...) are created by specific institutional structures that are essentially frameworks for action. They are what they do. What revolutionaries do is to break existing frames to create new horizons of possibility, an act that then allows a radical restructuring of the social imagination. This is perhaps the one form of action that cannot, by definition, be institutionalised. This is why a number of revolutionary thinkers, from Raffaele Laudani in Italy to the Collectivo Situaciones in Argentina, have begun to suggest it might be better here to speak not of "constituent" but "destituent power".

IVa: revolution in reverse

There is a strange paradox in Marx's approach to revolution. Generally speaking, when Marx speaks of material creativity, he speaks of "production", and here he insists, as I've mentioned, that the defining feature of humanity is that we first imagine things, and then try to bring them into being. When he speaks of social creativity it is almost always in terms of revolution, but here, he insists that imagining something and then trying to bring it into being is precisely what we should never do. That would be

utopianism, and for utopianism, he had only withering contempt. The most generous interpretation, I would suggest, is that Marx on some level understood that the production of people and social relations worked on different principles, but also knew he did not really have a theory of what those principles were. Probably it was only with the rise of feminist theory — that I was drawing on so liberally in my earlier analysis — that it became possible to think systematically about such issues. I might add that it is a profound reflection on the effects of structural violence on the imagination that feminist theory itself was so quickly sequestered away into its own subfield where it has had almost no impact on the work of most male theorists.

It seems to me no coincidence, then, that so much of the real practical work of developing a new revolutionary paradigm in recent years has also been the work of feminism; or anyway, that feminist concerns have been the main driving force in their transformation. In America, the current anarchist obsession with consensus and other forms of directly democratic process traces back directly to organisational issues within the feminist movement. What had begun, in the late '60s and early '70s, as small, intimate, often anarchist-inspired collectives were thrown into crisis when they started growing rapidly in size. Rather than abandon the search for consensus in decision-making, many began trying to develop more formal versions on the same principles. This, in turn, inspired some radical Quakers (who had previously seen their own consensus decision-making as primarily a religious practice) to begin creating training collectives. By the time of the direct action campaigns against the nuclear power industry in the late '70s, the whole apparatus of affinity groups, spokescouncils, consensus and facilitation had already begun to take something like it's contemporary form. The resulting outpouring of new forms of consensus process constitutes the most important contribution to revolutionary practice in decades. It is largely the work of feminists engaged in practical organising — a majority, probably, tied to the anarchist tradition. This makes it all the more ironic that male theorists who have not themselves engaged in on-the-ground organising so often feel obliged to include, in otherwise sympathetic statements, a ritualised condemnation of consensus.

The organisation of mass actions themselves — festivals of resistance, as they are often called — can be considered pragmatic experiments in whether it is indeed possible to institutionalise the experience of liberation, the giddy realignment of imaginative powers, everything that is most powerful in the experience of a successful spontaneous insurrection. Or if not to institutionalise it, perhaps, to produce it on call. The effect for those involved is as if everything were happening in reverse. A revolutionary uprising begins with battles in the streets, and if successful, proceeds to outpourings of popular effervescence and festivity. There follows the sober business of creating new institutions, councils, decision-making processes, and ultimately the reinvention of everyday life.

Such at least is the ideal, and certainly there have been moments in human history where something like that has begun to happen — much though, again, such spontaneous creations always seems to end up being subsumed within some new form

The author: It's time to take revolution seriously again

of violent bureaucracy. However, as I've noted, this is more or less inevitable since bureaucracy, however much it serves as the immediate organiser of situations of power and structural blindness, does not create them. Mainly, it simply evolves to manage them.

This is one reason direct action proceeds in the opposite direction. Probably a majority of the participants are drawn from subcultures that are all about reinventing everyday life. Even if not, actions begin with the creation of new forms of collective decisionmaking: councils, assemblies, the endless attention to "process" — and uses those forms to plan the street actions and popular festivities. The result is, usually, a dramatic confrontation with armed representatives of the state. While most organisers would be delighted to see things escalate to a popular insurrection, and something like that does occasionally happen, most would not expect these to mark any kind of permanent breaks in reality. They serve more as something almost along the lines of momentary advertisements — or better, foretastes, experiences of visionary inspiration — for a much slower, painstaking struggle of creating alternative institutions.

One of the most important contributions of feminism, it seems to me, has been to constantly remind everyone that "situations" do not create themselves. There is usually a great deal of work involved. For much of human history, what has been taken as politics has consisted essentially of a series of dramatic performances carried out upon theatrical stages. One of the great gifts of feminism to political thought has been to continually remind us of the people who are in fact making and preparing and cleaning those stages, and even more, maintaining the invisible structures that make them possible — people who have, overwhelmingly, been women.

The normal process of politics of course is to make such people disappear. Indeed, one of the chief functions of women's work is to make itself disappear. One might say that the political ideal within direct action circles has become to efface the difference; or, to put it another way, that action is seen as genuinely revolutionary when the process of production of situations is experienced as just as liberating as the situations themselves. It is an experiment one might say in the realignment of imagination, of creating truly nonalienated forms of experience.

Conclusion

Obviously it is also attempting to do so in a context in which, far from being put in temporary abeyance, state power (in many parts of the globe at least) so suffuses every aspect of daily existence that its armed representatives intervene to regulate the internal organisational structure of groups allowed to cash cheques or own and operate motor vehicles. One of the remarkable things about the current, neoliberal age is that bureaucracy has come to seem so all-encompassing — this period has seen, after all, the creation of the first effective global administrative system in human history — that we don't even see it any more. At the same time, the pressures of operating

within a context of endless regulation, repression, sexism, racial and class dominance, tend to ensure many who get drawn into the politics of direct action experience a constant alternation of exaltation and burn-out, moments where everything seems possible alternating with moments where nothing does. In other parts of the world, autonomy is much easier to achieve, but at the cost of isolation or almost complete absence of resources. How to create alliances between different zones of possibility is a fundamental problem.

These however are questions of strategy that go well beyond the scope of the current essay. My purpose here has been more modest. Revolutionary theory, it seems to me, has in many fronts advanced much less quickly than revolutionary practice; my aim in writing this has been to see if one could work back from the experience of direct action to begin to create some new theoretical tools. They are hardly meant to be definitive. They may not even prove useful. But perhaps they can contribute to a broader project of re-imagining.

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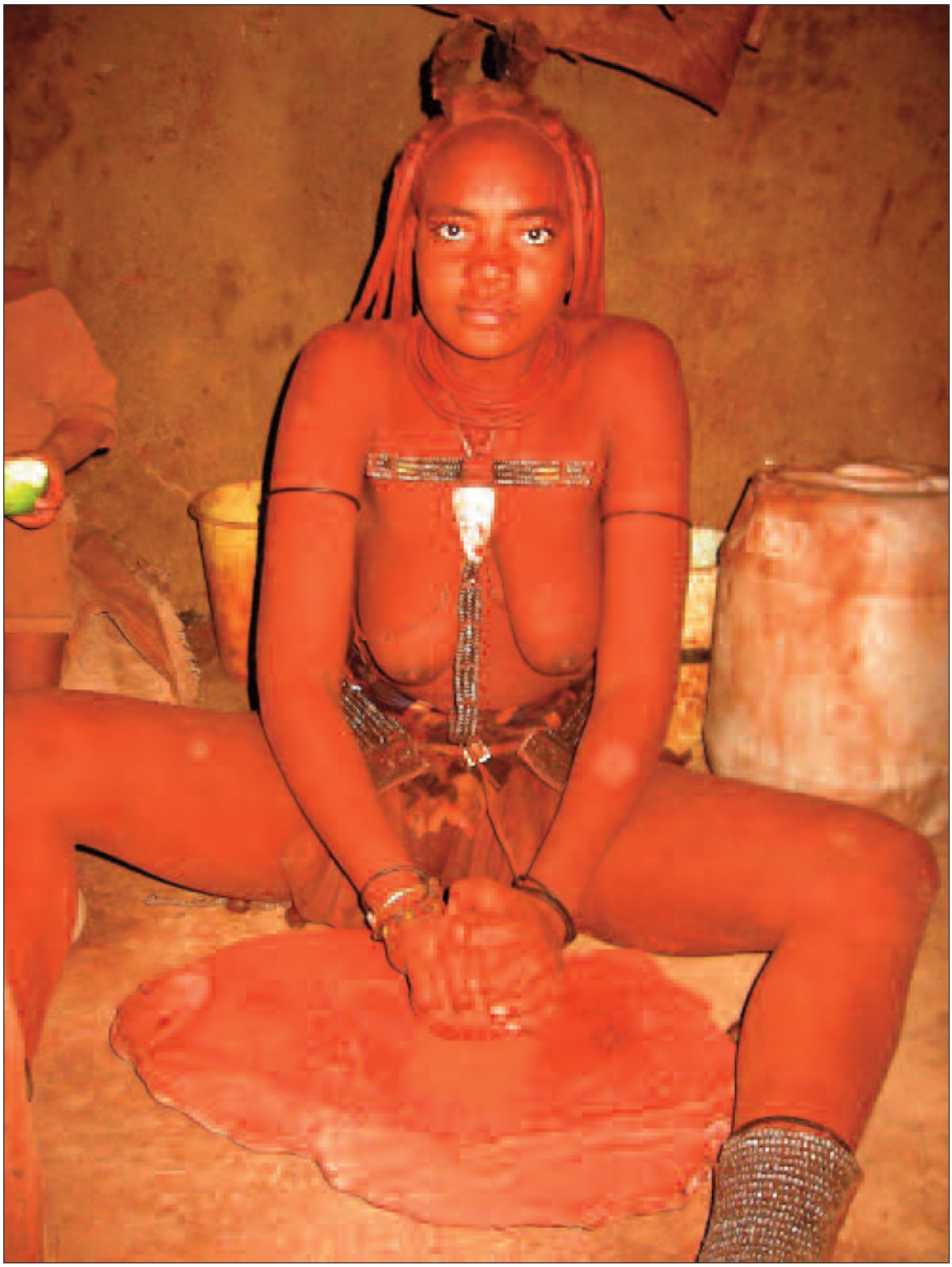


Society as congregation — religion as binding spectacle

Camilla Power *is senior lecturer in anthropology at the University of East London and a member of the Radical Anthropology Group. She has published many articles on the evolutionary origins of ritual, gender and the use of cosmetics in African initiation. Here, she looks at the legacy of sociology's founding father, Emile Durkheim.*

He implied that society was born in a communistic revolution. Does this theory still stand up?

Emile Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* is a frustrating and astonishing work. Published just before the First World War, the book reached the brink of the conclusion that human culture was created through communistic revolution. In Durkheim's understanding, the necessary vehicle for experience sufficiently intense and collective to create and structure society was ritual — periodically reiterated performance of a religious character, associated by Durkheim with totemic cult action. The object of worship, under the "flag" of the totem, was society itself, or, as he puts it, "the determined society called the clan" (1915: 206). Durkheim does not allow that social thought, with its efficacy greater than individual thought (1915: 228), can come into being and be established except through the violent and intense emotional solidarity attained in sacred ritual, the "collective effervescence" involving all members of the constituted group as participants. In other words, the origin of collective thought, of symbolic culture, and of language itself, is unimaginable without religious ritual. At origin, religion is no more and no less than a group's collective consciousness of itself as a group expressed through symbolism: "social life, in all its aspects and in every period of its history, is made possible only by a vast symbolism" (1915: 231).

The crucial, central chapters of *Elementary Forms* are entitled 'Origins of These Beliefs'. The entire work is an argument, which Durkheim considered to be fully scientific, concerning the origin of religion, therefore of human culture itself. Yet Durkheim tiptoed back from the edge of declaring a revolutionary emergence of communistic ritual to be the source of earliest human society. He implied it certainly: that thought and reason could only be born out of intense collectivity — the group's lived experience of "the sacred" creating and sustaining ideal collective representations. He defined the sacred, as against profane, in terms of the power to arouse and nourish those collective

representations. Through sacred ritual, the members of the group experienced collective intelligence as a material power greater than mere individual intelligence, a power manifested visibly in the summoning of the ritual congregation.

For Durkheim and Mauss: "the first logical categories were social categories; the first classes of things were classes of men" (1963 [1902]: 82). In the 'Conclusion' to *Elementary Forms*, Durkheim expounded the idea of logical/conceptual thought and religious thought as coeval. The emergence of conceptual thought was implicitly bound up in the first symbolic construction of 'society'. Before all, religion "is a system of ideas with which the individuals represent to themselves the society of which they are members...This is its primary function..." (1915: 225). As Lévi- Strauss stated the case later, writing within Durkheim's tradition: "Things cannot have begun to signify gradually" (1987: 59). The revolutionary emergence of symbolic thought required the explosive motor and transformational power of ritual. Drawing mainly on the ethnographies of Howitt, and Spencer and Gillen, Durkheim described the fevered pitch of excitement, emotion and intensive bouts of activity that marked periods of ritual aggregation among Australian tribes. The terms of this description — of violent frenzy harnessed through regularity of rhythm and unifying movement in chant and dance — do not admit of any gradualist notion of the emergence of collective consciousness. It is revolutionary through and through.

Yet, into his introduction, Durkheim had inserted a cautionary disclaimer regarding his investigation of "the old problem" of the origin of religion. "To be sure," wrote Durkheim, "if by origin we are to understand the very first beginning, the question has nothing scientific about it, and should be resolutely discarded. There was no given moment when religion began to exist..." (1915: 8). This statement is at odds with Durkheim's own procedure throughout the book, which aims to identify the essential character of the religious and to define religious representation by examining the most 'primitive' forms of religion. And it is at odds with his own sharp distinction, drawn at the end of the book, between animals who "know only one world" and men who "alone have the faculty of conceiving the ideal, of adding something to the real" (1915: 421). Durkheim rejected any explanation of this in terms of men's "natural faculty for idealising" which, he said, merely changes the terms of the problem, and does not at all resolve it. For him, religion (hence culture) is purely a social product. But Durkheim adopts positions which are contradictory. He cannot simultaneously maintain the distinction between human collective consciousness and animal individual consciousness, reject out of hand any godlike intervention in human consciousness, and also assert that "religion did not commence anywhere". Somewhere along the line of human evolution religion arose; something created it; we must presume with Durkheim that humans did so. This was an event, a revolution in human social life.

Within a few years of the publication of *Elementary Forms*, the Russian revolution had galvanised massive military and political reaction in the capitalist west. This inevitably had repercussions in western science, not least in anthropology. To press

the argument on human origins any further down Durkheim's road, towards validation of primitive communism, became completely ideologically unacceptable.

Malinowski's and Radcliffe-Brown's various statements discrediting speculation on origins provide evidence enough for this. The door was firmly slammed on discussion of human cultural evolution within social anthropology — the only discipline which had sound claims to discuss the subject. For the best part of a century, progress in a science of religion and mythology has come solely through the work of Lévi-Strauss. The founder of structuralism was able to evade the political implications of carrying on this work only by means of an extreme idealism and a point-blank refusal to discuss the question of ritual at all. The current standing of Durkheim's theory that religion made us human is best assessed by Ernest Gellner's remarks in *Reason and Culture*: "I do not know whether this theory is true, and I doubt whether anyone else knows either: but the question to which it offers an answer is a very real and serious one. No better theory is available to answer it" (1992: 37).

Gellner acknowledges that since Durkheim's discussion of the role of religion and ritual in human culture there has been no scientific progress on the subject. At the same time, he doubts whether the theory as it stands is testable. One social anthropologist who does consider that Durkheim's theory, with refinement and modification, can be subject to scientific testing is Chris Knight.

A marxist and structuralist, Knight (1991) developed a model of human cultural origins which incorporates several key elements from Durkheim's work on religion — notably 'totemic' relations as central to earliest ritual; an ideology of blood as the conceptual root of clan solidarity; and particularly menstrual taboos as the organising principle behind rules of exogamy (for the latter see especially Durkheim's *Incest: the nature and origin of the taboo*, which may be regarded as an early draft for *Elementary Forms*). Knight's more recent work on the origin of ritual and language (1999) continues the tradition of Durkheim's thinking on religious representations as collective representations. In this essay I will point to the convergences between Durkheim's and Knight's arguments. This modifies the theme of 'Society realised in spectacle' — implying the passive status of onlooker — to one of 'Society realised through pantomime', with active participation and involvement of all group members in the performance.

In his commentary on Durkheim's scenario, Gellner refers to the doctrine that in worshipping its god-symbol of solidarity a society unwittingly worships itself. This he considers "far less interesting and important than the view that what makes us human and social is our capacity to be constrained by compulsive concepts, and the theory that the compulsion is instilled by ritual" (1992: 37). Gellner's précis of the Durkheimian argument is apt, if tongue-in-cheek:

> *"In the crazed frenzy of the collective dance around the totem, each individual psyche is reduced to a trembling suggestive jelly: the ritual then imprints the required shared ideas, the collective representations, on this malleable*

proto-social human matter. It thereby makes it conceptbound, constrained and socially clubbable.

"The morning after the rite the savage wakes up with a bad hangover and a deeply internalised concept. Thus, and only thus, does ritual make us human" (1992: 36–7).

The problem Durkheim addresses is how a construct (such as 'god' or 'supernatural potency') can be sufficiently identical in the minds of members of any group to be labelled and collectively referred to. Once this has happened, the concept can be summoned up by any member of the collective at any time. As Gellner suggests, an extremely tight — compulsive — constraint is needed to ensure that the concept be faithfully transmitted. Error of transmission would erode the process of collectivisation. How can I be sure my concept is the same as your concept, so that one label will summon up both? The solution proposed by Durkheim is that collectivisation occurs through a precise ritual sequence, demanding unity and synchrony of action, highly stereotyped, amplified and repetitive — hence pantomime. In Durkheim's words:

"individual consciousnesses are closed to each other; they can communicate only by means of signs which express their internal states. If the communication established between them is to become a real communion, that is to say, a fusion of all particular sentiments into one common sentiment, the signs expressing them must themselves be fused into one single and unique resultant. It is the appearance of this that informs individuals that they are in harmony and makes them conscious of their moral unity. It is by uttering the same cry, pronouncing the same word, or performing the same gesture in regard to some object that they become and feel themselves to be in unison... [collective representations] presuppose that minds act and react upon one another; they are the product of these actions and reactions which are themselves possible only through material intermediaries. These latter do not confine themselves to revealing the mental state with which they are associated; they aid in creating it. Individual minds cannot come in contact and communicate with each other except by coming out of themselves; but they cannot do this except by movements. So it is the homogeneity of these movements that gives the group consciousness of itself and consequently makes it exist. When this homogeneity is once established and these movements have once taken a stereotyped form, they serve to symbolise the corresponding representations. But they symbolise them only because they have aided in forming them*" (1915: 230–1)* (my emphasis).

Gellner is right to focus on this aspect of Durkheim's understanding: the compulsive constraint of ritual action as critical to the formation of the symbolic domain.

Like Durkheim, Knight concentrates on the issue of communication. Eighty years on, he can draw on the theory of animal signals and communication developed by evolutionary biologists John Krebs and Richard Dawkins, and the 'Handicap Principle' of Amotz Zahavi. Krebs and Dawkins (1984) argue that the evolution of an animal signal is likely to pursue one of two routes. If it is basically honest or cooperative, containing good information, then the receiver has a strong interest in decoding it. In this case, signalling costs are liable to be minimised, and signals become increasingly efficient. If, on the other hand, a signal is dishonest, manipulative or exploitative, it is likely to evolve in the direction of high amplification, and become increasingly costly. The signaller finds a 'resistance' developing in the receiver of the signal, who has little interest in decoding the poor or misleading information contained in the signal. To overcome this resistance, a signal which aims to exploit tends to become exaggerated and elaborated. Typical examples in the animal world are found in the highly stereotyped behavioural sequences of courtship 'ritual' where individuals of either sex may have conflicts of interest regarding reproductive strategies. Krebs (2006: 29) acknowledges that there is no basic disagreement here with Zahavi's (1975) Handicap Principle. To prove honesty or reliability, signals must increase in cost above a threshold that deters 'cheats' from using signals dishonestly. In this view, more or less conflict between signaller and signal receiver drives costs higher or lower.

Knight (1999: 230–231) examines the two key components of human symbolic communication — language and ritual — in the light of this theory. Human speech stands out as the most energy-efficient, highly encoded system of communication known, hence can only be understood to have evolved within a cooperative, nonmanipulative, basically honest framework. Human ritual, by contrast, is generally highly amplified, loud, repetitive, conspicuous and stereotyped, and frequently deceptive or illusion-inducing. That ritual may be used by social groups to manipulate or exploit other groups is a notion familiar to social anthropologists (see for example Andrew Lattas 1989, where male initiate groups ritually appropriate and exploit female reproductive powers). Knight draws the inference that at origin, human ritual had a manipulative evolutionary function. It constituted deceptive signalling, though within a collective framework. Durkheim acknowledges the deceptive character of religious systems: "social action follows ways that are too circuitous and obscure, and employs psychical mechanisms that are too complex to allow the ordinary observer to see whence it comes. As long as scientific analysis does not come to teach it to them, men know well that they are acted upon, but they do not know by whom" (1915: 209).

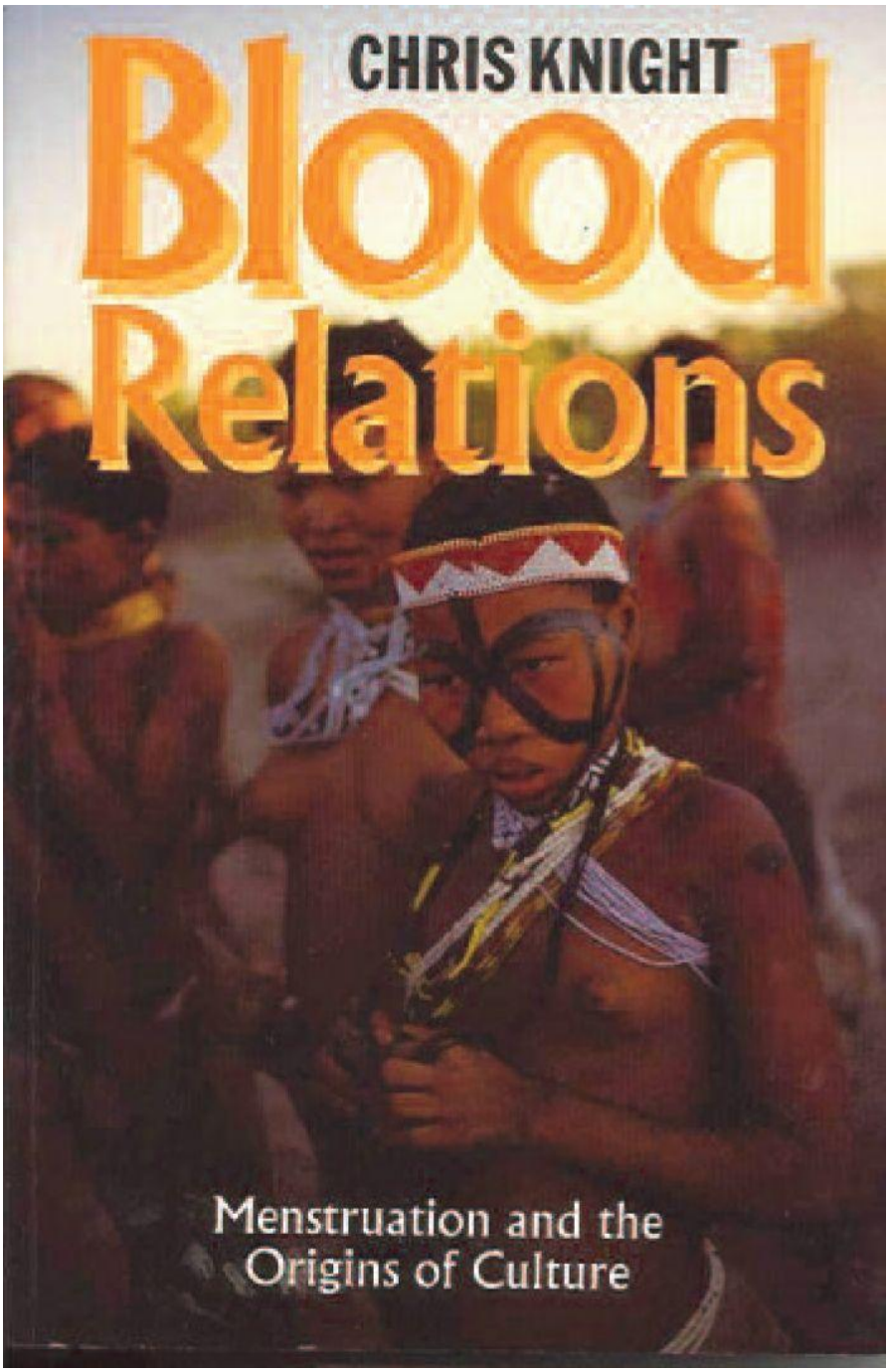
It is in the subsequent passage that Durkheim tips over from materialism into idealism. Realising that to create collective representations and to develop group consciousness humans require the compulsive constraint of ritual performance, and realising the manipulative character of ritual, Durkheim appeals to the idea that men create some imaginary foreign agency to act upon themselves. Here he arrives at a logical absurdity. He posits the emergence of manipulative symbols and then ascribes their origin to the very victims of this manipulation.

Although Durkheim counterposed animal consciousness to human consciousness, he made no attempt to acquaint himself with the Darwinian evolutionary theory of his day. He also resolutely opposed marxist theory, with its emphasis on struggle, contradiction and conflict. The result was that he stumbled up against this paradox — of manipulators manipulating themselves. In Darwinian evolutionary terms, this makes no sense. No animal can exploit itself. It is impossible to understand how a process of selection would have led to a group of individuals developing and elaborating a manipulative, deceptive, energy- expensive system of signalling for the purpose of exploiting itself as a group.

Durkheim clearly understood animal individual consciousness as 'selfish', motivated by individual interest, as against human collective consciousness constrained by morality (moral action, in Durkheimian terms, being what leads to greater solidarity). In his day, he lacked any information, particularly from primatology, on the politics of animal strategies. So, he was unable to concretise any notion of conflicts of interest, or to consider the social structure of his hypothetical groups. Among primates, increasing group size tends to foster greater political activity, in terms of the formation of coalitions and alliances, coalitions being used to buffer animals against the increasing costs of group life. Such coalitions are liable to be kin-based, and may be female kin-bonded or male kin-bonded, depending on ecological factors such as foraging requirements, habitat, and predation risk. The basic tenet of the Machiavellian intelligence hypothesis is that increasing complexity in primate/hominin social life led to selection pressure for greater intelligence and bigger brain-size. The larger the group, the more the problems of group living will require negotiated solutions, political alliances and tactical deception.

Durkheim's difficulty is that in jumping from animal to human consciousness, from the purely individual to the fully collective, he is in fact being too radical. Any truly human collectivity that arose must have developed on the basis of a proto-human society structured in coalitions. Durkheim's theory of the origin of human society in ritual can be made to work once it is understood that within any wider grouping there exist coalitions with potentially conflicting interests. Now it becomes possible to hypothesise coalitions being motivated to use deceptive signalling for the purpose of exploiting individuals within the group or even other coalitions. Nevertheless, the use of symbols for manipulation, and the use of symbols to create a solidary society appear, on the face of it, to be contradictory ideas.

Theorists of Machiavellian intelligence (Byrne and Whiten 1988) pay much attention to instances of individualistic woman from Namibia grinds red ochre in preparation for a ritual symbolic communication without speech, the reverse relationship does not hold: Pleistocene minds not as yet structured by communal ritual could not have evolved speech. Without shared ritual, speakers would not have had a domain of shared fantasies to which to refer. Durkheim says no more and no less than this in the passage quoted above where he discusses ritual action as the original mode of communication giving rise to collective consciousness:



A Himba woman from Nambia grinds red ochre in preparation for a ritual

> *"When this homogeneity is once established and these movements have once taken a stereotyped form, they serve to symbolise the corresponding representations. But they symbolise them only because they have aided in forming them"* (1915: 231).

Without the stable set of symbols, generated by the ritual domain, "social sentiments could have only a precarious existence," Durkheim continues. If the ritual action, the pantomime which expresses the collective sentiment, is connected "with something that endures, the sentiments tactical deception in primate behaviour, which, they suppose, prefigure symbolic behaviour. Knight points out that collective deception is unknown among non-human primates whereas the human symbolic domain consists of collective deceptions. Knight follows Durkheim's own line by identifying collective deceptions as collective representations. Symbolism, he argues, involves communicating about a displaced world — a domain of disembodied fantasy elements or collective representations.

Communicators without shared ritual would have had no such displaced domain to refer to.

The generation of a collective repertoire of structured disembodied fantasies cannot be explained by theorists of Machiavellian intelligence on the basis of individualistic tactical deception, Knight writes. If a primate signals deceptively to its companions that it can see a leopard, for the purpose of distracting those companions, they may at first react as if the leopard is there, but as soon as they realise it is not, they have no interest in sharing and maintaining the fantasy. To explain the production of a set of shared fantasies, tactical deception must involve the signalling activity not of individuals but of groups. But who? What groups would have shared sufficient motivation and sufficient of the same interests to have engaged in high-cost deceptive signalling as collectives? And how, given the localised nature of coalitionary activity, would such improbable behaviour be collectivised across a species?

Knight's concrete hypothesis on human origins (1991, 1999) offers an immediate solution. He proposes that proto-human society was most cohesively structured through female coalitionary activity and that, within coalitions, females would have shared very strong interests in manipulating males, their mates, to help provision their increasingly dependent and largebrained offspring. Knight suggests the first human rituals were performed by collectives of women, for the purpose of exploiting male muscle power in the hunt. Women, in coalitions, adopted a strategy of refusing sex to any male who did not return 'home' with meat from his kill. Clearly, the more widespread this strategy, the wider the collectivity of coalitions, the more likely it was to succeed. In creating a collectively displayed 'NO' signal, women were engaging in collective deception, the essential message to be transmitted to males being "we are not sexually available females".

The sex-strike could be conveyed most emphatically by signalling "wrong species; wrong sex". Since males would reasonably be expected A Himba to question this message, says Knight, such a 'NO' signal would require amplification through energet-

ically expensive, repetitive, highly iconographic pantomime. This pantomime would have been collective. The emergence of fully symbolic ritual can be explained in this way. By this hypothesis, the primary collective representation would have been one of periodic female inviolability, associated by Knight with the construction of menstrual taboos, these being part of a generalised blood taboo, linking the blood of women and the blood of animals, and imposed on the hunters' kills.

Ritual itself, in Knight's view, constituted the symbolic domain. Ritual action constructed the world to which humans, as they created symbolic speech, could henceforth refer. Acted out in pantomime, the set of collective deceptions did not need to be referred to using vocal labels. To the extent that they are danced or otherwise acted out in full, without reliance on speech, the result is ritual, Knight writes. But where ritual may be effective as themselves become more durable." In Durkheim's view, that something is "these systems of emblems... indispensable for assuring the continuation of this consciousness." He warns, "we must refrain from regarding these symbols as simple artifices, as sorts of labels attached to representations already made, in order to make them more manageable: they are an integral part of them."

In Knight's terms, what endures is the set of stable communal fantasies, a collective repertoire structuring the minds of all members of the group. The periodic recurrence of the sex-strike with its necessary ritual would establish periodic and habitual enactment of, and reference to, that collective repertoire. It is extraordinary to realise that in *Incest: the nature and origin of the taboo*, published in 1898, Durkheim prefigured these ideas. He specifically aligned women's "sacred" state at menstruation to the creation of rules of exogamy; he saw women at menstruation as exercising a "type of repulsing action which keeps the other sex far from them" (1963: 75). He recognised that this defined the structure of so-called primitive societies, by keeping husband and wife effectively in separate camps. Women's sacred quality at menstruation he regarded as contingent on the generally sacred character of blood in totemic cultures, most powerfully expressed in identification with the blood of the animal chosen as clan emblem.

Given that ritual is the essential precondition for symbolic speech, there appears to be another paradox. Ritual has evolved as a highly manipulative, energy-expensive, signalling system; symbolic speech as a super-efficient, low-cost, cooperative signalling system. What is ultimately the most cooperative of communications systems depends for its creation on the most powerfully manipulative. Again, the sex-strike model is able to solve the problem. Symbolic speech developed as the mode of communication among members of any sex-strike coalition to refer to their own ritual constructs. Ritual served to communicate at high amplitude across coalitionary/gender boundaries. In Knight's words: "Ritual was a system of pantomimed representations — acted out concepts. Speech was the means through which participants communicated to one another about such representations or concepts."

Here, ritual and speech can be understood as coeval and interdependent aspects of the symbolic domain. That women would have been the initiators of ritual action for

establishing the sex-strike in no way implies that men were not participants in ritual. To the extent men related to women as kin, as sons and brothers, they were included in collective action; to the extent they were marital or sexual partners, they would be excluded. The ritual display would be directed at them. Here we see the two sides of 'Society realised in Pantomime' and 'Society realised in Spectacle' as complementary and interdependent. If we posit an original dual organisation system as the simplest model, we can imagine one moiety would realise society through pantomime, their display offering to the other moiety society realised in spectacle.

But the nature of the display and the nature of the offering are profoundly paradoxical. Society is realised in the shattering of all normal rules. Durkheim produces a magnificent passage, again drawing on the Australian ethnographers, to describe the advancing "avalanche" of an Aboriginal religious ceremony (1915: 216), a corrobboree. Collective sentiment can only be expressed through movement in unison; cries and gestures become rhythmic and regular, but:

> *"they lose nothing of their natural violence; a regulated tumult remains a tumult. The human voice is not sufficient for the task;...boomerangs are beaten; bull-roarers are whirled...these instruments...express in a more adequate fashion the agitation felt. But while they express it, they also strengthen it. This effervescence often reaches such a point that it causes unheard-of actions.* The passions released are of such an impetuosity that they can be restrained by nothing. They are so far removed from their ordinary conditions of life, and they are so thoroughly conscious of it, that they feel that they must set themselves outside of and above their ordinary morals. The sexes unite contrarily to the rules governing sexual relations. Men exchange wives with each other. Sometimes even incestuous unions, which in normal times are thought abominable and are severely punished, are now contracted openly and with impunity" (my emphasis).

Durkheim's silence on the implications of this is astounding. He has had the honesty to pursue his scientific argument to the point where he understands the mechanics of ritual action as the matrix of social thought; yet he passes over in silence this passage describing such actions, literally, as thought socially abominable. He does not stop to ask, what on earth is going on? That Gellner, in his appreciation of the scope and power of Durkheim's argument on ritual as the generator of collective representation, also passes over this key ethnographic illustration in silence is equally astounding. Lévi-Strauss at least did react; he did address the issue, but his reaction was hardly less astounding. Having refrained throughout the length of *Mythologiques* from discussing the question of ritual, he saved for the final pages of the final volume the following: ritual amounts to a "bastardisation of thought"; ritual "reduces, or rather vainly tries to reduce, the demands of thought to an extreme limit, which can never be reached, since it would involve the actual abolition of thought." In these final pages of *The*

Naked Man (1981: 675–9), Lévi-Strauss reveals how precisely dialectically he opposes Durkheim.

There is a deep-going anomaly here. Socially aberrant behaviour, that is the casting aside of normal constraints, appears as intrinsic to the process of compulsively constraining our social constructs. Lévi-Strauss dealt with the anomaly by dismissing the entirety of ritual as anti-thought. Of course, with an 'exchange of women' model, with men structuring society by instituting the rule of exogamy, ritual shattering that rule is anti-thought, anti-structure. For Durkheim, who did not deal with the anomaly, the ritual domain structures social thought.

In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Thomas Kuhn discussed how scientific communities, when they acquire a paradigm, also acquire "a criterion for choosing problems", the problems which, within the terms of the paradigm, can be assumed to have solutions. "To a great extent these are the only problems which the community will admit as scientific or encourage its members to undertake," Kuhn writes. "Other problems, including many that had previously been standard, are rejected as metaphysical, as the concern of another discipline, or sometimes as just too problematic to be worth the time" (1970: 37). Social anthropology, for the best part of a century, has so rejected "the old problem of the origin of religion". Scientific revolutions, paradigm-shifts, are precipitated by anomalies. Yet, according to Kuhn's thinking, it is only a scientific community based in a rigid, conservative, detailed and precise theoretical structure who will be able consequently to detect anomaly. Confident in their expectation of finding everything 'normal', such a community will recognise 'abnormality' and will be thrown into a state of crisis by it. Lévi-Strauss, rigid, conservative, theoretically precise — because he knew what he expected to find — recognised ritual as anomaly, and was thrown into crisis by it. The rest of social anthropology, including Durkheim, blatantly ignored the question. Yet the irony is that Durkheim's theory of ritual origins, in the modified, updated version of the sex-strike proposed by Knight, readily deals with the problem. The sex-strike ritual is inevitably anti-marital; it should reverse the whole polarity of society, changing marriage for kinship. The theory predicts the possibility of incestuous union in the structuring of society as men exchange sex partners for kin partners.

Lévi-Strauss was able to handle ritual where it was mitigated by language, where it corresponds to symbolic speech, referring to and communicating about the concepts structured in the domain of ritual action. A case in point is his beautiful essay, *The Effectiveness of Symbols*, from the collection in *Structural Anthropology* which he dedicated to Durkheim. He discusses the highly ritualised great incantation of the *Cuna* shaman, the purpose of which is to aid a woman in difficult childbirth (1977: 186ff.). The cure is structured as the journey of the shaman and his helpers to the supernatural world to do battle with the malevolent power who has taken over the woman's spirit, and restore her spirit or double to her. All this would seem commonplace, says Lévi-Strauss, but for the specific information of the text.

The malevolent power, *Muu*, is the very force of female fertility, indispensable to childbirth itself, who has exceeded her powers and must be brought under control, but by no means allowed to escape. The journey undertaken by the shaman, along "*Muu*'s Way", is not to some imaginary underworld, but literally represents exploration of the woman's interior, through the vagina into the uterus. The woman's insides are the real dwelling place of *Muu*; the shaman must enter and explore this internal world, restoring order by mapping the disturbed wilderness with a social, mythical geography. A cure can be effected when the woman is able to confront and order her own pain through a collectively represented logic of her own interior world, rendering coherent what has become incoherent and chaotic.

It would be possible, arguably, to examine the syntax of this mythical journey to the woman's interior within Knight's template. "*Muu*'s abode", called "woman's turbid menstruation" or "the dark deep whirlpool" is populated by fantastic monsters, sticky tentacled aquatic creatures and blood- red savage animals, which are opposed by forces of shining white light, the tall- hatted *nelegan*, the shaman's spirit helpers, who light up "*Muu*'s Way" with their penetration. To ensure *Muu* does not escape, the "Lords of the wild animals" are summoned, along with a people of "Bowmen" — who may reasonably be understood to be hunters; they confront *Muu*'s wetness with astringency, dry entanglements of netting and clouds of dust barring her path.

But what I want to focus on is how completely Lévi-Strauss applies Durkheim's own theory on the function of ritual action in his analysis of the way the chant rouses and sustains the collective representations necessary to effect the cure. By far the largest part of the text consists of minutely detailed descriptions of physical movement, actions, with the various arrivals and departures of the midwife and the shaman repeatedly described, as if "filmed in slow motion", and with flashbacks.

"Everything occurs," Lévi-Strauss comments, "as though the shaman were trying to induce the sick woman whose contact with reality is no doubt impaired and whose sensitivity is exacerbated — to relive the initial situation through pain, in a very precise and intense way" (1977: 193).

By locating events and actions actually within the body of the woman, a transition can "be made from the most prosaic reality to myth, from the physical universe to the physiological universe, from the external world to the internal body...the myth being enacted in the internal body must retain throughout the vividness and the character of lived experience...through an appropriate obsessing technique." Lévi-Strauss goes on to describe the technique: "in breathless rhythm, a more and more rapid oscillation between mythical and physiological themes, as if to abolish in the mind of the sick woman the distinction which separates them, and to make it impossible to differentiate their respective attributes."

By constant reiteration of the physical actions and process, by making the woman live through these movements — her own and others' — and by the interweaving of mythical and physical events, the woman's consciousness is being constrained to focus on the mythical fantastic symbols of her own interior. "The sick woman believes

in the myth and belongs to a society which believes in it," says Lévi-Strauss (1977: 197). The spirits, the monsters and magical animals are "part of a coherent system on which the native conception of the universe is founded. The sick woman accepts these mythical beings...what she does not accept are the incoherent and arbitrary pains...which the shaman, calling upon myth, will re-integrate within a whole where everything is meaningful."

The shaman, as Lévi-Strauss puts it, "provides the sick woman with a language" (1977: 198). What Lévi- Strauss fails to say, though it is there in his description, is that the shaman creates the language through constant and precisely detailed repetition of imagined and real physical actions — in other words through pantomime. It is by these means that he constrains in consciousness the constructs of myth — collective representations.

Lévi-Strauss finishes his essay with a comparison of the methods of the shaman and of Freudian psychoanalysis. In doing so he descends to an extraordinary reductionism, positing biochemical processes — literally, the balance of "polynucleids in the nerve cells" — as the source of mythical structures. "The effectiveness of symbols" amounts to the alignment of "formally homologous structures, built out of different materials at different levels of life — organic processes, unconscious mind, rational thought" (1977: 201). These pre-existing mental structures "as an aggregate form what we call the unconscious", itself "reducible to a function — the symbolic function, which no doubt is specifically human, and which is carried out according to the same laws among all men, and actually corresponds to the aggregate of these laws" (1977: 202–3). Having been completely Durkheimian in his description of the psychosocial cure of the woman, Lévi-Strauss reverts here to an implacable opposition. He offers an untestable, circular and idealist hypothesis, which fails completely to address just how and why humans alone have a symbolic function.

Durkheim, of course, rejected this utterly. Religious representations were purely social products, imposed on the individual through the action — the ritual action — of the collective. Any explanation for their existence in terms of "man's natural faculty for idealising" was no sort of explanation; it was a retreat from the problem. Lévi-Strauss is guilty of such a retreat into the realm of the unknowable and unconscious. My argument here is that it is clear why he had to retreat that way. He was unable to acknowledge the power of Durkheim's theory of ritual origins, because if he did, he knew he faced the problem that ritual action, involving the celebration of incest, none the less functioned as the means to compulsively constrain social constructs. The resolution of this problem so deeply offended his own theoretical premise of the "avoidance of incest/exchange of women" that he recognised it as anomaly. To escape the problem, he had to posit a purely idealist — and unknowable — origin of human symbolic consciousness. This freed him to carry on the study of symbolic structures in the realm of myth — the mind left "to commune with itself" — on condition that he could avoid analysing those disturbing elements of ritual action that so threatened his premise. So handicapped, Lévi-Strauss could pursue the science of religion.

Lévi-Strauss was less guilty than most. The structural-functionalists, the dominant power in anthropology during the middle of the last century, did not even develop a science of religion. They were quite happy with Durkheim's idea of the god-symbol as a kind of lid slammed on top of 'society' to maintain its structure in functional harmony. They did not want to hear about ritual collectivity creating solidarity at the point of human origins, since this led to conclusions politically unacceptable to them. With speculation on origins disallowed, Durkheim could be decontaminated. His god-symbol doctrine, provided it was cut away from the root understanding of ritual power as the original, revolutionary, consciousness-transforming social power — that was fine. Cut away from the root, it could be rendered harmless, idealist, ideologically sound. As Gellner says, the god-symbol doctrine is not the most interesting of Durkheim's ideas. Let's pay more attention to what's going on under the lid, the seething, boiling "collective effervescence".

What's exciting about social anthropology today is that the heavy ideological burdens are slowly being shed. Durkheim's theory — and as Gellner says, it's still the best theory going — has now been developed to a form where it is amenable to testing. In the specific form of Knight's sex-strike hypothesis, it generates predictions sufficiently precise and sufficiently improbable to be put to the test. And it answers the paradoxes. Are there social anthropologists out there as adventurous as the *Cuna* shaman, ready to venture down "*Muu*'s Way" and bring to light the "dark whirlpool, woman's turbid menstruation"? Perhaps we can now map and explore the fertile source of those ritual monstrosities — the original collective representations of humankind.

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Durkheim, the selfish gene — and the anthropological conundrum at the heart of ritual

The *Année Sociologique* school of the beginning of the last century was led by Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss. Their foundation journal was filled with systematic sociological investigations of religion and symbolic classification focused on 'primitive' or 'elementary' forms with universalising intent.

Today, a century on from this great project, social anthropology has abandoned the task of explaining religion entirely. Losing heart in the naïve belief in the power of collective consciousness under the onslaught of postmodern narrative and free-market economics, it has also lost its way. Ironically, the people who have picked up and dusted off Durkheim's scientific study of religion over the past decade are selfish-gene Darwinians. Precisely because they are supreme methodological individualists, they find the group cultural phenomena of religious symbolism fascinating and difficult to account for. Never mind the amateur and unscholarly efforts of Richard Dawkins — there have been several serious recent studies of religion from evolutionary perspectives.

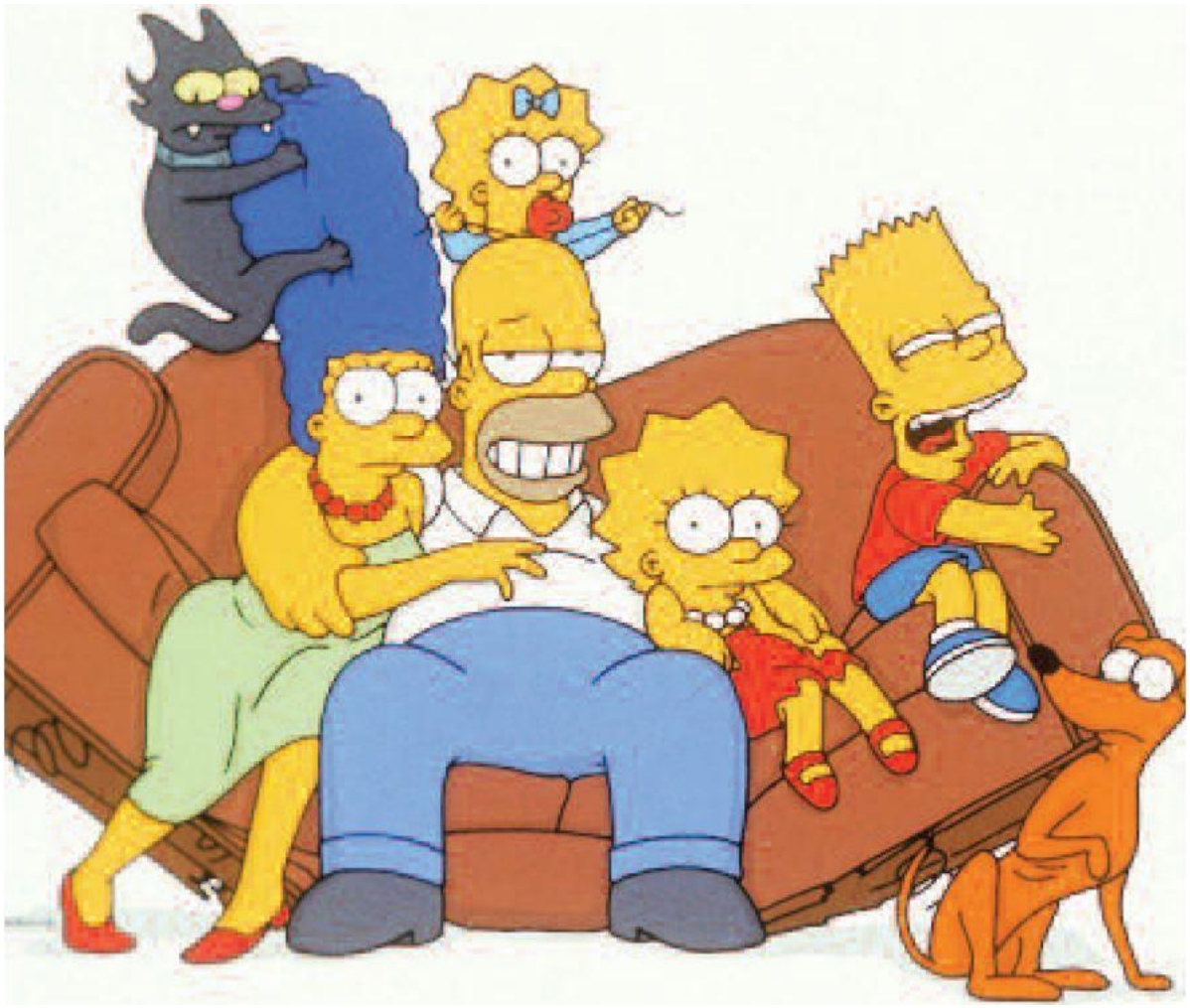
For cognitivists like Pascal Boyer and Scott Atran, religion emerges as an evolutionary by-product, rather than adaptation. The religious universe is populated with counterintuitive entities resulting from cognitive misfires: our folk models of physics, biology and psychology are on a hair trigger to ascribe agency and intention even to inanimate objects and nonhumans. These supernatural beings may then be recruited as a kind of moral police force against social defection. But this mentalist approach still has to fall back on Durkheimian mechanisms of ritual collective effervescence to render the 'gods' morally authoritative. Other hardcore Darwinians like John Maynard Smith, William Irons and Richard Sosis view religion as adaptive strategy. They place ritual central to the question — as Durkheim did — to argue that religion functions as a costly signal of commitment, effectively the force that binds groups of individuals in a Darwinian world.

I first wrote the previously unpublished essay above in the early 1990s and have updated it for publication here. I could just as well have called it 'Durkheim and the selfish gene' or 'Durkheim and Darwinian signal evolution theory'. But it also points to a deep-going conundrum at the heart of ritual. For Durkheim and those anthropologists he most influenced — Mary Douglas,

Victor Turner, Roy Rappaport — ritual was the matrix of social and symbolic life. Yet ritual regularly turns the world upside down. How come ritual enables the making of the rules, yet its enactment entails breaking the rules? This tension in social anthropology was expressed through a diametric opposition between Lévi-Strauss and Durkheim in their attitude towards ritual. That same axis is evident today among Darwinians, between evolutionary psychologists and evolutionary anthropologists. For the former, as for Lévi-Strauss and Chomsky, minds have an innate architecture predetermining possible behaviours; whereas the latter discuss variable strategies for both animals and humans. To change the world, animals change their behaviour — literally taking direct action on the world. Ritual, for Durkheim, is the direct action that changed animals to humans.

Camilla Power

Darwinist family values



"There's more than one way to run a family"

Most people, if pushed, will justify their political opinions, or lack of them, by reference to human nature — to what humans always have done, to what humans have always been like. Take the perennial political football of the family and 'family values'. The whole subject of the break-up of the family is in the ether; it dominates the media. The right has hijacked such issues; the silence from the feminists and the

hard left is deafening. But are we to believe that issues of child support, one-parent families and who pays for the babies, the massive under-utilisation of male energies and the growing sector of cheap, insecure, female part-time labour are of no importance for the left? And who can we turn to for answers?

Some would seem to be in a better position than most. Darwinian thinkers, for example, are explicitly concerned with what human nature is, and try to solve such problems as how females in the evolutionary past directed male labour and energy to their offspring. Obviously, the same questions are pertinent today. And, as any anthropologist could tell you, there's more than one way to run a family. George Bush Sr may have wished that American families were more like The Waltons than The Simpsons, but both had a great deal more in common than our real-life Fred and Wilma Flintstone ancestors. Contrary to popular belief, the nuclear family, dysfunctional or not, did not emerge in the Stone Age and continue unchanged into the Nuclear Age. Unfortunately, some Darwinians seem more wedded to popular prejudice than science. Take Helena Cronin, author of a respected work of modern Darwinian thinking, *The Ant and the Peacock*. A few years ago, she was pontificating in *The Guardian* on how Darwinian theory should inform New Labourite social policy. Unsurprisingly, her recommendations revolved around the nuclear family. But why? Let's focus on just one notoriously thorny issue, consider what anthropologists and Darwinians have to say about it, and, hopefully, in the process, nail a few myths.

The issue is that of the 'single mum'. At about the time of Cronin's article, the press were busy publishing sensationalist 'why oh why' stories when it was revealed that a 12-year-old had given birth to a child. Of course, this is shocking. But is it, as they claimed, so horribly unnatural? On one level, yes. What disturbs us about a 12-year-old giving birth is that a girl can be sexually and physically mature when socially and psychologically she may not be able to cope. But this is an artefact of our modern ways of life. In our evolutionary past, this just would not happen. Fertility is governed by nutritional state. In the environment of our hunter-gatherer past, girls would not get pregnant until late teens, giving them time to learn the social and sexual ropes. The problem arises in our overfed society because children can become physically mature long before they are socially adult. We experience this as a moral disjunction.

But on another level, it is, in evolutionary terms, not that odd at all. The press were concerned about the lack of a father. But it turns out that the baby boy had the support of a vigorous grandmother of 26 — not so alone after all. The presence of other close female relatives was not reported, but as it stands, the kinship structure of this household may be typical of human evolution. In evolution, so-called 'single' mothers formed the nucleus of close-knit coalitions of female kin. The most recent heroine of narratives of how we became human is the grandmother. Her strategies forged the peculiar pattern of human life history, with a long lifespan following menopause. By working overtime foraging, providing high-energy weaning foods for her daughter's offspring, grandma enabled her daughter to wean quicker, and have more, well-nourished babies. Grandmothers, in other words, fuelled the evolution of large human brains.

Males may have been useful now and then, providing meat feasts on a hit-and-miss basis. But grandma delivered day in, day out. Males could come and go. She could be depended on.

That's not of course to say that females wouldn't tap into the energies of at least one male if they could. Among indigenous peoples all over Amazonia, until recent interference by missionaries, it turns out that the most successful female strategy was to have backup fathers for each offspring. Their ideology insisted that any man who contributed sperm is one of several fathers of the child. So much for the nuclear family.

It is true that all human societies — by stark contrast with primate societies — place sexual behaviour within some moral framework. This is likely to have emerged in evolution as a female resistance strategy, with older kin acting to protect young girls from possible aggression by males competing for the most desirable females. But the specific version of morality varies enormously between societies. For the matrilocal Canela of Brazil, for example, a girl who won't have extra-marital sex is considered selfish and immoral.

In short, models of human evolution nowadays start from a premise of Pleistocene girl power. Female coalitionary action is seen as central in the emergence of uniquely human life history (childhood, adolescence, old age), of large brains, of language, art and symbolic culture — everything it is to be human. Our ancestors were strategists who manipulated, or, let's say, organised male behaviour using their sexuality and sociality to gain their ends (ie, feed the kids). Human nature was not forged in the historic period of social inequality. We evolved in Africa's Rift Valley, in small-scale, face-to-face societies where no one was richer or poorer. Early modern humans had attitude; they demanded respect: "Don't mess with me! I'm as good as you are." One of the later Darwin seminars hosted by Cronin at the London School of Economics proved very effectively that people are healthier in more equal societies. Let's hope she passed this on to the New Labourites, recommending they tax the rich and pour funds into the NHS, on Darwinian grounds.

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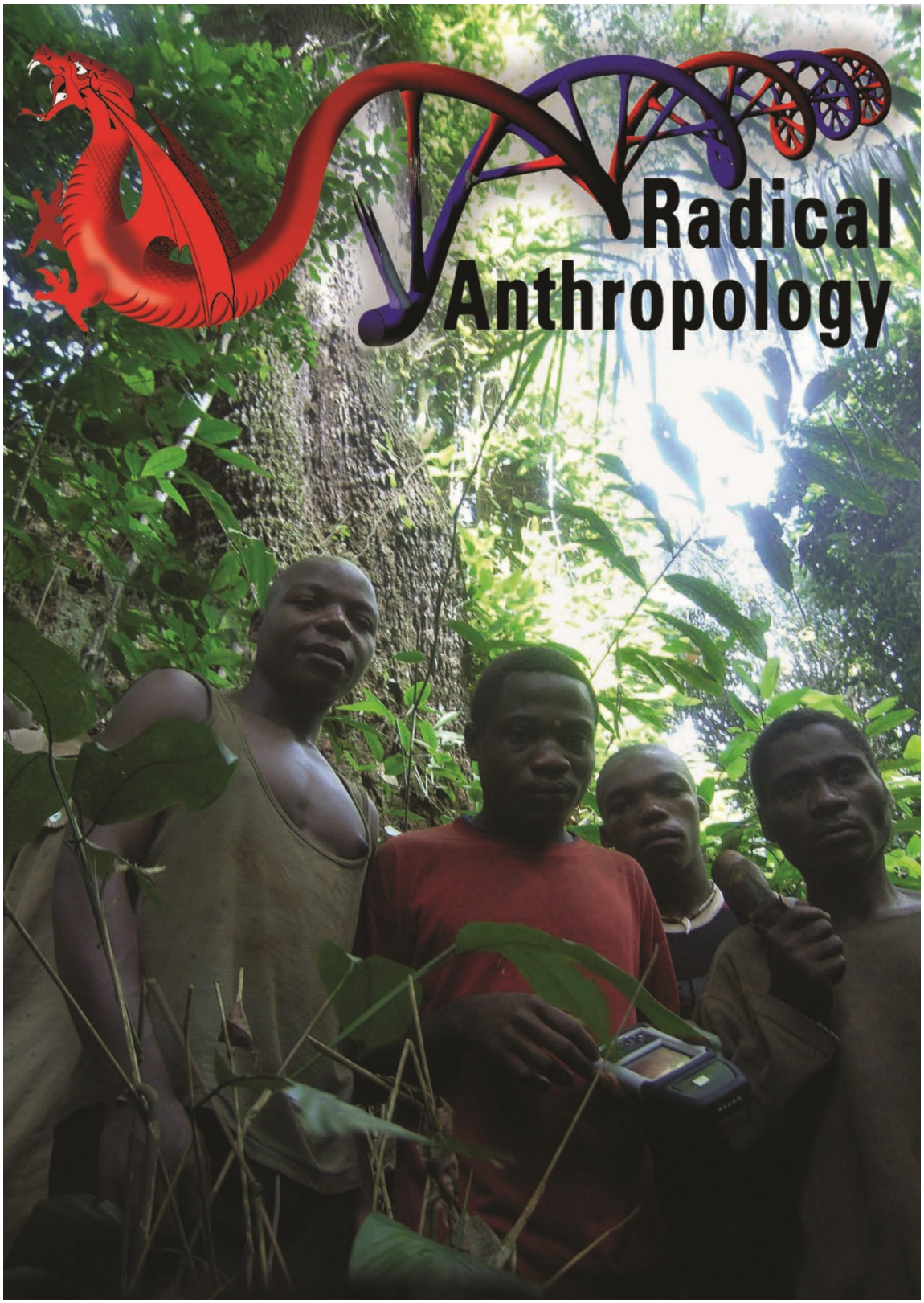
Radical
Anthropology

Who we are and what we do

Radical Anthropology is the journal of the Radical Anthropology Group.

Radical: about the inherent, fundamental roots of an issue.

Anthropology: the scientific study of the origin, behaviour, and physical, social, and cultural development of humans.

Anthropology asks one big question: what does it mean to be human? To answer this, we cannot rely on common sense or on philosophical arguments. We must study how humans actually live — and the many different ways in which they have lived. This means learning, for example, how people in non-capitalist societies live, how they organise themselves and resolve conflict in the absence of a state, the different ways in which a 'family' can be run, and so on.

Additionally, it means studying other species and other times. What might it mean to be almost — but not quite — human? How socially self-aware, for example, is a chimpanzee? Do nonhuman primates have a sense of morality? Do they have language? And what about distant times? Who were the Australopithecines and why had they begun walking upright? Where did the Neanderthals come from and why did they become extinct? How, when and why did human art, religion, language and culture first evolve?

The Radical Anthropology Group started in 1984 when Chris Knight's popular 'Introduction to Anthropology' course at Morley College, London, was closed down, supposedly for budgetary reasons. Within a few weeks, the students got organised, electing a treasurer, secretary and other officers. They booked a library in Camden — and invited Chris to continue teaching next year. In this way, the Radical Anthropology Group was born.

Later, Lionel Sims, who since the 1960s had been lecturing in sociology at the University of East London, came across Chris's PhD on human origins and — excited by the backing it provided for the anthropology of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, particularly on the subject of 'primitive communism' — invited Chris to help set up Anthropology at UEL. Since its establishment in 1990, Anthropology at UEL has retained close ties with the Radical Anthropology Group.

RAG has never defined itself as a political organisation. But the implications of some forms of science are intrinsically radical, and this applies in particular to the theory that humanity was born in a social revolution. Many RAG members choose to be active in Survival International and/or other indigenous rights movements to defend the land rights and cultural survival of hunter-gatherers. Additionally, some RAG

members combine academic research with activist involvement in environmentalist, anti-capitalist and other campaigns. For more, see www.radicalanthropologygroup.org.

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Camilla Power, senior lecturer in anthropology at the University of East London.
Lionel Sims, principal lecturer in anthropology at the University of East London, and member of the Society of European Archaeoastronomy and the Socialist Workers Party.

On the cover:

The journal's logo represents the emergence of culture (dragons feature in myths and legends from around the world) from nature (the DNA double-helix, or selfish gene). The dragon is a symbol of solidarity, especially the blood solidarity that was a necessary precondition for the social revolution that made us human. For more on this, see our website at www. radicalanthropologygroup.org.

The cover picture features Baka Pygmies using software to precisely map a valuable moabi tree so that it can continue to provide them with fruit, oil and medicines for generations to come. See Jerome Lewis's article on page 11 for details.

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The journal is also available free via our website: www.radicalanthropologygroup.org.

Anthropology is for everyone — Editorial

In the editorial for our first issue, we said we were proud to feature representatives of the most exciting and important trends in anthropology. Which left us with a difficulty. How were we to top our initial achievement? There was an obvious answer, if one that seemed doomed to disappointment: just contact *all* the very best and most important names in the field, and ask them to contribute too. That's what we did. Amazingly, unbelievably, they all said yes. Even better, they all delivered on their promise, and you can read what they have to say in these pages. If we may be so immodest to say so, that makes the first two issues of our journal an essential — if not, of course, definitive — guide for anyone interested in creating a future fit for our species and the planet.

For the present, however, what we seem to need as much as anything is inspiration and the confidence that things could be changed and improved. Because if the prospects for radical change are as gloomy as most people insist, there would seem to be little point doing anything but console ourselves as the economy tanks and the planet burns. Where better to find such inspiration than **Jerome Lewis'**s work with African hunter-gatherers on page 11? Lewis pursues a classic anthropological strategy — to learn something about ourselves by paying close and sympathetic attention to how others see us. In his article for *Radical Anthropology*, Lewis considers what the Yaka hunter-gatherers of Congo- Brazzaville make of Western 'conservation' efforts. The clue to the truth of what 'conservation' is all about is to be found in a simple but puzzling fact: the Yaka do not discriminate between the activities of the loggers cutting down their forest for private gain — supposedly the main villains of the piece — and conservationists.

This is not because the Yaka have made a stupid mistake. It's because both loggers and well-meaning conservationists do in fact work hand in hand. They both come from a culture that has already destroyed its forests and put a safety fence around the charred ruins that remain. Conservationists pursue a strategy that makes sense if what you want is to accept defeat and preserve the ruins. If, on the other hand, we truly want a future for the forests, maybe we should turn for advice to those who have been its custodians for millennia. From their point of view, the forest is not a scarce resource to be protected, but an abundant resource to be shared.

As Lewis puts it, the onus is on us to change our point of view from "one that endlessly chases and protects scarce natural resources to one that sees natural resources as adequate, even abundant. Seeing that there is enough for everybody, but it just needs

to be shared properly, is the lesson that we can learn from the Yaka". How the Yaka achieve this sharing way of life is also touched upon in Lewis's brilliant article.

That they *have* achieved it is not in any serious doubt, which may come as a surprise to those who insist that human nature must militate against such communist arrangements. This confidence about what human nature is and must be is another dominant feature of Western thought — if you like, our inherited common sense.

Common sense can be a reliable guide in our lives — how could we account for its existence otherwise? But sometimes it is so disastrously wrong that we need a way to think beyond it. We need to know the truth behind appearances because better knowledge of our human nature will allow us to make living arrangements that are in accord with that nature. We also need to know the truth if our moral codes are to be anything more than hot air — what kind of behaviour can we expect from human animals? And if that leaves something to be desired, what social arrangements can we make so that the darker sides of our inherited behavioural strategies can be better managed in the interests of all? The first question, though, must be, how are we to acquire the truth about human nature if common sense is no guide?

It is scarcely possible to consider what a science of human nature could tell us without engaging with the work of **Noam Chomsky**. More than anyone else, he has changed the way we think about what it means to be human, gaining a position in the history of ideas arguably comparable with that of Darwin or Descartes. As if that wasn't enough for one lifetime, he is also essential reading for anyone critical of US militarism and imperialism, and global capitalism. Here, we limit ourselves to an area of his thought not so often discussed, the evolution of language. See our interview on page 19. (We in the Radical Anthropology Group have our differences with Chomsky, which we hope come out in the interview. In the next issue, we'll be talking to anthropologist Chris Knight, where an alternative view on the evolution of language will be spelled out. In the meantime, see www.radicalanthropologygroup.org/ class_text_070.pdf.) We continue the human nature theme later in the journal by considering under what conditions we can expect humans to trust each other. See our interview with **Marek Kohn** on page 29.

We are delighted to have such eminent names onboard. But our journal must ultimately be judged a failure if all we end up creating is yet one more forum for that small minority of people lucky enough to make their living from the production of new knowledge. Such knowledge is useful — as **Lionel Sims** puts it on page 24, it strengthens our resolve by arming us intellectually. But it can be more than that: it can help us decide what we can and should make of our lives — it is "the practical arm of moral philosophy", as **Keith Hart** says in a guest editorial starting on page 4, and must be popular, not academic. That means anthropology is for everyone. With the appointment of activists to our new editorial board (see left), as well as the development of a Radical Anthropology Network (see page 31), we hope we have taken a small step towards making these worthy aspirations a reality.

Towards a new human universal: rethinking anthropology for our times

We should take Kant as our inspiration and reclaim anthropology as a practical guide for living, argues Keith Hart

Magellan's crew completed the first circumnavigation of the planet some 30 years after Columbus crossed the Atlantic. At much the same time, Bartolomé de las Casas opposed the racial inequality of Spain's American empire in the name of human unity. We are living through another 'Magellan moment'. In the second half of the 20th century, humanity formed a world society — a single interactive social network — for the first time. This was symbolised by several moments, such as when the space race in the 1960s allowed us to see the earth from the outside or when the internet went public in the 90s, announcing the convergence of telephones, television and computers in a digital revolution of communications.

Our world too is massively unequal and the voices for human unity are often drowned. Emergent world society is the new human universal — not an idea, but the fact of our shared occupation of the planet crying out for new principles of association. In this editorial, I will explore the possible contribution of anthropology to such a project. If the academic discipline as presently constituted would find it hard to address this task, perhaps we need to look elsewhere for a suitable intellectual strategy.

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Kant's Anthropology

Immanuel Kant published *Anthropology from a pragmatic point of view* in 1798. The book was based on lectures he had given at the university since 1772–3. Kant's aim was to attract the general public to anthropology — and it was Kant more than anyone who gave 'anthropology' as an independent discipline its name. Remarkably, histories of anthropology have rarely mentioned this work, perhaps because the discipline has evolved so far away from Kant's original premises. But it would pay us to take his *Anthropology* seriously, if only for its resonance with our own times.

Shortly before, Kant wrote *Perpetual peace: a philosophical sketch.* The last quarter of the 18th century saw its own share of 'globalisation' — the American and French revolutions, the rise of British industry and the international movement to abolish slavery. Kant knew that coalitions of states were gearing up for war, yet he responded to this sense of the world coming closer together by proposing how humanity might form society as world citizens beyond the boundaries of states. He held that 'cosmopolitan right', the basic right of all world citizens, should rest on conditions of universal hospitality, that is, on the right of a stranger not to be treated with hostility when he arrives on someone else's territory. In other words, we should be free to go wherever we like in the world, since it belongs to all of us equally. He goes on to say:

> *The peoples of the earth have entered in varying degree into a universal community, and it has developed to the point where a violation of rights in one part of the world is felt everywhere. The idea of a cosmopolitan right is not fantastic and overstrained; it is a necessary complement to the unwritten code of political and international right, transforming it into a universal right of humanity.*

This confident sense of an emergent world order, written over 200 years ago, can now be seen as the high point of the liberal revolution, before it was overwhelmed by its twin offspring, industrial capitalism and the nation-state.

Earlier Kant wrote an essay, 'Idea for a universal history with a cosmopolitan purpose' which included the following propositions:

1. In man (as the only rational creature on earth) those natural faculties which aim at the use of reason shall be fully developed in the species, not in the individual.

2. The means that nature employs to accomplish the development of all faculties is the antagonism of men in society, since this antagonism becomes, in the end, the cause of a lawful order of this society.

3. The latest problem for mankind, the solution of which nature forces us to seek, is the achievement of a civil society which is capable of administering law universally.

4. This problem is both the most difficult and the last to be solved by mankind.

5. A philosophical attempt to write a universal world history according to a plan of nature which aims at perfect civic association of mankind must be considered to be possible and even as capable of furthering nature's purpose.

Our world is much more socially integrated than two centuries ago and its economy is palpably unequal.

Histories of the universe we inhabit do seem to be indispensable to the construction of institutions capable of administering justice worldwide. The task of building a global civil society for the 21st century, even a world state, is an urgent one and anthropological visions should play their part in that.

This then was the context for the publication of Kant's *Anthropology.* He elsewhere summarised 'philosophy in the cosmopolitan sense of the word' as four questions:

What can I know?

What should I do?

What may I hope for? What is a human being?

The first question is answered in metaphysics*, the second in* morals*, the third in* religion *and the fourth in* anthropology*.*

But the first three questions 'relate to anthropology', he said, and might be subsumed under it. Kant conceived of anthropology as an empirical discipline, but also as a means of moral and cultural improvement. It was thus both an investigation into human nature and, more especially, into how to modify it, as a way of providing his students with practical guidance and knowledge of the world. He intended his lectures to be 'popular' and of value in later life. Above all, the *Anthropology* was to contribute to the progressive political task of uniting world citizens by identifying the source of their 'cosmopolitan bonds'. The book thus moves between mundane illustrations and Kant's most sublime vision, using anecdotes close to home as a bridge to horizon thinking.

If for Kant the two divisions of anthropology were physiological and pragmatic, he preferred to concentrate on the latter — 'what the human being as a free actor can and should make of himself'. This is based primarily on observation, but it also involves the construction of moral rules. The book has two parts, the first and longer being on empirical psychology and divided into sections on cognition, aesthetics and ethics. Part 2 is concerned with the character of human beings at every level from the individual to the species, seen from both the inside and the outside.

Anthropology is the practical arm of moral philosophy. It does not explain the metaphysics of morals which are categorical and transcendent; but it is indispensable to any interaction involving human agents. It is thus 'pragmatic' in a number of senses: it is 'everything that pertains to the practical', popular (as opposed to academic) and moral in that it is concerned with what people should do, with their motives for action.

In his Preface, Kant acknowledges that anthropological science has some way to go methodologically. People act self-consciously when they are being observed and it is often hard to distinguish between self-conscious action and habit. For this reason, he recommends as aids 'world history, biographies and even plays and novels'. The latter, while being admittedly inventions, are often based on close observation of real behaviour and add to our knowledge of human beings. He thought that the main value of his book lay in its systematic organisation, so that readers could incorporate their experience into it and develop new themes appropriate to their own lives. Historians and philosophers are divided between those who find the book marginal to Kant's thought and those for whom it is just muddled and banal. And the anthropologists have ignored it entirely. I hope to show that this was a mistake.

The anthropology of unequal society

Following Locke's example, the 18th- century Enlightenment was animated by a revolutionary desire to found democratic societies to replace the class system typical of agrarian civilisation. How could the arbitrary social inequality of the Old Regime be abolished and a more equal society founded on the basis of what all people have in common, their human nature? The great Victorian synthesisers, such as Morgan, Engels, Tylor and Frazer, were standing on the shoulders of

Enlightenment predecessors motivated by a pressing democratic project to make world society less unequal. Seen in this light, the first work of modern anthropology is not Kant's, but Jean- Jacques Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origins and Foundations of Inequality among Men* (1754).

Here Rousseau was concerned not with individual variations in natural endowments which we can do little about, but with the artificial inequalities of wealth, honour and the capacity to command obedience derived from social convention which can be changed. In order to construct a model of human equality, he imagined a pre-social state of nature, a sort of hominid phase of human evolution in which men were solitary, but healthy, happy and above all free. This freedom was metaphysical, anarchic and personal: original human beings had free will, they were not subject to rules of any kind and they had no superiors. At some point humanity made the transition to what Rousseau calls 'nascent society', a prolonged period whose economic base can best be summarised as hunter-gathering with huts. This second phase represents his ideal of life in society close to nature. The rot set in with the invention of agriculture or, as Rousseau puts it, of wheat and iron. Cultivation of the land led to incipient property institutions whose culmination awaited the development of political society.

> *The first man who, having enclosed a piece of land, thought of saying 'This is mine' and found people simple enough to believe him, was the true founder of civil society.*

The formation of a civil order (the state) was preceded by a Hobbesian condition, a war of all against all marked by the absence of law, which Rousseau insisted was the result of social development, not an original state of nature. He believed that this new social contract was probably arrived at by consensus, but it was a fraudulent one in that the rich thereby gained legal sanction for transmitting unequal property rights in perpetuity. From this inauspicious beginning, political society then usually moved, via a series of revolutions, through three stages:

> *The establishment of law and the right of property was the first stage, the institution of magistrates the second, and the transformation of legitimate into arbitrary power the third and last stage. Thus the status of rich and poor was authorized by the first epoch, that of strong and weak by the second and*

by the third that of master and slave, which is the last degree of inequality and the stage to which all the others finally lead, until new revolutions dissolve the government altogether and bring it back to legitimacy.

One-man-rule closes the circle.

It is here that all individuals become equal again because they are nothing, here where subjects have no longer any law but the will of the master…

For Rousseau, the growth of inequality was just one aspect of human alienation in civil society. We need to return from division of labour and dependence on the opinion of others to subjective self-sufficiency, Kant's principal concern and mine. This subversive parable ends with a ringing indictment of economic inequality which could well serve as a warning to our world.

It is manifestly contrary to the law of nature, however defined.that a handful of people should gorge themselves with superfluities while the hungry multitude goes in want of necessities.

Lewis H. Morgan drew on Rousseau's model for his own fiercely democratic synthesis of human history, *Ancient Society*. If Rousseau laid out the first systematic anthropological theory and Kant then proposed anthropology as an academic discipline, what made Morgan's work the launch proper of modern anthropology was his ability to enroll contemporary ethnographic observations made among the Iroquois into analysis of the historical structures underlying western civilisation's origins in Greece and Rome. Marx and Engels enthusiastically took up Morgan's work as confirmation of their own critique of the state and capitalism; and the latter, drawing on Marx's extensive annotations of Ancient Society, made the argument more accessible as *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. Engels's greater emphasis on gender inequality made this strand of 'the anthropology of unequal society' a fertile source for the feminist movement in the 1960s and after.

The traditional home of inequality is supposed to be India and Andre Beteille (eg, *Inequality among men*) has made the subject his special domain of late, merging social anthropology with comparative sociology. In the United States, Leslie White at Michigan and Julian Steward at Columbia led teams, including Wolf, Sahlins, Service, Harris and Mintz, who took the evolution of the state and class society as their chief focus. Probably the single most impressive work coming out of this American school was Eric Wolf's *Europe and the People without History*. But one man tried to redo Morgan in a single book and that was Claude Lévi-Strauss in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*. We should recall that, in *Tristes Tropiques*, Lévi-Strauss acknowledged Rousseau as his master. The aim of *Elementary Structures* was to revisit Morgan's

three-stage theory of social evolution, drawing on a new and impressive canvas, 'the Siberia- Assam axis' and all points southeast as far as the Australian desert.

Lévi-Strauss took as his motor of development the forms of marriage exchange and the logic of exogamy. The 'restricted reciprocity' of egalitarian bands gave way to the unstable hierarchies of 'generalised reciprocity' typical of the Highland Burma tribes. The stratified states of the region turned inwards to endogamy, to the reproduction of class differences and the negation of social reciprocity. Evidently, the author was not encouraged to universalise the model, since he subsequently abandoned it, preferring to analyse the structures of the human mind as revealed in myths.

My teacher, Jack Goody has tried to lift our profession out of a myopic ethnography into a concern with the movement of world history that went out of fashion with the passing of the Victorian founders. Starting with *Production and Reproduction*, he has produced a score of books over the last three decades investigating why SubSaharan Africa differs so strikingly from the pre-industrial societies of Europe and Asia; and latterly refuting the West's claim to being exceptional, especially when compared with Asia. Goody found that kin groups in the major societies of Eurasia frequently pass on property through both sexes, a process of 'diverging devolution' that is virtually unknown in Sub-Saharan Africa, where inheritance follows the line of one sex only. Particularly when women's property includes the means of production — land in agricultural societies — attempts will be made to control these heiresses, banning premarital sex and making arranged marriages for them, often within the same group and with a strong preference for monogamy. Direct inheritance by women is also associated with the isolation of the nuclear family in kinship terminology, where a distinction is drawn between one's own parents and siblings and other relatives of the same generation, unlike in lineage systems. All of this reflects a class basis for society that was broadly absent in Africa.

The major Eurasian civilizations were organized through large states run by literate elites whose lifestyle embraced both the city and the countryside. In other words, what we have here is Gordon Childe's 'urban revolution' in Mesopotamia 5,000 years ago, where

> *...an elaborate bureaucracy, a complex division of labour, a stratified society based on ecclesiastical landlordism.[were] made possible by intensive agriculture where title to landed property was of supreme importance.*

The analytical focus that lends unity to Goody's compendious work is consistent with an intellectual genealogy linking him through Childe to Morgan-Engels and ultimately Rousseau. The key to understanding social forms lies in production, which for us means machine production. Civilization or human culture is largely shaped by the means of communication — once writing, now an array of mechanized forms. The site of social struggles is property, now principally conflicts over intellectual property. And his central issue of reproduction has never been more salient than at a time when the

aging citizens of rich countries depend on the proliferating mass of young people out there. Kinship needs to be reinvented too.

A new human universal: the unity of self and society A lot hinges on where in the long process of human evolution we imagine the world is today. The Victorians believed that they stood at the pinnacle of civilisation. I think of us as being like the first digging-stick operators, primitives stumbling into the invention of agriculture. In the late 1990s, I asked what it is about us that future generations will be interested in. I settled on the rapid advances then being made in forming a single interactive network linking all humanity. This has two striking features: first, the network is a highly unequal market of buyers and sellers fuelled by a money circuit that has become progressively detached from production and politics; and second, it is driven by a digital revolution in communications whose symbol is the internet, the network of networks. So my research over the last decade has been concerned with how the forms of money and exchange are changing in the context of this communications revolution.

My case for global integration rests on three developments of the last two decades:

1. The collapse of the Soviet Union, opening up the world to transnational capitalism and neo-liberal economic policies.

2. The entry of China's and India's two billion people, a third of humanity, into the world market as powers in their own right and the globalisation of capital accumulation, for the first time loosening the grip of America and Europe on the global economy.

3. The shortening of time and distance brought about by the communications revolution, linked to a restlessly mobile population.

The corollary of this revolution is a counter-revolution, the reassertion of state power since 9/11 and the imperialist war for oil in the Middle East. As Kant said, conflict is the catalyst for seeking a lawful basis of world society. Certainly humanity has regressed significantly from the hopes for equality released by the Second World War and the anti-colonial revolution that followed it. On the other hand, growing awareness of the consequences of our collective actions for life on this planet might be another stimulus to take world society seriously. Society is caught precariously between national and global forms at present; and that is why new ways of thinking are so vital.

What this adds up to is the possible formation of a new human universal. By this I mean making a world where all people can live together, not the imposition of principles that suit some powerful interests at the expense of the rest. The next universal will be unlike its predecessors, the Christian and bourgeois versions through which the West has sought to dominate or replace the cultural particulars that organise people's lives everywhere. The main precedent for such an approach to discovering our common humanity is great literature which achieves universality through going deeply into particular personalities, relations and places. The new universal will not just tolerate cultural particulars, but will be founded on knowing that true human community can only be realised through them.

There are two prerequisites for being human: we must each learn to be self- reliant to a high degree and to belong to others, merging our identities in a bewildering variety

of social relationships. Much of modern ideology emphasises how problematic it is to be both self-interested and mutual, to be economic as well as social, we might say. When culture is set up to expect a conflict between the two, it is hard to be both. Yet the two sides are often inseparable in practice and some societies, by encouraging private and public interests to coincide, have managed to integrate them more effectively than ours. One premise of the new human universal will thus be the unity of self and society.

Marcel Mauss held that the attempt to create a free market for private contracts is utopian and just as unrealisable as its antithesis, a collective based solely on altruism. Human institutions everywhere are founded on the unity of individual and society, freedom and obligation, self-interest and concern for others. Modern capitalism thus rests on an unsustainable attachment to one of these poles. The pure types of selfish and generous economic action obscure the complex interplay between our individuality and belonging in subtle ways to others. If learning to be two-sided is the means of becoming human, then the lesson is apparently hard to learn. Each of us embarks on a journey outward into the world and inward into the self. Society is mysterious to us because we have lived in it and it now dwells inside us at a level that is not ordinarily visible from the perspective of everyday life. All the places we have lived in are sources of introspection concerning our relationship to society; and one method for understanding the world is to make an ongoing practice of trying to synthesise these varied experiences. If a person would have an identity — would be one thing, one self — this requires trying to make out of fragmented social experience a more coherent whole, a world in other words as singular as the self.

Kant is the source for the notion that society may be as much an expression of individual subjectivity as a collective force out there. Copernicus solved the problem of the movement of the heavenly bodies by having the spectator revolve while they were at rest, instead of them revolve around the spectator. Kant extended this achievement for physics into metaphysics. In his *Preface to The Critique of Pure Reason*, he writes,

> *Hitherto it has been assumed that all our knowledge must conform to objects... but what if we suppose that objects must conform to our knowledge?*

In order to understand the world, we must begin not with the empirical existence of objects, but with the reasoning embedded in our experience itself and in all the judgments we have made. This is to say that the world is inside each of us as much as it is out there. Our task is to unite the two poles as subjective individuals who share the object world with the rest of humanity. Knowledge of society must be personal and moral before it is defined by the laws imposed on each of us from above.

Kant's achievement was soon overthrown by a counter-revolution that identified society with the state. This was launched by Hegel in *The Philosophy of Right* and it was only truly consummated after the First World War. As a result, the personal was separated from the impersonal, the subject from the object, humanism from science.

Twentieth-century society was conceived of as an impersonal mechanism defined by international division of labour, national bureaucracy and scientific laws understood only by experts. Not surprisingly, most people felt ignorant and impotent in the face of such a society. Yet, we have never been more conscious of ourselves as unique personalities who make a difference. That is why questions of identity are so central to politics today.

Money in capitalist societies stands for alienation, detachment, impersonal society, the outside; its origins lie beyond our control (the market). Relations marked by the absence of money are the model of personal integration and free association, of what we take to be familiar, the inside (home). This institutional dualism, forcing individuals to divide themselves, asks too much of us. People want to integrate division, to make some meaningful connection between themselves as subjects and society as an object. It helps that money, as well as being the means of separating public and domestic life, was always the main bridge between the two. That is why money must be central to any attempt to humanise society. Today it is both the principal source of our vulnerability in society and the main practical symbol allowing each of us to make an impersonal world meaningful.

How else can we repair this rupture between self and society? Mohandas K. Gandhi's critique of the modern identification of society with the state was devastating. He believed that it disabled citizens, subjecting mind and body to the control of professional experts when the purpose of a civilisation should be to enhance its members' sense of their own selfreliance. He proposed instead that every human being is a unique personality and participates with the rest of humanity in an encompassing whole. Between these extremes lie proliferating associations of great variety. He settled on the village as the vehicle for Indians' aspirations for selforganisation; and this made him in many respects a typical 20^{th}-century nationalist. But what is most relevant to us is his existentialist project. If the world of society and nature is devoid of meaning, each of us is left feeling small, isolated and vulnerable. How do we bridge the gap between a puny self and a vast, unknowable world? The answer is to scale down the world, to scale up the self or a combination of both, so that a meaningful relationship might be established between the two. Gandhi devoted a large part of his philosophy to building up the personal resources of individuals. Our task is to bring this project up to date.

Novels and movies allow us to span actual and possible worlds. They bring history down in scale to a familiar frame (the paperback, the screen) and audiences enter into that history subjectively on any terms their imagination permits. The sources of our alienation are commonplace. What interests me is resistance to alienation, whatever form it takes, religious or otherwise. How can we feel at home out there, in the restless turbulence of the modern world? The digital revolution is in part a response to this need. We feel at home in intimate, face-to-face relations; but we must engage in remote, often impersonal exchanges at distance. Improvements in telecommunications cannot stop until we replicate at distance the experience of face-to-face interaction. For the drive to

overcome alienation is even more powerful than alienation itself. Social evolution has reached the point of establishing nearuniversal communications; now we must make world society in the image of our own humanity.

Crisis of the intellectuals The universities have been around for a long time, but they came into their own in the last half-century, as the training grounds for bureaucracy that Hegel envisaged. Most contemporary intellectuals have taken refuge in them by now and human personality has been in retreat there for some time. In *Enemies of Promise: publishing, perishing and the eclipse of scholarship*, Lindsay Waters, humanities editor for Harvard University Press, claims that the current explosion of academic publishing is a bubble as certain to burst as the dotcom boom. Publishing, he says, has become more concerned with quantity than quality and mechanization 'has proved lethal'. He warns academics, in the face of the corporate takeover of the university, '...to preserve and protect the independence of their activities, before the market becomes our prison. (...) Many universities are, in significant part, financial holding operations (...) The commercialization of higher education has caused innovation in the humanities to come to a standstill.'

Because Waters blames the humanities' decline on money and machines, his call for resistance has no practical basis in contemporary conditions. Anna Grimshaw and I, in the pamphlet that launched our imprint, Prickly Pear Press, once tried to locate anthropology's compromised relationship to academic bureaucracy in the crisis facing modern intellectuals, as identified by the Caribbean writer, CLR James in *American Civilization*. We held that intellectual practice should be integrated more closely with social life, given their increasing separation by academic bureaucracy. The need to escape from the ivory tower to join the people where they live was the inspiration for modern anthropology. But this had been negated by the expansion of the universities after 1945 and by the political pressures exerted on academics since the 1980s.

Edward Said, in *Representations of the Intellectual*, without ever mentioning anthropology, made claims for intellectuals that could be taken as a metaphor for the discipline. He emphasised the creative possibilities in migration and marginality, of being an awkward outsider who crosses boundaries, questions certainties, a figure at once involved and detached. Narrow professionalism poses an immense threat to academic life. Specialisation, concern with disciplinary boundaries and expert knowledge lead to a suspension of critical enquiry and ultimately a drift towards legitimating power. The exile and the amateur might combine to inject new radicalism into a jaded professionalism. Said credited James with being an intellectual of this kind, but James placed intellectuals within a historical process that had aligned them with power and made them increasingly at odds with the people. Said did not identify how and why intellectual life had been transformed from free individual creativity into serving the needs of bureaucracy.

For James there was a growing conflict between the concentration of power at the top of society and the aspirations of people everywhere for democracy to be extended into all areas of their lives. This conflict was most advanced in America. The struggle was for

civilisation or barbarism, for individual freedom within new and expanded conceptions of social life (democracy) or a fragmented and repressed subjectivity stifled by coercive bureaucracies (totalitarianism). The intellectuals were caught between the expansion of bureaucracy and the growing power and presence of people as a force in world society. Unable to recognise that people's lives mattered more than their own ideas, they oscillated between an introspective individualism (psychoanalysis) and service to the ruling powers, whether of the right (fascism) or left (Stalinism). As a result, the traditional role of the intellectual as an independent witness and critic standing unequivocally for truth had been seriously compromised. Their absorption as wage slaves and pensioners of bureaucracy not only removed intellectuals' independence, but also separated their specialised activities from social life.

One anthropologist who addressed these questions of intellectuals and the public, of ideas and life, knowledge and power, was Edmund Leach in his prescient BBC lectures, *A Runaway World?* There he identified a world in movement, marked by the interconnectedness of people and things. This provoked the mood of optimism and fear that characterized the 60s, when established structures seemed to be breaking down. The reality of change could not be understood through conventional cultural categories predicated on stable order. Moral categories based on habits of separation and division could only make the world's movement seem alien and frightening. An ethos of scientific detachment reinforced by binary ideas (right/wrong) lay at the core of society's malaise. Leach called for an intellectual practice based on movement and engagement, connection and dialectic. In short he was calling for the reinsertion of ideas into social life.

The solution to anthropology's problems cannot be found in increased specialisation, in the discovery of new areas of social life to colonise with the aid of old professional paradigms or in a return to literary scholarship disguised as a new dialogical form. It requires new patterns of social engagement extending beyond the universities to the widest reaches of world society. We must acknowledge how people everywhere are pushing back the boundaries of the old society and remain open to universality, which has been driven underground by national capitalism and would be buried forever if the present corporate privatisation of intellectual life is allowed to succeed.

The expansion of academic bureaucracy has accentuated the objectification of thought as a marker of status and reward. Ideas have become commodities to be possessed, traded and stolen. An intensified focus on the formal abstraction of performance has led to the academic labour market being driven by the empty measures of print production that Waters rightly denigrates. Subjective contributions, like the qualities of a good teacher, inevitably carry less weight. And so the academic intellectuals, who might have offered a critique of the corporate takeover of the universities, find themselves instead drawn passively into a vicious variant of the privatisation of ideas. Something must be done to reinstate human personality in our common understanding of how the world works. But this should be through the

medium of money and machines, not despite them. Kant's cosmopolitan moral politics offer one vision of the course such a renewal might take.

Anthropology now and to come

Anthropology can no longer be summarised as what a few luminaries in the centres of imperial power think and do. Americans dominate a much larger profession, for sure, while British and French anthropology are in decline and the European Association grows in stature. The annual AAA (American Anthropological Association) meetings have become a global gathering point where anthropologists are more likely to meet national colleagues than at home, rather like the African politicians of the interwar period who got to meet each other in Paris or London. The second largest annual meetings are in Brazil, where anthropologists have expanded from their Amazonian base to offer informed commentary on all aspects of national society and culture. Scandinavian anthropologists draw on their social-democratic tradition to exhibit a high level of public engagement. Countries like Nigeria and India sustain large numbers of anthropologists in the study of 'tribal' areas. The discipline appears to be flourishing in the lands of new settlement, such as Australia, Canada and South Africa. New varieties of national anthropology are springing up all over Eastern Europe. I could go on, but the point is made. 'Anthropology' has slipped its colonial bonds and is now many things all over the world.

The same cannot be said of its institutional setting. Like most other intellectual activities, the discipline has become largely locked up in the universities. Anthropology's modernist moment — the commitment to join the people where they live in order to find out what they do and think — became ossified as the professional mantra that we do 'fieldwork-based ethnography'. The universities themselves, in most countries outside the US, are centrally organised by the state; and the ethnographic model of society — indigenous, culturally homogeneous, bounded territorial units — uncomfortably mimics the nationalism that it was originally designed to promote and, worse, dissolves world society into a plethora of local fragments, each aspiring to self-sufficiency. If cultural relativism was once a legitimate reaction to racist imperialism, the legacy of the ethnographic turn has been to make it impossible for most academic anthropologists to respond effectively to our own 'Magellan moment'. We generate fine-grained accounts of human experience, but without the aspiration to universality that still animated the discipline up until the 50s. We now address only ourselves and our students.

This is not to say that anthropology sits well with the university. We retain the will to range across disciplinary boundaries; the humanism and democracy entailed in our methods contradict bureaucratic imperatives at every turn.

Anthropology has always been an antidiscipline, a holding company for idiosyncratic individuals to do what they like and call it 'anthropology'. This is coming under pres-

sure today. Increasingly, academic anthropologists turn inwards for defence against allcomers and this often leaves them exposed and without allies in the struggle for survival in the universities. We can't assume that the identification of anthropology with the academy in the previous century will continue in the next. It is now harder for selfdesignated guilds to control access to professional knowledge. People have other ways of finding out for themselves, rather than submit to academic hierarchy. And there are many agencies out there competing to give them what they want, whether through journalism, tourism or the self-learning possibilities afforded by the internet. Popular resistance to the power of disembedded experts is essentially moral, in that people insist on restoring a personal dimension to human knowledge.

So the issue of anthropology's future needs to be couched in broader terms than those defined by the profession itself. I have been building a case that 'anthropology' is indispensable to the making of world society in the coming century. It may be that some elements of the current academic discipline could play a part in that; but the prospects are not good, given the narrow localism and anti-universalism that is prevalent there. Rather I have sought inspiration in Kant's philosophy and in the critique of unequal society that originates with Rousseau. 'Anthropology' would then mean whatever we need to know about humanity as a whole if we want to build a more equal world fit for everyone. I hope that this usage could be embraced by students of history, sociology, political economy, philosophy and literature, as well as by members of my own profession. Many disciplines might contribute without being exclusively devoted to it. The idea of 'development' has played a similar role in the last half-century.

Disciplines thrive when their object, theory and method are coherent. In the 18th century, anthropology's object was human nature, its theory 'reason', its method humanist philosophy. In the 19th century, anthropology's object was to explain racial hierarchy, its theory was evolution, its method world history. The object of British social anthropology in the 20th century was primitive societies, its theory was functionalism and the method fieldwork. We need a new synthesis of object, theory and method suitable to conditions now. The ethnographic paradigm has been moving for half a century in response to the anti-colonial revolution and other seismic changes in world history. But anthropologists have retained the method of face-to-face encounters while dumping the original object and theory. Paradoxically, while the anthropologists have rejected philosophy, history and anything else that could give meaning to the purpose of their discipline, the idea of ethnography has been adopted in everything from geography to nursing studies. Of course the anthropologists claim that the others don't understand what ethnography is really about or how it is done. But they have forgotten what it is about 'anthropology' that makes their version of 'ethnography' special. They no longer ask the basic questions that launched anthropology — what makes inequality intolerable or how people can live together peaceably. So they can't explain what is missing when others take up 'ethnography'.

I have made much of Kant's example here because he attempted to address the emergence of world society directly. He conceived of anthropology primarily as a form of

humanist education; and this contrasts starkly with the emphasis on scientific research outputs in today's universities. We could also emulate his 'pragmatic' anthropology, a personal programme of lifetime learning with the aim of developing practical knowledge of the world. He sought a method for integrating individual subjectivity with the moral construction of world society. World history, as practised by the likes of Jack Goody and Eric Wolf, is indispensable to any anthropology worthy of the name today. The method of biography is particularly well-suited to the study of self and society and I would predict that its use will be more commonplace in future. No one, in my view, better exemplifies the vision and methods needed for anthropology's renewal than Sidney Mintz. Apart from his record as a Caribbean ethnographer, he has produced an outstanding biography in *Worker in the Cane*, and in *Sweetness and Power* world history of the first rank. The 'literary turn' in anthropology, symbolised by the publication of *Writing Culture* two decades ago, has also opened up anthropology to fiction — novels, plays and movies. This is surely for the good.

The rapid development of global communications today contains within its movement a far-reaching transformation of world society. 'Anthropology' in some form is one of the intellectual traditions best suited to make sense of it. The academic seclusion of the discipline, its passive acquiescence to bureaucracy, is the chief obstacle preventing us from grasping this historical opportunity. We cling to our revolutionary commitment to joining the people, but have forgotten what it was for or what else is needed, if we are to succeed in helping to build a universal society. I grew up in an education system designed to prepare graduates for the Indian civil service, so I have had to retool late in life with the help of younger and more skilled companions. The internet is a wonderful chance to open up the flow of knowledge and information. Rather than obsessing over how we can control access to what we write, which means cutting off the mass of humanity almost completely from our efforts, we need to figure out new interactive forms of engagement that span the globe and to make the results of our work available to everyone. Ever since the internet went public, I have made online selfpublishing the core of my anthropological practice. It matters less that an academic guild should retain its monopoly of access to knowledge than that 'anthropology' should be taken up by a broad intellectual coalition for whom the realisation of a new human universal — a world society fit for humanity as a whole — is a matter of urgent personal concern. ☒

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Managing abundance, not chasing scarcity: the real challenge for the 21st century

Humanity must move away from seeing natural resources as scarce commodities to be controlled by the most powerful, says Jerome Lewis

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In Congo-Brazzaville in the 1990s it was striking that local people, and particularly the Mbendjele Yaka Pygmy hunter-gatherers with whom I lived[1], did not distinguish between the activities of conservationists and those of logging companies. But they did distinguish between the EuroAmericans currently present in the forest and their colonial predecessors.

Whereas the colonial administrators and traders of the past are called 'elephants of our fathers' (*banjoku na batata*) in ordinary speech, today's 'white people' (*mindele*) are referred to as 'red river hogs' (*bangwia*). During colonial times Europeans involved in this area mostly lived alone and travelled in the forest accompanied by Chadian or Senegalese soldiers. Today, whether loggers or conservationists, Euro-Americans live grouped together in substantial purpose-built settlements and travel around the forest in teams, locating and counting forest species using Yaka guidance and expertise.

The impressive wealth of EuroAmericans is picked out by these metaphors. Whereas large elephants had a high trade value in the past, today, with the development of the bush-meat trade, red river hogs have become more commercially valuable. The hogs' habit of living in groups means that three or four may be killed at a time. Everyone lives in the same forest, yet all white *Mindele* appear to be incredibly wealthy, just as all red river hogs somehow grow surprisingly fat. There is a certain mystery in how pigs become so fat from the forest that all creatures share, which is also attributed to the way Euro-Americans generate huge wealth from Yaka forest using baffling technology.

The implications of this grouping together of loggers and conservationists led me to think harder about the way Euro-Americans engage with the forest and its resources

[1] Field research was undertaken in the Northern Republic of Congo, in 1994–1997, with generous support from the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, an Emslie Horniman Anthropological Scholarship and a Swan Fund Scholarship. I am grateful for an Alfred Gell Memorial Scholarship. Annual visits have been made since 2000.

in comparison to the Yaka. This article explores the cultural conceptions and observations that underpin their conflation of what seem to us opposed activities. The Yaka's analysis challenges basic assumptions underpinning dominant western approaches to environmental conservation, particularly current attempts to assure the future of the flora and fauna of the Congo Basin by establishing protected areas. Somewhat surprisingly, however, the Yaka's analysis accords with the principles behind the latest attempts to improve forest management through forestry certification schemes which allow for sustainable human exploitation of the forest.

Broadly speaking, people use two contradictory models to conceive and understand forest resources in Northern Congo-Brazzaville. In general, people coming from industrialised countries value forest resources because of their scarcity whereas those people living in or near the forest value them because of their abundance. Here it is argued that Yaka understanding of how people can maintain an abundant nature offers conservation organisations a new paradigm for conceptualising their role in the management of Central African forests, and establishes the basis for a meaningful dialogue with local people. Local conceptions of forest resources as abundant provide a more appropriate model for resource management in Central Africa than the continuing imposition of Euro-American derived models based on scarcity.

The Mbendjele Yaka

The Yaka (*Mbendjele*) Pygmies[2] living in northern Congo are forest living hunter-gatherers who are considered the first inhabitants of the region by themselves and their farming neighbours, the Bilo[3]. Each Yaka associates her or himself with a hunting and gathering territory called 'our forest'. Here, local groups of Yaka visit ancestral campsites in favoured places where they will gather, fish, hunt and cut honey from wild beehives depending on the season and opportunities available. Though many occasionally make small farms or work for money or goods, they value forest activities and foods as superior.

Yaka value travelling through the forest and camping in different places. Social organisation is based on a temporary camp generally containing at most some 60 people in ten or so quickly but skilfully built leaf and liana huts. Camps are able to expand or contract easily in response to changing conditions relating to the viability of hunting and gathering activities or social events and needs. If Yaka have difficulty finding game in one area of forest, they simply move to another area, allowing game

[2] Mbendjele claim shared ancestry with other forest hunter-gatherer groups in the region such as the Baka, Mikaya, Luma or Gyeli. All these groups are called Ba.Yaka (Ba'aka) people by the Mbendjele. The academic name for these diverse groups is 'Pygmies'. The term can be objectionable outside this context.

[3] The Yaka term 'Bilo' refers to any non-Yaka, village-dwelling African people who live near Yaka people. Although growing urban populations are also called Bilo, typical Bilo are village dwelling, agriculturalists, and fishing or trapping peoples, who speak Bantu or Ubangian languages.

to replenish. In general, Pygmy peoples use their mobility and flexibility to avoid or resolve problems like hunger, illness, conflict, political domination or disputes among themselves.

Hunter-gatherers such as the Yaka have been characterised as 'egalitarian societies', where differences in power, wealth or authority are systematically avoided or undermined (Woodburn 1982). This characterisation is based on an analytical distinction between an 'immediate-return' hunter-gatherer economy and agricultural, herding or capitalist 'delayed-return' economies that is helpful for understanding the differences in approach to resource management and the environment.

In delayed-return societies work is invested over extended periods of time before a yield is produced or consumed. This delay between labour investment and consumption results in political inequality because it becomes necessary to establish hierarchical structures of authority to distribute work, yields and control vital assets as labour matures into a yield. The majority of contemporary human societies are based upon delayed-return economies. Efforts by communist states to develop more egalitarian structures inevitably yielded to these fundamental forces, reasserting new types of hierarchies and inequalities to manage the delay between labour and yield.

'Immediate-return' hunter-gatherers such as the Yaka are strongly orientated to the present. People like to obtain a direct and immediate return for their labour — eating most of their production on the day they obtain it, as hunters, gatherers and sometimes as day labourers paid in food. They value consumption over accumulation and will share their food with all present on the day they acquire it. Without the authority and power derived from the ability to withhold vital resources, hierarchy has great difficulty establishing itself. Thus societies whose economies are based on immediate-returns tend to be egalitarian societies. These are common among huntergatherers such as Central African Pygmies, Southern African San and the Hadza of Tanzania, as well as among Orang Asli groups such as the Batek or Chewong in South East Asia.

Yaka, like other immediate-return societies, greatly stress obligatory, nonreciprocal sharing as a moral principle. A person who happens to have more of something, such as meat or honey, than they immediately need, is under a moral obligation to share it without expectation of return. In this way resources taken from the forest are equitably distributed among all present, and accumulation is both unfeasible and impractical. Other camp members will, if necessary, vociferously demand their shares from someone with more than they can immediately consume.

Anthropologists have characterised this type of sharing as 'demand-sharing'[4] and observe that it leads to a high degree of economic and social equality. There is a noticeable absence of social inequality between men and women and between elders and juniors. Any individual, man or woman, adult or child, has the opportunity to

[4] Woodburn 1998.

voice their opinion and resist the influence of others as they see fit.[5] Yaka actively shun status since it will attract jealousy that may ruin their success in valued activities. Thus, in contrast to western expectations, good hunters will refrain from hunting too often. They will avoid anything that could be interpreted as boasting about their skill or success, lest their colleagues become jealous and curse them (see Lewis 2003).

The forest is idealised as the perfect place for people to live, in contrast to cleared spaces such as farms or rivers. Mbendjele Yaka women like to give birth to their children in the forest. Everyday conversations are obsessed with the forest, with the locations of desirable wild foods, with different tricks and techniques for finding and extracting them, with the intricacies of animal behaviour or plant botany, on stories of past hunting, fishing or gathering trips, or on great feasts and forest spirit performances. Yaka say that when they die they go to a forest where Komba (God) has a camp. They cannot conceive of their lives, or deaths and afterlife, without the frame of the forest around them. They express their dependency on and the intimacy of their relationship with the forest in the proverb, "A Yaka loves the forest as she loves her own body."

The Yaka believe that Komba created the forest for them. It has always been, and will eternally be there for them. They, similar to many other forest hunter-gatherers, as Bird-David discusses (1990; 1992), have a faith that the forest will always provide them with what they need. Abundance is taken as natural. Should people not experience abundance, it is not because resources are diminishing but due to improper sharing.

The emphasis on sharing as the means to maintain abundance is peculiar to egalitarian societies. Conceiving of resources as abundant can lead to a variety of approaches to them. To illustrate this I will describe divergences between the Yaka conceptions that inform my argument and those held by their Bilo neighbours[6], and others.

Abundance

Most local Congolese conceive of the forest and its resources as abundant. In the 1990s conservationists confirmed this by designating this area as one of rich biodiversity. But unlike Yaka hunter-gatherers, Bilo groups depend on subsistence farming that requires the felling of large trees and the clearing of forest to create fields for cultivation and dwellings. The forest bordering their clearings requires constant and energetic

[5] Lewis 2002 elaborates on this in Yaka society. Gender relations in immediate-return hunting and gathering societies are the most egalitarian anthropologists have observed (Endicott and Endicott 2006, Woodburn 1982).

[6] The Yaka describe Bilo village people as recent arrivals to the forest who discriminate against them, attempt to exploit them, claim rights over their land and labour, and make aggressive claims to own farmland, rivers, forest and even other people. Yaka elders often emphasised that it is their transience that makes Bilo claims vacuous and therefore not to be taken too seriously. Rural migration to urban centres is the latest migratory movement of the Bilo. Currently 80% of Congo's population lives in two cities.

cutting if it is to be prevented from reclaiming domesticated land. From this perspective the abundant forest is a wild force that needs to be conquered for successful social life to occur. Bilo often justify claims to own forest areas in terms of conquest.

As the experience of Europeans and Americans attests, a 'conquering' relationship with an abundant nature can have disastrous consequences on natural systems, especially when combined with modern industrial technology. Only relatively recently, with the expansion of scientific research into industrialisation and capitalism's impact on environmental systems, have Euro-American conceptions of an abundant nature been replaced by careful estimations of the value of individual resources in terms of their scarcity and human demand for them. A striking example of this is the planned launch of carbon trading on international stock markets in 2012, in which trees standing in Northern Congo can be traded by bankers as carbon stocks in environmentally 'feelgood' investment portfolios.

Bilo and earlier Euro-American views of an abundant and wild nature placed human society outside it, and emphasised metaphors of control and conquest in describing human relations with natural environments. In contrast, the Yaka see themselves as part of a socially interacting and generous nature that provides abundantly to all so long as rules about sharing are respected.

Ekila[7] as a guide to proper sharing

For Yaka, people should be successful in their activities because nature is abundant. If they are not, it is because they, or somebody else, has ruined their *ekila* by sharing inappropriately. Sharing is fundamental to sociality. Yaka share even when there would seem to be no need to share, for instance, when huge amounts of fish are captured by everyone in the dry season; and they still share even if this means the producer remains with almost nothing. They explain that if they didn't share, their *ekila* would be ruined and they would no longer catch fish or find food.

Ekila regulates Yaka environmental relations by defining what constitutes proper sharing. For example, by not sharing food, especially meat, properly among all present, a hunter's *ekila* may be ruined so that he is unsuccessful in future. A hunter who is too often successful may stop hunting for a while for fear that his successes will attract envy and ruin his *ekila*. If either a husband or wife inappropriately shares their sexuality with others outside their marriage, it is said that both partners have had their *ekila* ruined. A menstruating woman is said to be *ekila* and her smell will anger dangerous forest animals. She must share part of her menstrual blood with forest spirits in order that her male relatives continue to find food. Even laughter, a highly valued activity, should be properly shared. Whereas laughter shared between people in camp during the evening makes the forest rejoice, laughing at hunted animals ruins the *ekila* of the hunter.

[7] *Ekila* is a fascinating cultural category that I discuss in Lewis 2008 and 2002: 103–120.

If *ekila* has been ruined it causes men to miss when they shoot at animals, and for women it causes them to have difficulties in childbirth. If parents eat certain *ekila* animals when their children are still infants, this can provoke illness in their children and even death. Failure or difficulties in the food-quest or procreation are discussed in relation to *ekila* rather than to inadequacies in human skill or the environment's ability to provide. People recognise each other's skills, but in this egalitarian society it is impolite to refer to them. Rather, success or failure may be discussed in terms of *ekila*.

A whole area of forest may become *ekila*. This becomes apparent when hunting is consistently unsuccessful, and successive misfortunes befall those who camp in or pass through a certain area. Yaka hunters from the clan responsible for that area will place leaf cones stuffed with earth on all foot paths leading into the *ekila* forest. This warns other Yaka that the forest is dangerous, and that they should not attempt to find food but turn back or simply pass through quickly. Despite a non-scientific reasoning, the effect of this allows degraded areas of forest to be left in order that their resources increase to sustainable levels again.

Although couched in unfamiliar idioms, *ekila* is a theory for maintaining abundance. Adherence to these practices, and their explanation, has established a relationship with resources that has assured Yaka people have experienced the forest as a place of abundance for the entirety of their cultural memory. *Ekila* teaches that by not sharing properly resources become scarce. By sharing properly, resources will be experienced as abundant.

From abundance to scarcity

Even in the short time I have been visiting the forest, areas I stayed in during the 1990s are considerably less abundant now than they were then. While visiting in 2003 I found myself walking in wide elephant trails (*mbembo*) that were obviously becoming overgrown from lack of use. I remarked this to my companions. They responded that the elephants walk elsewhere now due to the noise of the loggers' bulldozers, not that elephants were becoming scarce.

Explained within the logic of *ekila*, outsiders coming into Yaka forest have not understood the importance of proper and equitable sharing as the means to guarantee the continuing abundance of its resources. Indeed, the opposite is occurring as outsiders, such as loggers, obtain exclusive rights to resources that they systematically remove without replacement for great personal enrichment, and others such as conservationists, who obtain large grants to exclude all other people from areas of forest they occupy. This colonial-like expansion by loggers and conservationists is far advanced in forest belonging to another Yaka group, the Baka of Cameroon. When I visited Cameroon in November 2002 Lambombo, a Baka elder, explained:

Before all this was our forest, our ancestors were all hunters who lived in the forest. Our fathers told us to live in this forest and to use what we needed. Komba [God] made the forest for all of us, but first of all for the Baka. When we see the forest we think, 'That is our forest'. But now we are told by the government and the conservationists that it is not our forest. But we are hunters and need the forest for our lives.

Of these others who say our forest is theirs, there is Ecofac [the conservationists], MINEF [the ministry for forests] and the loggers. When the loggers cut our trees we got nothing, and we still get nothing. We who are older notice that all that was in the forest before is getting less. We used to always find things — yams, pigs and many other things — we thought that would never end. Now when we try and look we can't find them anymore.

The government and the conservationists have messed up our forest. When we looked after the forest there was always plenty. Now that we are forbidden to enter our forest when we put out traps they remain empty. Before if we put out traps and nothing walked on them we would take them elsewhere to let the forest rest. We know how to look after the forest.'

Lambombo describes the movement from abundance to scarcity that he has witnessed. His perceptive analysis of how this situation came about and the persecution they continue to experience is unfortunately marginalised by those, such as the government and the conservationists, which have been entrusted with responsibility for these areas.

Though it goes back further than Lambombo may realise, the increasing scarcity of forest resources coincides with Euro-Americans' engagement with the Yaka. Since the Atlantic Trade Era and the arrival of Europeans in Central Africa the demand for forest products has been steadily increasing. The Atlantic Trade Era brought ivory, slaves, and cam wood onto international trade circuits. In the colonial period ivory, rubber, copal resin, duiker skins and red wood were the main exports. Since independence those resources that remain valuable, namely hard woods and minerals, have been increasingly intensively exploited using industrial technology combined with political and military strategising.

In practical terms, for local people their forests have been converted into floral and faunal assets that have been traded or rented out by the national government under pressure from international financial institutions, such as the World Bank, wishing to reclaim loans. It is this system of intensive and unsustainable exploitation of forest resources by outsiders, euphemistically called economic development, that is the root cause of the severe environmental problems facing the forests of the Congo basin.

By contrast, the sustainability and success of Yaka forest management over many centuries is portrayed as unrestrained and primitive by non- Yaka. Traditional subsistence activities such as hunting, petty trade in forest products or slash and burn

agriculture are often depicted as destructive. Local people are stereotyped as careless about their environment, uneducated, easily corrupted and only interested in short-term gain. However, the majority of intensive commercial poaching is organised by local educated elites who manipulate their power to set up effective poaching and trafficking networks that are immune from prosecution. The weak majority is being scapegoated due to the activities of a powerful minority.

Such misreading of local realities serves to justify international elites sending expatriate conservation managers to apply Euro-American ideas about wildlife management, developed in industrialised countries, to places such as Yaka forest. The result is militaristic management regimes that convert part of the forest into an animal refuge for northern scientists to study forest ecology, and for northern tourists to watch forest animals, while the land around the park is 'developed'. In Congo, government and international attitudes perceive of hunting and gathering in areas around the park as primitive and wasteful, whereas industrial logging, extensive commercial tree plantations and similar activities are desirable developments.

Yet this view of development is bringing about the steady impoverishment of the world's resources to the benefit of rich nations and national elites. Forest resources are now so effectively destroyed throughout the rest of the world that they are increasingly scarce and the subject of guilt and intense anxiety from industrialised governments and their peoples. However, their commitment to globalising industrial capitalism overrides this realisation. The current fashion to promote protected areas legitimises this while condemning the Congo Basin to become just like European or American landscapes where nature is subjugated to the needs of people. Conservationists promoting protected areas seem to have already given up on the possibility of maintaining the forests of the Congo Basin intact. Without change this is likely to be a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Amazingly, the relationship between the intensification of industrial extraction and the increasing diminishment of natural resources continues to be ignored or glossed over. So a recent effort to impose more industrial exploitation on the Congo Basin was presented as a conservation initiative called the Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP). In September 2002, the United States and South Africa joined 27 public and private partners to launch the CBFP at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa. Its stated goal is to promote economic development, alleviate poverty, and improve governance and natural resource conservation through support for a network of protected areas and well-managed forestry concessions in the Congo Basin. These initiatives promote alliances between huge logging companies, national governments and international conservation organisations to impose militarily enforced protected areas in small areas of forest while encouraging industrial development in remaining areas. At the time the CBFP was conceived, no forester in Central Africa had Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification[8] demonstrating that they

[8] Forest Stewardship Council certification is widely considered the least controversial criteria for establishing sustainable forestry practices.

could log sustainably and many loggers publicly claimed it would be impossible for FSC to work in Africa.

Enforcement of forestry regulations was, and continues to be, undermined by rampant corruption. Available documentation of illegality and abuse of cutting regulations[9] provides strong evidence of the profoundly unsustainable logging practiced by most companies in Central Africa. Yet, despite all this, conservation organisations have encouraged, facilitated and established numerous such partnerships. The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) even created its own network called Central African Forest Trade Network (CAFTN) when substantial funds became available from USAID (the United States Agency for International Development) in 2002.

But the evidence suggests that many logging companies use the panda (the WWF logo) to shield themselves from criticism that could damage their image in high value European and American markets, and to facilitate getting public funds and cheap bank loans. In 2005 Greenpeace released a damning report on Danzer's illegal activities and urged a general boycott of Danzer products[10]. In spite of this WWF continued to support Danzer by facilitating access to markets to sell their goods through WWF's Global Forest Trade Network, and in 2007 WWF was actively lobbying a major German bank for a loan on Danzer's behalf.

There seems to be a significant risk that supporting such initiatives as the model for the future of forest conservation in the Congo Basin will condemn Central Africa to become an expanse of unsustainably logged and impoverished woodland surrounding small islands of militarily protected forest.

Red river hogs: loggers and conservationists

A partnership between loggers and conservationists seems strange at first sight. However, conservationists and loggers have been mutually dependent for some time already. Since the 1970s industrial logging has rapidly expanded with the importation of improved technology and skills to exploit the forest in ways that mostly earn money for international companies and local elites. This has had numerous consequences.

Industrial logging requires a substantial labour force and large infrastructural developments to sustain it. Regular wages create demands for goods and services from employees that attract other people to provide them. Employees' less well-off relatives come to live with them in town. These communities need feeding; intensive farming or hunting to supply the town with food offers an attractive income for traders and others. Roads used to evacuate logs also provide transport for bushmeat and other forest products. They also disenclave remote villages. People flock to the logging town out of curiosity, to seek employment and to enjoy the intense social life available there.

[9] Forest Monitor 2001 provides examples.

[10] http://www.greenpeace.org.uk/ forests/forests.cfm?ucidparam= 20041201143538

Urban developments suddenly emerge in areas of high biodiversity, changing the land for kilometres around and leading to the common problems associated with rapid urbanisation in a forest environment. Local elites see lucrative opportunities for gain by combining their political immunity with modern technologies and the access to the forest provided by the loggers' infrastructure.[11]

The consequences of opening up forest by loggers draws wider attention to it from international environmentalists who take an interest in logging's impact, and associated activities on forest resources. The impact is great. To date most environmentalists' reaction to this focuses on establishing small areas of protected forest for isolation from local people, and intensively policing them rather than seeking to ensure that industrial activities such as logging are only permitted if they are sustainable.

Despite this peculiar myopia, current trends are to establish even larger protected areas that cross national boundaries in what is being called a 'landscape management approach'.

Major international finance for this has been provided through the Central African Forest World Heritage Initiative (CAFWHI), whose focus, like most conservation projects in Central Africa, is policing the bushmeat trade — 84% of the budget is for this activity alone. The illegal bushmeat trade is cited as the single greatest threat to the Central African forests and used to justify the draconian imposition on local people of exclusion zones protected by armed 'eco-guards'. The activities of illegal and unsustainable logging companies are not addressed. Despite many millions of dollars, no funding is planned for community consultations, co-management initiatives or local capacity building.

Exclusion zones and protected areas displace the problem, they do not solve it. Elephant poachers I met near the Nouabale Ndoki National Park in 1996 in Congo explained that they simply crossed the river into Cameroon to hunt there for the local Congolese mayor. Corruption allows the biggest culprits of environmental crime to escape with impunity. Commercial bushmeat traders and farmers go elsewhere. But for Yaka huntergatherers it is much more difficult since each zone will have important seasonal wild resources not necessarily available elsewhere in the territory they normally live and travel in. The militaristic enforcement of hunting restrictions around protected areas does not address the root causes of the bushmeat trade. These are economic and political.

Using shocking images of dead apes, monkeys and other game, conservationists obtain funds in rich countries to support their activities. But this focus is acting as

[11] In northern Congo in the mid-1990s members of the local elite were responsible for organising some of the most damaging environmental practices. These included largescale elephant massacres using high powered military machine guns (the remains of over 300 corpses were found in one forest clearing in 1997), large-scale wood theft from logging companies and the extensive clearance of forest for commercial plantations and farms.

Anecdotal evidence of extensive poaching being organised by the highest political powers continues to emerge.

a diversion from addressing the root causes of the serious environmental problems facing Central Africa. Local people are being scapegoated unfairly, while the urgent need to reign in corruption and develop practices that ensure sustainable resource use continues to be neglected.

As international capital draws out more and more of the forest's resources, international environmentalists are seeking to isolate increasingly large areas of forest and exclude local people from them. The implications of this dual occupation of the forest by loggers and conservationists are potentially very serious for Yaka and other Pygmy people. They are the easy victims of those outsiders extracting resources and those 'protecting' them.

From Yaka perspectives conservation, like logging, makes abundant forest scarce. By sealing off areas to all except the privileged (Euro-American scientists and tourists, important officials and project workers), conservationists claim to protect wildlife. This enforced preservation of forest in some areas serves to justify the forest's destruction elsewhere. International institutions such as the World Bank promote and finance conservation initiatives at the same time as promoting, funding, and even obliging governments to open their national resources to exploitation by foreign corporations.

Surprisingly, this contradictory behaviour only occasionally provokes outrage. In 2005, for instance, in a campaign spear-headed by the Rainforest Foundation and Greenpeace, the World Bank was widely criticised for appearing to have pushed through surreptitiously forest legislation that was advantageous to international logging interests and international conservation organisations but ignored civil society and local forest peoples' needs. The furore that followed resulted in a moratorium on new logging concessions in Democratic Republic of the Congo and a very critical World Bank Inspection Panel Report (2007).

Justifying the promotion of industrial exploitation by providing grants at the same time to conservation organisations is not a new strategy. Already in 1992 Polly Ghazi, writing in *The Guardian*, noted how the World Bank, despite a 'green forestry policy', offered commercial rate loans to boost Congo-Brazzaville's timber exports. 'To help tempt the government of the Congo, which already owes the West huge debts, the loan offer is being linked to a free UN grant for setting up protected conservation areas. The $10 million grant will come from the new Global Environment Facility, raising fears that the much heralded green fund could be misused to damage rather than protect rainforests...'

Like the World Bank, loggers and conservationists are each using the other to justify their actions and obtain funding to develop their activities. Loggers are able to divert attention from the harmful impact of their activities by pointing to efforts being made to protect conservation areas and by paying lip-service to the ideals of sustainable forestry. Conservationists justify the draconian repression of local peoples' traditional rights by referring to the destruction caused by activities associated with logging or that depend on the infrastructure created by loggers. As exclusion zones encompass

more and more forest, logging companies use their existence to justify enlarging and accelerating their activities around the protected areas.

Why conservation agencies focus activities on limiting local peoples' hunting or bushmeat trading activities rather than on the massive road building activities of multinational companies seems to be an issue of scale linked to what is achievable in a funding cycle — often just three years. It is less daunting to attempt to control local people than to address the underlying causes of environmental destruction — the obligatory capitalisation of resources imposed by the big international lenders on poor countries governed by corrupt political systems.

The dominance of protected-area thinking in conservation planning means that the economics of industrial forest exploitation are rarely challenged by national governments or conservationists working in Central Africa. Within the context of the debt arrears facing the Congo the value of the forest is calculated according to its value on international markets — ie, the commercial worth of its timber. The value of non-timber forest products to forest people, one of the most impoverished social groups, in addition to the ecological functions of watershed maintenance and biodiversity protection that a large forest provides, have been ignored. Promoters of industrialisation couch their arguments in terms of wealth generation and poverty reduction. However, the substantial profits generated by industrial exploitation are unequally distributed. The lion's share goes to a few, probably foreign, businessmen and members of the national elite.

The political economist Bayart (1993) characterised these political systems as based on 'the politics of the belly'; the principle that a person will use their position of authority and power to 'eat' whatever they can, and grow fat (wealthy). Indeed this tendency among civil servants and politicians has created a context of pervasive corruption that undermines the normal way that states redistribute wealth through taxation and local investment. Major social investments in infrastructure or in equipping buildings to serve the public interest, such as schools or hospitals, are undermined by corrupt individuals siphoning off money and equipment. This makes social planning subject to all kinds of unexpected problems that often cause actions to fail spectacularly.

Omitting these factors in conventional economic analysis undervalue the forest's resources and make industrial and commercial land use appear more attractive than they are. In one of the rare studies to quantify the alternative value of forest resources to local people, Camille Bann's (2000) 18- month study in Ratanakiri, Cambodia, estimated the value of harvesting nontimber forest products (NTFP) to yield US$3,922 per hectare to local people in comparison to no more than US$1,697 per hectare if harvested for timber.

NTFP are a very important source of subsistence for the poorest sectors of society. All households in the study relied on NTFP, but only 30% of households in the region have a family member engaged in the wage economy. Forest products provide an important natural mechanism for alleviating poverty without explicit government

investment. Additionally forest must remain intact for local peoples' unique cultures, values and traditional knowledge to continue. Given the negative ecological impacts of timber harvesting on watershed maintenance and biodiversity conservation, then the net benefits from harvesting timber are diminished further.

Not calculating the value of the forest from local peoples' perspectives is condemning huge areas of Central Africa's forests to become resources for industrial activities, the great majority of which are not conducted in a sustainable way. Of the hundreds of logging companies operating in the

Congo Basin, not even a handful have achieved Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification, indicating that they are sustainable forest managers. And among those that have been certified, controversy often surrounds the legitimacy of the certificate, to such an extent that some founders of FSC militantly oppose the Council today.

Scarcity

Euro-Americans, and people from capitalist countries more generally, are infatuated with goods that are scarce in their own countries. The discourse of endangered species is premised on this. Rarity is an explicit theme in media portrayals of Yaka forest. It is depicted as the last great wilderness of the Congo basin (Congo. Spirit of the Forest, 2000), or more dramatically in the National Geographic as 'Ndoki, Last Place on Earth' (Chadwick 1995). These sensational portrayals are promoted by documentaries glamorising their material and underpin conservationists' funding applications.

Both loggers and conservationists are monopolising what they conceive of as scarce resources; loggers want control of precious trees, conservationists of rare animals and undisturbed forest areas. The perception of scarcity is the ideological bedrock of both these activities, and a driving force in the industrialisation and capitalisation of the world's resources. The Yaka's conflation of loggers and conservationists is more perceptive than most people realise.

Most conservationists come from industrialised nations where the awesome power of industrial exploitation has devastated the original environment and turned it into patchworks of spaces in use by people in different ways, with the occasional token to the original appearance of the land in the form of well-managed parks. Industrialised-nation conservationists then go out to non-industrialised nations like Congo and apply the same model of development, focusing themselves on delimiting and protecting small pockets of faunal and floral resources from local and industrial exploitation.

The competition for scarce funding puts pressure on conservation to appear to be effective; to be seen to achieve goals and be successful. Indeed, these pressures are so great that most conservation organisations need to be more concerned with appearances to the rich north than to the local area where work is being done. The quickest way of appearing to be doing something in this context is to take the protectionist approach and isolate an area of forest, exclude locals and enforce protection.

The enforcement and protection of protected areas becomes a military-like operation, sometimes described by conservationist field-workers as a 'war on poaching'. Since the mid 1990s when Eco-guard militias became a popular conservation tool, I have recorded a number of cases of serious human rights abuses, including murder, by Wildlife Conservation Society Ecoguards in northern Congo, and complained to those responsible. I have also been told by victims of very serious abuses by WWF Eco-guards in south-eastern Cameroon ranging from torture and public humiliation to the burning down of an entire village.

This aggressive and colonial-like imposition of protected areas on local people understandably antagonises many and establishes their relationship to conservation as involuntary and based on force. This is the basis for most of the conflicts conservation faces and is likely to face in Central Africa.

From local perspectives, rich and powerful outsiders are denying poor people access to their basic needs. This is seen as a grave abuse of basic human rights by many. Local people may rarely protest in front of powerful white people, but the resentment they feel may (and does) lead to serious problems for conservationists. In this context it is very difficult for conservationists to convince local people that they are concerned with their best interests. Protected areas in the Congo basin have been imposed on local people by international organisations pressurising national governments. Many contemporary conservationists' narrow view of their task in Central Africa is resulting in the acceleration of the industrialisation of forest resources, the very process underlying the problems conservation seeks to remedy.

In Central Africa, rather than grasp what local conceptions can offer, conservationists constantly seek to transform how locals understand their environment. The very notion of 'endangered species' judges resources according to their scarcity. For people such as Mbendjele, this is contradicted by their experience. To understand current conservation discourse requires a dramatic reformulation of their thinking based on counter-intuitive claims that they have little reason to do.

The current dominance of the scarcity model precludes the idea of sharing, it even encourages voracious consumption. Conservation needs to get away from the paranoid thinking that informs the hoarding mentality underpinning industrial capitalism and much conservation activity, and cease to be enslaved to market economics. The economic considerations of multinational corporations and institutions presently dominate too much decision-making. Instead decisions should be based on the understanding that nature is indeed abundant and capable of sustaining all life, if it is shared properly.

Making the Yaka lifestyle scarce

Yaka forest knowledge and practice have ensured that large areas of forest thrive and endure. Later-comers, such as conservationists, are benefiting hugely from this good custodianship of forest resources. While conservationists depend on Yaka forest

knowledge and skills to identify, explore, and understand the environments they come to control, the exclusionary policies they impose on Yaka people threaten the very relationship with the forest that permitted the transmission and development of the forest skills and knowledge conservationists need.

When access to good forest is denied or made dangerous for Yaka, it becomes difficult to transmit forest knowledge adequately to succeeding generations. Over time forest knowledge will become rarer among young Yaka people as resources are impoverished or access denied. Eventually Yaka knowledge may only remain in the notebooks and publications of anthropologists, ecologists and other scientists. The ultimate disenfranchisement of the huntergatherers will thus be complete. Their forest land and resources are denied them or destroyed, and they no longer have the knowledge necessary to return into the forest if ever their rights were to be recognised. This process is occurring to varying extents throughout the region. It is probably most advanced among the Twa Pygmies in the Great Lakes Region, most of who have become landless potters and beggars (Lewis 2000).

Forest knowledge, like forest resources, has been transformed from being abundant and widely available into a scarce and controlled expertise, only recorded in formats available to those with a northern-style education — a format that so far excludes access by Yaka forest people.

If current activities continue in the Central African forests, the huntergatherers' fate will be sealed by the continued imposition and dominance of an ideology of scarcity. Whether forest resources are over-exploited and depleted as a consequence of industrial capitalist extraction methods or sealed off from local people by zealous animal protectionists from rich countries, the result for local people is the same. There will be no space in the forest for forest people unless they become involved in the activities of the foresters or the animal protectionists. Their livelihood and resource base have been swept away from them and control over it given to multinational companies and Euro-American animal protection agencies.

While the forest was in local people's control it was considered abundant, and actually was so. Since EuroAmericans arrived and began to perceive of forest resources as scarce, desirable and valuable, so they have become. Now control over the future of the forest is vested in the hands of people with little or no genuine long-term or generational interest in preserving it beyond their limited engagement with it, often for just a fiscal year or two, or a project funding cycle.

This tradition of natural resource use that is based on what was done in rich countries, if widely applied through the process of globalisation to other parts of the world, will result in massive areas of farmland, urban dwellings and industrial areas, surrounding the occasional token to the original appearance of the land in small and insignificant protected areas. This is not a viable model for the future of the tropical forests of the Congo Basin.

Nor is it a model for long-term environmental conservation more generally in non-industrialised areas. How long will small islands of protected resources be able to survive when surrounded by extensive urban sprawls with subsistence slash and burn agriculture supporting impoverished populations, or when surrounded by industrially exploited or otherwise transformed areas from which all valuable resources have been intensively removed, and most of the profits from their exploitation successfully exported to rich countries?

Abundance as the basis for environmental management

Rather than attempt to change the conception of abundance common among local people, maybe the onus is on conservation to change its point of view from one that endlessly chases and protects scarce natural resources to one that sees natural resources as adequate, even abundant. Seeing that there is enough for everybody, but it just needs to be shared properly, is the lesson that we can learn from the Yaka and *ekila*.

The Yaka are offering conservation a model for the future. Rather than repressing them and disregarding their basic human rights, conservationists need to learn from them. Taking abundance as the starting point for a meaningful dialogue with local people conservationists could create the conditions necessary for effective longterm conservation of Congo Basin environments. For conservationists *ekila* is a metaphor for the need for political engagement in decisions about how resources are distributed and used.

This would result in conservation taking the maintenance of abundance as its goal, rather than the protection of scarcity. Following *ekila* logic, the key to abundance is equitable sharing. This translates in the language of modern environmentalism as assuring effective resource management and benefit sharing — a movement away from seeing conservation as a series of protected areas surrounded by industrial zones, to a process of equitably managing resources for all. This is clearly not happening within the currently popular paradigm of scarcity.

However, there are indications that when the Forest Stewardship Council's Principles are applied rigorously the hunter-gatherers' model is being adopted. The Forest Stewardship Council approach, although expressed in very different language, has adopted similar principles to those of Yaka forest stewardship. When taken seriously, the FSC management model is based on maintaining the forest's abundance through socially just and ecologically sustainable harvesting of forest resources. This is a modern idiom for talking about the same issues that concern *ekila*.

Unfettered industrial capitalism is the real menace to the key world environments that we all depend upon, not Yaka hunters seeking food for their families. While happy to impose hunting bans on traditional huntergatherers such as Pygmies, conser-

vationists are surprisingly reluctant to impose logging bans on international logging companies. Unless industrialists can show their methods to be both environmentally and socially sustainable they should be prevented from continuing to exploit the forests of the Congo Basin. The reluctance to apply the same standards to rich northerners as are applied to local people is the downfall of conservation efforts in the Congo Basin.

Environmentalists can only expect nonindustrialised nations to stand up to the forces of capitalism if they do so themselves, and apply greater pressure to counter the imperatives of global capital in the places from where it originates — in Europe, Asia and America. There can be no effective conservation of our planet without committed political engagement and a willingness to question the assumptions that underpin dominant attitudes to our environment. As is self-evident to the Yaka, but seemingly not to many conservationists, humanity is part of nature, not something that it is possible to isolate from nature. We need to move away from seeing natural resources as scarce commodities to be controlled by the most powerful and follow the Yaka lead to realise that nature can be an abundant provider and home for all creatures if we share whatever we take properly, and behave with consideration and respect to each other, and the planet that we all depend upon. This is the real challenge facing us all in the 21st century.

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For a full list of references, see www. radicalanthropology.org/journal.htm

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Human nature and the origins of language

Noam Chomsky ranks among the leading intellectual figures of modern times and has changed the way we think about what it means to be human, revolutionising linguistics and establishing it as a modern science. He agreed to discuss just some of his ideas with *RadicalAnthropology*.

Noam Chomsky *is institute professor and professor of linguistics (emeritus) at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.* would be a miracle that my granddaughter reflexively identified some elements of the blooming buzzing confusion as language-related and went on to acquire capacities of the kind that you and I are now exercising, while her pet kitten (chimp, songbird, bee...), presented with exactly the same data, could not take the first step, let alone the later ones. And correspondingly she could not acquire their capacities. There is also a question about whether my granddaughter's achievement falls under the technical concepts of learning developed in one or another branch of psychology, or whether they are more properly subsumed under general theories of growth and development. About these matters there are real questions and legitimate controversy: What is the nature of the genetic endowment? How does acquisition proceed? Etc. Scientists do routinely ask similar questions about the visual system, system of motor organisation, and others — including, in fact, the digestive system.

Radical Anthropology: It's unusual on the left to work explicitly, as you do, with a concept of genetically determined human nature. Many suspect the idea must set limits on our ability to change the world and also change ourselves in the process. So, let's start by asking, what exactly do you mean by 'human nature'?

Noam Chomsky: It is considered unusual, but I think that is a mistake. Peter Kropotkin was surely on the left. He was one of the founders of what is now called 'sociobiology' or 'evolutionary psychology' with his book *Mutual Aid*, arguing that human nature had evolved in ways conducive to the communitarian anarchism that he espoused. Marx's early manuscripts, with their roots in the Enlightenment and Romanticism, derived fundamental concepts such as alienation from a conception of human nature — what we would call genetically determined. In fact, anyone who merits attention and who promotes any cause at all is doing so on the basis of a belief that it is somehow good for humans, because of their inherent nature.

To object that the facts about human nature set limits on our ability to change the world and ourselves makes about as much sense as the lament that our lack of wings sets limits on our ability to 'fly' as far as eagles under our own power. There is nothing more mysterious about the concept human nature than about the concept bee or chicken nature, at least for those who regard humans as creatures in the biological world. Like other organisms, humans have a certain genetic endowment (apparently varying little in the species, not a surprise considering its recent separation from other hominids). That determines what we call their nature.

RA: We agree! We would also insist on the importance of anthropology, in order to be sure that the concept of 'human nature' we're working with captures the diversity of human experience. Your work on linguistics, on the other hand, deliberately set out in isolation from anthropology and the social sciences. Why? Do you still consider that separation necessary?

Chomsky: The idea of a 'separation' is an interesting myth. It might be worth investigating its origins. The facts are quite the opposite. Some of the earliest work in our programme at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), back to the 1950s, was on native American languages (Hidatsa, Mohawk, Menomini). Later, with Ken Hale's appointment 40 years ago, the department became one of the world centres of research in Australian and native American languages, soon after others, worldwide. That engaged faculty and students in issues of land rights, endangered languages and cultures, cultural wealth, educational and cultural programmes in indigenous communities (run mainly by MIT graduates brought here from indigenous communities), the spectacular revival of Wampanoag as a spoken language after 100 years (mainly the work of Hale and Jesse Little Doe), stimulating cultural revival as well, and much else. And of course all of this interacting closely with theoretical work, contributing to it and drawing from it. Where is the separation?

RA: But you have always insisted, haven't you, on the difference between natural and social science? Is linguistics a social or natural science? Or has the progress of linguistics as a science blurred any meaningful boundary between the two?

Chomsky: I have never suggested any principled difference between the natural and social sciences. There are, of course, differences between physics and sociology. Physics deals with systems that are simple enough so that it is possible, sometimes, to achieve deep results, though leaving many puzzles; I just happened to read an article posted on physicsworld.com on the basic unsolved problems about formation of snow crystals. It's roughly the case that if systems become too complex to study in sufficient depth, physics hands them over to chemistry, then to biology, then experimental psychology, and finally on to history. Roughly. These are tendencies, and they tend to distinguish roughly between hard and soft sciences.

RA: OK, let's consider your contribution to the science of linguistics. First it might be worth reminding our non-specialist readers where it all began. Your work on language started with a critique of the then-prevailing view that children had to learn their natal language. You insisted instead that it was an innate part of our brain.

In other words, humans no more have to learn language than we have to teach our stomachs how to digest. How did you come to this conclusion? And how can we know whether it's true?

Chomsky: I cannot respond to the questions, because I do not understand them. Plainly, children learn their language. I don't speak Swahili. And it cannot be that my language is 'an innate property of our brain.' Otherwise I would have been genetically programmed to speak (some variety of) English. However, some innate capacity — some part of the human genetic endowment — enters into language acquisition. That much is uncontroversial among those who believe that humans are part of the natural world. If it were not true, it

RA: Point taken! But aren't what you term 'external' languages such as Swahili of secondary interest from a scientific point of view, since language as you define it is basically for internal cognition, not social communication? It's surely central to your position that you don't need Swahili or any other external language just to think logically and clearly? A second point is that most of us take for granted that innate human capacities such as vision or digestion evolved gradually, through what Darwin termed 'descent with modification'. Your argument that language emerged in an ancestral individual in an instant — before any external language could have existed — suggests that we are talking about an entirely different kind of thing?

Chomsky: I would not say that Swahili is an 'E(xternal) language'. I don't even understand what that means. In fact, I know of no characterisation of Elanguage. I introduced the term, but didn't define it, except as a cover term for any conception of language other than I-language. Without an explanation of what you mean by Swahili (apparently, something other than the similar I-languages of individual speakers), I can't answer the question whether it is of secondary or primary (or no) interest. I do not agree that I-language is "basically for internal cognition, not social communication." It is surely used for both, and it's not "for" anything, any more than hands are "for" typing on the computer, as I'm now doing.

It's a mistake to suppose that capacities must evolve gradually. There are many known examples of sharp changes — slight genetic modification that yields substantial phenotypic effects, and much else. By coincidence, I was just looking at an article in *Science* on the 'Avalon explosion', which appears to be one of many examples of an explosion of forms without gradual selection. But it really doesn't matter in the present context. The human digestive and visual systems did clearly evolve over a very long period. Language as far as we know did not. Anatomically modern humans are found up to 200,000 years ago; behaviourally modern humans appear very recently in evolutionary time, as far as evidence now exists, perhaps within a window of 50–100,000 years ago, a flick of an eye in evolutionary time. That's why palaeoanthropologist Ian Tattersall regards human intelligence generally as an "emergent quality", not "a product of Nature's patient and gradual engineering over the eons."

I did not say that language as a completed system emerged in an individual in an instant. But I cannot think of a coherent alternative to the idea that mutations take

place in individuals, not communities, so that whatever rewiring of the brain yielded the apparently unique properties of language, specifically recursive generation of hierarchically structured expressions, would therefore have taken place in an individual, and only later been used among individuals who had inherited this capacity.

RA: Sure, evolution proceeds through the selection of chance mutations that arise in individuals. But is there nothing we can say about the terms of selection? Nothing about why a chance mutation for language might have increased in frequency in the population? Fingers surely evolved for something, after all — even if not for typing e-mails! To be sure we've understood you here: you say that communication is a possible function of language but that it's just one among many possible functions, hence of no special relevance either to the nature of language or its origins?

Chomsky: At the Alice V. and David H. Morris Symposium on the Evolution of Language held at Stony Brook University in October 2005 (and elsewhere), I quoted evolutionary biologists Salvador Luria and Francois Jacob, both Nobel Laureates, as expressing the view that communicative needs would not have provided "any great selective pressure to produce a system such as language," with its crucial relation to "development of abstract or productive thinking"; "the role of language as a communication system between individuals would have come about only secondarily.The quality of language that makes it unique does not seem to be so much its role in communicating directives for action" or other common features of animal communication, but rather "its role in symbolizing, in evoking cognitive images," in "molding" our notion of reality and yielding our capacity for thought and planning, through its property of allowing infinite combinations of symbols" and therefore "mental creation of possible worlds."

There is good reason to believe that they are right, in part for reasons I mentioned in the passage to which you are referring. If the rewiring of the brain that yielded recursive generation of hierarchically structured expressions took place in an individual, not a group (and there seems to be no coherent alternative), then interaction must have been a later phenomenon. Language would have evolved first as an internal object, a kind of "language of thought" (LOT), with externalisation (hence communication) an ancillary process. I can't review here the strong and growing evidence to support this conclusion, but I have elsewhere. There are ample reasons why having a LOT would confer selectional advantage: the person so endowed could plan, interpret, reflect, etc., in ways denied to others. If that advantage is partially transmitted to descendants, at some later stage there would be opportunity for communication, and motivation to develop a means of externalising the internal LOT — a process that might not involve evolution at all; perhaps it was a matter of problem solving using available cognitive mechanisms. This is, of course, speculation, like all talk about the evolution of language. But it is the minimal assumption, and I think enters in some way into all such speculations, even if tacitly. The conclusion, quite plausible I think, is that while language can surely be used for communication (as can much else), communication probably has no special role in its design or evolution.

As for organs, traits, etc., being "for" something, the notion may be a useful shorthand, but shouldn't be taken too seriously, if only because of the ubiquitous phenomenon of exaptation. Suppose that insect wings developed primarily as thermoregulators and then were used for skimming and finally flying, evolving along the way. What would they be "for"? Or what is the skeleton "for"? For keeping one upright, protecting organs, storing calcium, making blood cells...? A property of an organism enters into its life (and survival) in many different ways, some more salient than others. But there is no simple notion of its being "for" some function.

RA: At the conference you mention, you also talked about 'the great leap forward' — the 'human revolution', as many have called it. It's fair to say, we think, that most Darwinian theorists would regard the social dimensions of this major transition as having played a decisive role. We are thinking, for example, of the late John Maynard Smith, who linked the emergence of language with the earliest social contracts — an idea harking back to Rousseau. How does your origins scenario fit with approaches of this social and political kind? Darwinians don't take cooperation for granted. Can you say anything about the sociopolitical conditions which might have driven our ancestors to start talking and listening to one another?

Chomsky: I should make it clear that the term 'great leap forward,' referring to the burst of creative activity, sudden in evolutionary time, was not mine. It's Jared Diamond's. It's commonly assumed that the emergence of language was a key element of the great leap. We of course know very little about the sociopolitical conditions that existed at the time, but there's no scenario I can think of that suggests how a sudden change in these conditions could have led to the emergence of language. The only plausible assumption I have ever heard, and I suspect the only one that would be taken seriously by evolutionary biologists, is that some rewiring of the brain, perhaps the result of some slight modification in the functioning of regulatory circuits, provided the basis for this new capacity.

The simplest assumption — which appears to be implicit in all of the more complex ones that have been proposed — is that the rewriting yielded 'Merge', the simplest recursive function, which instantaneously made available an infinite array of structured expressions generated from whatever conceptual 'atoms' are available. That yields, in effect, an internal I-language, a 'language of thought,' providing obvious advantages to the person so endowed. If the mutation is partially transmitted to offspring, they too would have the advantage. And over time it might have come to dominate a small breeding group. At that stage there becomes a motivation to externalise the I-language, that is, to map the internal objects generated to the sensori-motor system, yielding what we think of as language — the external expressions we are exchanging now, for example. That mapping is quite nontrivial, and the problem of how to construct it can be solved in many different ways. It is in these ancillary processes that languages differ widely, and in which the mass of complexity of language resides. It's not at all clear that this is, technically, a step in the evolution of language. It might have been just a matter of problem-solving, using existing cognitive capacities.

The secondary step of externalisation evidently took place under existing sociopolitical conditions, and probably profoundly changed them. Beyond that, evidence is thin. I do not see how notions of social contract might play more than a superficial role. Scientists generally, not just evolutionary biologists, don't take much for granted. But there isn't much doubt that like other animal societies, those of *Homo sapiens* involved plenty of cooperation, which might have been considerably enhanced, one would suppose, by the emergence of the remarkable instrument of language.

RA: Would you agree that science involves restricting our speculative hypotheses to those that can be tested against empirical data? We are not clear in what sense the speculation you have just offered us is testable. Presumably we should expect to find recursion playing a central role in every known language — not just in the language of thought but in language as actually spoken. It seems that this isn't the case. Some linguists have claimed that the language of the Piraha, for example, almost entirely lacks recursion and for that reason presents a challenge to your theory. Does it?

Chomsky: Don't quite understand the first question. Which speculation do you have in mind?

As for the Piraha, there's a common confusion between recursion and embedding. Everett claimed that Piraha lacks embedding. Others challenge that claim (since his examples of Piraha language appear to me to have examples of relative clauses embedded in phrases, I don't know what Everett means by embedding). But I haven't seen any claim that Piraha lacks recursion, that is, that there are a finite number of sentences or sentence frames. If that's so, it would mean that the speakers of this language aren't making use of a capacity that they surely have, a normal situation; plenty of people throughout history would drown if they fall into water. Nothing much follows except for a question as to why they haven't made use of these capacities (a question independent of Everett's assumptions about the culture). No one seriously doubts that if Piraha children are brought up in Boston they'll be speaking Boston English, that is, that the capacities are present, unlike other animals, as far as is known. There's no challenge to the theory — not mine, but everyone's — that the human language faculty provides the means for generation of an infinite array of structured expressions.

RA: We had in mind your whole speculative origins scenario. How does it stand up to what we know about primate politics and cognition? The hypothesised behavioural ecology of our hominin ancestors? The laws of evolution of animal signals? Does it say anything testable in the light of findings from these arguably relevant fields, or in the light of archaeological data? And so on...

Chomsky: You'll have to explain to me what you mean by my 'speculative origins scenario'. In particular, can you identify what I've written about this that is even controversial enough to require empirical test? Or is it not perfectly consistent with what is known about our ancestors? Or, for that matter, what is not accepted, tacitly, by everyone who has had a word to say on this topic?

RA: It is a refreshingly bold "just-so" story for the evolutionary emergence of language. It's certainly parsimonious and has a kind of logic on its side, but how could

we discriminate between your story and any other? Modern Darwinism provides us with ways to turn a just-so story into a testable proposition — by modelling the costs and benefits of proposed adaptive behaviours, for example. To count as scientific, a hypothesis surely has to be testable. Can you specify just one or two experimental results or archaeological finds or anything else that might in principle pose a problem for your hypothesis of instantaneous language evolution?

Chomsky: I'm afraid I am still puzzled. The question I raised remains unanswered, and as long as this is so, I do not really understand what you are asking. If it is true that what I have suggested is not even controversial enough to require empirical test, is perfectly consistent with what is known about our ancestors, and is accepted, tacitly, by everyone who has a word to say on this topic, then I do not see how the question you are posing arises. So I cannot proceed until you indicate to me in what respects that judgment is incorrect.

I have not suggested that the emergence of language is instantaneous. Rather, that the rewiring of the brain enabling an infinite array of structured expressions was in effect instantaneous. I have never heard of an alternative to this suggestion. That leaves plenty of questions, among them, the question to what extent the internal computational system that arises is a "perfect solution" to conditions imposed by the CI (conceptual-intentional) interface (hence in effect also instantaneous), and the question how the internal syntax-semantics is externalised, a later process virtually by definition, and one that might not even involve evolution in the sense of genomic change.

RA: Let's try to summarise your argument so the point we're driving at can be made clearer. Although language in a broad sense relies on various evolved structures and mechanisms, and although language can be used for communication, the crucial step that gave our species the language faculty was a chance rewiring of the brain. This genetic event instantly gave rise to a computational mechanism for recursion — something unique to humans, and perhaps originally nothing to do with language. Perhaps it evolved as an adaptation for, say, navigation, this mechanism subsequently being exapted for language. In your 2002 *Science* article co-authored with Marc Hauser and Tecumseh Fitch, you describe all this as a "tentative, testable hypothesis in need of further empirical investigation". Our previous questions were merely inviting you to clarify for our readers what some of these tests might look like. What kind of experimental or observational results might pose a problem for the theory?

We're taken aback by your claim that every serious scholar agrees with you on these points. Our own impression is that virtually every scholar vehemently disagrees! Ray Jackendoff and Steven Pinker come to mind. We are not interested, for the moment, in whether the truth lies more with you or more with Pinker and Jackendoff. If we are to have a Darwinian account of the emergence of language, we surely need to ask what might have been the selection pressures that gave rise to it in humans but in no other animal? Pinker argues that the explanation is social cooperation, explaining this in turn by invoking kin selection and reciprocal altruism. But these are widely applicable Darwinian principles, by no means restricted to *Homo sapiens*. So why

didn't apes evolve language? Or something a bit like language? Were our hominin ancestors particularly cooperative? Which ones and when? Is there any archaeological evidence, for example, that our ancestors of four or five millions of years ago were getting especially co-operative? What socio- ecological factors might have driven this? And so on. This has turned into a longer than usual question, but the reason we're interested in these kinds of issues — and why we're interested in the fact that you seem to ignore or downplay them — is that they have obvious political dimensions. What ecological and social conditions, for example, are conducive to communistic co-operation? Or is everything we need to know to be found in the computational mechanisms of individual human brains?

Chomsky: You say you're "taken aback by your claim that every serious scholar agrees with you on these points," namely the points I've actually made. As far as I am aware, that is true. Pinker and Jackendoff, for example, tacitly presuppose these points. Of course they disagree with views that they've attributed to me. But that was not my question: to repeat, what is controversial in what I've actually said and written?

There's no "hypothesis" in the paper I co-authored with Hauser and Fitch about recursion in language being an exaptation from deeper capacities, maybe used in navigation. Rather, that's proposed as a possibility that could be explored, and tested. It's easy to see how it could be explored: e.g., by studying these processes in different systems and looking for commonalities, differences, appearance at various times of evolution, the usual approaches of the comparative method; obviously premature in this case, because not enough is known. There are plenty of hypotheses discussed, and there are masses of empirical evidence testing them, but they are about the nature of the system that evolved — obviously a prerequisite to study of its evolution.

So I'm back to where I was. Unless you can identify some thesis that is controversial, and that isn't accepted, at least tacitly, in all speculations about language evolution that can be taken seriously, I can't respond to the queries.

RA: OK, we take your point, but we're trying to get you to talk about some interesting issues in evolutionary science. The popular science writer Marek Kohn describes well what I mean in his chapter on trust in his book *As We Know It*. Kohn quotes anthropologist Chris Knight as saying that "Darwinian theory shows that cheating is likely to result in higher fitness than co-operating — and the greater the rewards of co-operation, the greater the unearned benefits to the freeloader. Any theory of how language, symbolism or culture originated has to show how a system based on cooperative agreement could have developed without being destabilised at any stage by the pursuit of individual interests." What do you think of this?

Chomsky: I don't see the force of the claim. For one thing, evolutionary theory has nothing to say, in general, as to whether cheating is more advantageous than cooperating. There are many circumstances in which the contrary would be true, and empirical evidence, though it exists, has little bearing on real situations. For another, there's no need (or way) to establish what Knight demands. One might just as well

argue that language differentiation results from pursuit of group interests, like other kinds of cultural variety. And individual interests are beside the point. Furthermore all such matters (even mapping of I-language to the sensorimotor system) may have nothing to do with evolution in the biological sense.

RA: The question is under what circumstances is the sharing of valuable information with non-kin using a cheap signalling system like language an evolutionarily stable strategy (ESS)? In all other species, a signal must be costly to be seen by the signal receiver as reliable in situations of conflict. But if you don't accept that language is an adaptation or arose in a Darwinian, biological world, then you need not submit to the constraints posed by selfish-gene theory. Is that why you don't see the force of these arguments?

Chomsky: Selfish-gene theory tells us nothing about the value of interacting through language. Human language is nothing like the signalling systems of other animals. Of course language arose in a Darwinian biological world, because that's all there is, but that world relates only superficially to the pop-biology that circulates informally. **RA:** OK, let's move on. Our activist readership will be interested to know what they can do with your ideas. Frederick Engels once wrote, "The more ruthlessly and disinterestedly science proceeds, the more it finds itself in harmony with the interests of the workers." That's quite an inspiring idea. Revolutionaries need no ideology, he is saying — only science, conducted dispassionately for its own sake. Are we right in saying that you don't encourage socialists or anarchists to view science — or at any rate, your own linguistic science — as having potential in that political sense?

Chomsky: I don't encourage socialists or anarchists to accept falsehoods, in particular, to see revolutionary potential where there is none. Anton Pannekoek didn't encourage radical workers and other activists of the antiBolshevik left to see revolutionary potential in his work in astronomy, for the simple reason that he was honest, and knew there was none to speak of. The shred of truth that can be extracted from the remark of Engels that you cite (which I don't recognise) is that those who wish to change the world should have the best possible understanding of the world, including what is revealed by the sciences, some of which they might be able to use for their purposes. That's why workers education, including science and mathematics, has commonly been a concern of left intellectuals.

RA: But do you think the scientific community should get collectively selforganised and consciously activist? Let's take the example of climate change. Is astronomy entirely unconnected with the task of familiarising ourselves with the big picture here? With the origins of life on earth, with the reasons why we have life on earth in the first place and with comprehending why capitalism might be ultimately inconsistent with Earth's future as a habitable planet? Anton Pannekoek may, rightly or wrongly, not have seen the revolutionary potential of his astronomy, but he certainly linked his scientific outlook with his politics — in political pamphlets on Darwinism and human

origins, for example. Might we yet see a pamphlet by Noam Chomsky, linking your scientific and your political thinking for a popular audience?

Chomsky: I am reasonably familiar with Pannekoek's writings, and do not recall his drawing conclusions about his political stands from his work on astronomy, nor do I see how one could do so. Nor why it should be a demand — no sane human being devotes 100% of his or her life to political activism.

If scientists and scholars were to become "collectively self-organised and consciously activist" today, they would probably devote themselves to service to state and private power. Those who have different goals should (and do) become organized and activist. All the questions you raise merit inquiry and attention, and if there are lessons to be drawn from the sciences, then that should be the concern of everyone, including scientists to the extent that they can make a contribution. One contribution they can and should make is to be clear and explicit about the limits of scientific understanding, a matter that is particularly important in societies where people are trained to defer to alleged experts. I have written occasionally on links between my scientific work and political thinking, but not much, because the links seem to me abstract and speculative. Others believe the links to be closer, and have written more about them (Carlos Otero, James McGilvray, Neil Smith, and others). If I can be convinced that the links are significant, I'll be happy to write about them.

RA: We have mostly talked about the evolution of language, but you are perhaps most famous for your political stand. It is understandable that your political work should attract hostile criticism — material interests are at stake. What can seem more puzzling is why arcane academic debates, more fittingly subject to disinterested inquiry than political polemic, can provoke equally impassioned criticism. Why is this, do you think?

Chomsky: It should seem puzzling, to professionals as well. I have seen many illustrations over the years, and they go back quite far in history. Sometimes people are "defending their turf." Sometimes it is personal jealousies. I know of cases that are really depraved. Academics are not necessarily nice people. And one might mention a remark attributed to Henry Kissinger: the reason academic disputes are so vicious is that so little is at stake.

Stonehenge: monument of counter-revolution

Stonehenge has long been a fascination and a mystery. What were the monument builders doing? What was it all for? Recent archaeological digs raised hopes that we might finally get some answers. The diggers need to start looking up, not down, argues Lionel Sims

Lionel Sims *is an anthropologist at the University of East London, a member of the European Society for Astronomy in Culture (SEAC) and the Stonehenge Round Table Group.* archaeology led by Chris Tilley. Thirdly, I started contributing to what was then the annual RAG day-trip to the Avebury monuments. The trip was hilarious: none of us had a clue what the monuments were, but just knew they had to be something to do with the collapse of hunting cultures and in some way were a memory of our ancient origins. So when anybody asked, 'What is Silbury Hill?', or Avebury circle, or Stonehenge, the repeated reply was — 'We don't know'. My research came out of both attempting to defend Engels and to lessen the embarrassment of always saying 'We don't know'.

Radical Anthropology: How and why did you get interested in prehistoric monuments and Stonehenge?

Lionel Sims: I was not interested in prehistoric monuments or Stonehenge at all until around 1989/90, when I became involved in a debate within the British left defending Friedrich Engels' claim, outlined in his book *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, that humans are a revolutionary species, and that the oppression of women was a late development in history. This debate sparked such vitriol that I realised there must be big stuff behind it. The majority was against me in the debate, but I was not at all convinced by the confused and angry counter-arguments.

Rather than give up, I decided to pursue the matter in my personal research. My intention was to open up the debate in the light of recent research in anthropology and the natural sciences, and use whatever findings came up to strengthen the marxist case first set out by Engels. I knew this would be a long haul, but also knew that nobody else was doing it, and I felt that I was well placed. In particular, I was a member of the Radical Anthropology Group (RAG), which was a great support and sounding board. Secondly, I enrolled on a Masters course at University College London (UCL) in anthropology, and attended classes in

RA: It seems that that is still the official answer when archaeologists are asked what Stonehenge is! Not only do we not know, we can't know, they say. To the layman, then, the choice is between official scepticism and an infinite array of mystical answers. How did you approach the question?

LS: The quick answer is: with science! The second answer is: the official archaeology response that we can't know is only for those outside their circles. They now say they *can* come up with an answer — Mike Parker- Pearson has come up with 'monuments for the living' (Durrington Walls monument) and 'monuments for the dead' (Stonehenge), and his theory recently reached a wider audience through *New Scientist* magazine. It is interesting that to make this argument Parker-Pearson has had to engage with archaeoastronomy. This is a big shift for British archaeology.

Returning to the main question — science can investigate what is not directly observable. In fact, all of science is about finding the indirect unobserved 'reality' behind the directly observed 'reality'. Just because we have no written records from prehistory does not mean we can't test theories of prehistory and reject some of them. For example, John North showed in 1996 that Stonehenge cannot be aligned on summer solstice sunrise, but does have one main alignment on winter solstice sunset. That therefore excludes any theory which requires a ritual timed for the start of the longest, possibly brightest, day. Another theory suggests that Stonehenge is an astronomical 'computer' designed to predict eclipses (Gerald Hawkins). I was initially impressed with this claim since it seemed to be congenial to a culture that respects the lunar scheduling of ritual — the eclipse of full moon would be disastrous for a lunar-scheduled ritual system (Chinese priests in the past were executed if they failed to predict one!) and therefore it would be powerful knowledge to have. To test this theory I had to learn astronomy — about which I knew zero when I started. After two years of study I realised Stonehenge could not possibly be designed to predict eclipses, but was designed to predictably avoid them!

Therefore the method of science allows us to reject some theories and narrow the range of possible explanations for monuments like Stonehenge. Any interpretation that can't be tested, such as mystical answers, I have no time for. Or rather, they tell us something about the teller, but usually very little about the object of the telling. Further, if we can mobilise a range of different methodologies, in combination the number of theories they allow us to reject grows exponentially. Therefore, I started with a marxist method in anthropology, archaeology and archaeoastronomy. If I come up with a hypothesis from any one of these disciplines, I then test it out with another. If it checks out, my hypothesis grows in confidence. In the last ten years this has been my finding — each time I move over to another methodology, the initial hypothesis is confirmed and therefore strengthened. A few years ago I was at a conference in Sardinia and a man I met there, Marco, convinced me to read IndoEuropean myths. I was astonished to find that a team of researchers at Chicago University have reconstructed the root myths that can be dated to about the time of Stonehenge, and they confirm

in details I would never have imagined the findings of the previous methodologies I have used.

RA: We'll come back to those myths! But for now, let's stay with the monument itself. Contrary to Parker- Pearson, you call Stonehenge a 'monument of counter-revolution'. First, tell us what revolution and counter-revolution you are talking about. Stonehenge was built by settled Neolithic farmers, wasn't it?

LS: Like Engels I believe that we humans are a revolutionary species. Our hunter-gatherer ancestors overthrew primate jealousy and selfishness and established a mode of production through the revolutionary creation of matrilineal/matrilocal clans. The solidarity of classificatory brothers and sisters, what Morgan and Engels called 'the gens', was the organisational heart of the first communist society. Chris Knight, a professor of anthropology at the University of East London, and others, have made this claim scientifically respectable on the basis of modern scientific methods.

However, that theory, sex-strike theory, has a number of assumptions for it to work. The main one is a materialist assumption — that there are plenty of big game animals for launching a predictably successful, monthly big game hunt. Now, that assumption cannot be true by at least ten thousand years ago, if not much earlier. Many of the big game animals died out by then, and much of the grasslands of the world disappeared under forests — which have a much lower biomass than grasslands. All I asked is — what would we predict the hunters would have done? All we do is test out the available alternatives — they could have been conservative, and carried on hunting, or they innovated. To carry on hunting in the old way meant dispersing into smaller, more scattered, more mobile groups and, perhaps, coming back together again once or twice a year. This is what happened over most of the world in a period we call in British archaeology the Mesolithic. If they innovated there were two main ways to do so — become complex hunters who 'farmed' salmon/cod from the sea and rivers (for example), or become 'farmers'.

Up until 20 years ago, it was the 'farming revolution' theory that held sway. Archaeologists assumed that the hunter-gatherer precursors of farmers were irrelevant since "nothing much happened" (as archaeologist Colin Renfrew put it) until the farming of the Neolithic. We now know that the first 'farmers' who built Stonehenge (and Avebury, and so on) weren't settled farmers at all, but cattle herders who still hunted, occasionally planted and were not living in settled villages but were still 'nomadic', ie, they preserved as much of their earlier hunter-gatherer lifestyle as possible. This has been established by the last two decades of research in archaeology, and is found to be true for much of the world. Intensive, sedentary farming was resisted as much as possible by all the people of the world. It was only under the most pressing circumstances that it was adopted.

The key to this, I am sure, was sexual/economic politics. In a hunting society, a man only earns sexual rights, marriage, in return for hunting services to his wife and in-laws. This is called bride-service. Once domestic cattle have been adopted, they are not used for food, but for purchasing wives. Then a man can approach another man

who has a daughter, and instead of promising a life-time of hunting he now bargains to purchase a wife in perpetuity for a once-for-all payment of a number of cattle. This is called bride-price. Now look at this arrangement from the point of view of the bartered woman. What if she doesn't like her new husband? What if she complains to her brother(s) or her mother(s) that he is not a nice man? What will they say? Go back to him, they will say. Do you think we are going to return his cattle? How will we get a wife/children if we return his cattle? Now brother/sister solidarity has broken down, patrilineal/patrilocal clans become the organisational heart of a society increasingly stratified by degrees of cattle wealth and warring cattle-raiders. One way to keep such groups from falling apart from internal competition is to build monuments.

I'm no stone-hugger. These monuments were labour-intensive structures to test the loyalty of groups with the need to atone for the crime of women's oppression. That's a counter-revolution.

RA: If the solution to the puzzle of Stonehenge can be found in such everyday, earthly matters as trade and marriage, why are so many people convinced that the builders were looking at the stars? Were they? And how do we know either way?

LS: Most archaeologists would still say that Stonehenge has no 'astronomy'. However, there is no other explanation for the accurate alignments on winter solstice sunset from the right hand side of the Heel Stone through the gap in the grand trilithon or on the southern minor standstill moonsets from the left hand side of the Heel Stone through the upper gap. (To make sense of this and of much that follows, we recommend you go to www.stonehenge3d.co.uk.) In my article in the *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* in 2006 (available at www.radicalanthropologygroup.org), I identified 27 or so other properties that were consistent with this lunar-solar double alignment. My point to archaeology was: if you can come up with one simple explanation for 28 properties of the architecture which is better than mine, then do so!

The monument builders were not just 'looking at the stars'. As you imply, you can do that without getting a hernia by building Stonehenge. Obviously, Stonehenge is not just a sighting device. It is a cosmological centre, which creates the illusion when standing at the Heel Stone that the sun and the moon enter the underworld at that point. It becomes therefore a portal into the underworld. We would predict that sex-strike theory, when it collapses in the Neolithic, would require a device to simulate what

everybody would have done naturalistically in the Palaeolithic — that is, a lunar-scheduled, ritual lifecycle — but now found it very difficult to do because of the emerging divisions in society as cattle wealth undermined clan solidarity.

Farming revolution theory will only allow monument alignments on the solstice sun as primitive agricultural calendars. But it has now been shown that most of them have at least double alignments on both the sun's solstices and the moon's standstills. (A lunar standstill is the lunar equivalent of the sun's solstice in horizon astronomy — a place on the horizon which defines the moon's rising and setting range — with

one difference: that those positions change between a major and a minor limit, each spanning the sun's solstice positions, according to an 18.61 year cycle.)

Another property of these two cycles — the sun's solstices and the moon's standstills — is that this knowledge allows you to predict the phase-locking of solstices with dark moons twice every 19 years. The sun's solstices occur twice a year for a period of a week around winter and summer solstice, but the moon's standstills occur over a period of a year twice in an 18.6-year cycle.

Look at the two pictures of Stonehenge (at the top of this page and the next), shown from the Heel Stone. You will see that Stonehenge, viewed from the Heel Stone, once appeared as a solid wall of stone with two windows. The lower gap within the grand trilithon traps a ray of light from the setting winter solstice sun; the upper gap traps the southern standstill moonsets over the course of a standstill year. Thirteen moons will have set in that upper window, culminating in dark moon coinciding with the winter solstice sunset. That is the start of the longest darkest night, and therefore predictably allows observing the greatest possible number of stars. This is a much more sophisticated 'astronomy' than farming revolution theory allows, displays complex knowledge of the moon's movements, and is consistent with a culture that is confiscating monthly lunar cycles to a solar timescale. That is what we would predict for a culture moving from hunting to agriculture, but during a period of relative 'equipoise' between these two systems.

The setting winter solstice sun from the Heel Stone at Stonehenge

Every counter-revolution has to take account of the previous revolution. So a 'machine' that can lie, that can pretend it still is true to the old way, but now has adapted it to new conditions — that is a useful machine to an emerging warrior-priesthood which is displacing matrilineal solidarity with its own form of solidarity — monument building.

RA: You mentioned earlier that archaeology has long resisted archaeoastronomy, but that it is starting to come around. Why the resistance, do you think? Does the fact that it is coming round mean that it now has to take your theory seriously?

LS: We are now in the third stage of the history of archaeoastronomy (Norman Lockyer was the first at the beginning of the 20th century; then Gerald Hawkins and Alexander Thom in the 1960s and 1970s; now led by Clive Ruggles in Britain since the 1980s). Ruggles was research assistant to Richard Atkinson, the leader of British archaeology in the 1960s and 1970s. Ruggles has shown that the claims for scientific, precision astronomy of Hawkins and Thom are incorrect, and also established modern standards for testing for intentional (rather than accidental) alignments in ancient monuments. But most of this has passed archaeology by, and archaeologists know virtually nothing of the details. They let Clive Ruggles get on with it, and basically come up with very cautious claims for astronomical alignments in prehistoric monuments. Previously they ridiculed such claims since their main theory of prehistory was of a slowly accumulating farming revolution emerging out of huntergatherer savagery.

Atkinson called them 'howling barbarians'! Therefore the first claims of 'scientific astronomy' made no sense to archaeologists. But now that the farming revolution theory is no longer accepted within archaeology, and since archaeoastronomers no longer claim a scientific, but a religious, role for horizon 'astronomy', there is the chance for convergence between the two disciplines.

All of this has nothing to do with my views becoming more acceptable. My articles are being met with a resounding silence! My work began with a detailed critique of the marvellous work done by John North. I have been the only researcher to take North's work seriously. Without his achievements there is no way I could have come up with the arguments I am now making. North's work is also met with a resounding silence!

RA: Could you tell us briefly what you think North's achievement was?

LS: John North's book — *Stonehenge: Neolithic Man and Cosmos* — was published in 1996. He proved that Stonehenge had a double main alignment from the Heel Stone on winter solstice sunset below another on the southern minor standstill moonsets. The first is an annual property, the second once every 19 years spread over the course of a year. He demonstrated this through 600 pages of careful argumentation, showing in a patient examination of hundreds of earlier and similar monuments the principles of NW European prehistoric monument design. Some of these principles are: how horizons were manipulated by digging ditches and banks around monuments to preferentially shift the trapping of the sun and moon's light rays between posts or stones; the use of standard gradients in earth mounds
which allowed doubled reverse viewing of certain stars or the sun and the moon; the

construction of artificial and level horizons for establishing alignments accurate to one-third of one degree; and many more. Once he had demonstrated how these principles operated elsewhere, he could then test them out at Stonehenge. He therefore showed us the method we can use to decode monuments. Nothing in the archaeoastronomy or archaeology of NW European monuments can move forward until North's work is critically acknowledged.

RA: OK, and what about your contribution? Above you said that your theory explains 28 features of the architecture of Stonehenge and that no other theory comes close. Perhaps that would be the best way to approach your work. What architectural features are you talking about?

LS: They are not just mine, many are from North. I just put them together in a new way to show that the combined result was to build a monument that could predictably stage rituals when winter solstice sunset coincided with dark moon — therefore at the start of the longest, darkest night. Nobody had come up with this before. Some of the properties which all go together and are explained by this single motivation are:

- Approaching Stonehenge from the North East along the Avenue, Stonehenge paradoxically appears as a solid wall of stone except in two places, even though it is full of gaps when viewed, as archaeologist do on their site plans, from above.
- The two nearest trilithons point to a convergence on the Heel Stone.
- The lower gap is exactly aligned on winter solstice sunset; the upper gap on the southern minor standstill moonsets.
- Stonehenge is built on the side of a hill. As you walk to the centre of the monument from the Heel Stone at winter solstice sunset, the upward movement of the eye counterbalances the sinking of the sun, creating the illusion of suspending its sinking movement.
- Stone 11 is half the height, half the width and half the breadth of the other 29 stones in the outer sarsen circle. There are therefore 29.5 stones in the outer circle. This is the average length of the (synodic) month.
- There are 19 bluestones in the inner arc. This is the length of the standstill cycle of the moon.
- The bluestones, which come from the Preselli Hills in Pembrokeshire, are dark blue with mica flecks. If the monument is designed for a ritual of the longest darkest night, then this selection of stone is a good rendition of the night sky in the middle of winter.

Stonehenge traps the southern standstill moon

- The monument is binary — two circles (one of sarsen, one of bluestone) and two horseshoe arcs (one of sarsen, one of bluestone). This is consistent with the main double alignment on the sun and the moon.

I could go on. All of these points and others outlined in my article in the *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* are consistent with my argument, and no other theory can integrate them in this way.

RA: You mentioned above that a study of Indo-European myths confirms your findings. Could you tell us a little bit about this with reference to the features you have just described?

LS: It is a remarkable achievement of scholarship that not only has some of the proto-Indo-European language been reconstructed, but also some of their origin myths. This is the root language and origin myths of all the peoples from Iceland to Sri-Lanka. From both Indo-European study, and from the archaeology, a strong case can now be made that Indo-Europeans were patrilineal cattle herders of the late Neolithic and early Bronze Age. Some components of their origin myths have been reconstructed by, in particular, Wendy Doniger, Bruce Lincoln and Calvert Watkins.

These myths are obsessed with heroes killing the cattle-stealing dragon, repairing the cosmos and forestalling its imminent collapse, and the original patriarchal twins instituting human sacrifice as the pre-eminent means of keeping the cosmos stable and selfreplenishing. If you start your understanding of human origins with sex-strike

theory, of culture led by matrilineal/matrilocal coalitions of hunters which then started to break down when big game hunting collapsed, then these myths are exactly what you would predict as one of the outcomes of that collapse. In terms of monuments, double alignments of the sun and the moon, in which monthly lunar phases are being transplanted onto annual solar cycles, and in which dark moon rituals are now being ritually celebrated twice a year rather than 13 times a year, are also what you would predict. None of this is explicable or explainable by the standard model of culture-creating farmers out of hunter-gatherer savagery.

RA: Finally, can we return to your first answer, and consider why it was that the people you were debating on the British left were hostile to these ideas. Why were they? And what can our activist readers take from your work?

LS: In the winter of 1989/90, the views of the section of the British left I was debating with were no different to those common among the liberal left and 'intelligentsia'. There was a very ambiguous and weak endorsement of the claims of Engels (and Marx) that our species was born in a revolutionary break with primate 'politics'. A number of reasons lay behind this. First and most important was an inability to critically use the methods of the new Darwinism — selfish-gene theory. All the left and liberal intellectuals were (and still are) biophobic. Any recourse to using the mathematics of selection processes was considered a collapse into a right-wing agenda. Second, the left had a weak response to the radical feminist attack of patriarchy theory and, in defence of their organisations, wanted to close off the debate rather than embrace a new and, to them, untested theory.

Third, much of academic anthropology was profoundly anti-marxist, and used methods that were uncongenial to marxists. Therefore, whereas anthropologists celebrated the thought systems of 'simple' societies, marxists, and in part including Engels, used ecological methods, which led them to claim that hunter-gathers had an insubstantial hold on survival because they had to rely on hunting with a 'primitive technology' and so on. Therefore, before agriculture, the ecology of hunter-gatherers was predicted to be close to starvation. If you started talking about the high levels of solidarity between brothers and sisters in matrilineal clans as the basis for the first communist society, then it was heard as utopian. Instead, marxists celebrated agriculture as the first mode of production which afforded plenty. Yet Engels had always claimed this as the counter-revolution — not the deliverance from huntergatherer poverty!

Fourth, during the 1970s feminism and marxism were involved in acrimonious debates over the roots of women's oppression and Engels' part in that debate. In their failure to resolve the issue both sides retreated, wounded in different ways, to leave the issue alone. Academic anthropology has consistently attacked (vulgar) marxism with the evidence from pre-state societies. Those of us in RAG who are marxists believe that if it seems that anthropology undermines marxism on the issue of the roots of oppression, then only anthropology can rescue it. That is why we call ourselves the Radical Anthropology Group.

The main messages I would want activists to take from all this are the following.

Firstly, in the last 40 years there has been a revolution in the life sciences and, I would claim, this revolution has provided the method and the data to confirm the truth of Engels' claim that we are a revolutionary species, and that we established the first human culture as communist.

Second, this communist society started breaking down as the big game animals of the Palaeolithic started to die out. By the Neolithic, when monument building began, wealthy cattle-owning men are establishing their power, partly through monument building, at the expense of the earlier brother-sister solidarity of the matrilineal/matrilocal clans. This event was, as Engels claimed, the world- historic defeat of women and the establishment of the first class societies.

Third, as the Neolithic counterrevolution was based on economics, not biology, and as we were present at our own making as communists, then the next revolution is a return to the first, but now on the basis of modern technology that can assure plenty for all.

These claims strengthen our resolve by arming us intellectually. Who would not want that?

Lionel Sims gives guided tours and talks on Avebury and Stonehenge as part of the Radical Anthropology Group's lecture series and annual field trip to Stonehenge and Avebury. For more details, see www. radicalanthropologygroup.org.

The material origins of inequality

Rough equality among men in patrilineages sits upon systematic inequality between men and women.This is the first inequality out of which all later inequalities spring -this is Engels' basic argument. The imbalances that can occur within this relation of inequality are like a proto-class out which all later classes evolve. The main imbalances suggested in the scholarly literature are:

- Cattle herders also hunt and garden, therefore there are three dimensions for 'chance' inequalities to arise.
- Political authority (chiefs, kings, etc) can grow as the reversedominance structures of matrilineal/matrilocal organisation weaken (see, for example, *Hierarchy in the Forest:The Evolution of Egalitarian Behaviour* by Christopher Boehm).This can have economic consequences, eg, monument building.
- Agricultural labour services, except plough agriculture which uses oxen, are the province of women, and variable opportunities for wealth inequalities exist with multiple wives (see, for example, *Guns, Germs and Steel* by Jared Diamond).
- Before cattle-herders there were the complex hunter-gatherers of the Mesolithic, something like the NW coast American Indians. Most of these were slave-owning misogynist warriors who vigorously defended territory. As there were at least 4,000 years of the Mesolithic which preceeded NW European Neolithic monument building, we would expect some degree of gender inequality and ranking among men before cattle-herding.
- Brian Hayden of Columbia University has suggested an 'accumulator-feasting' complex to explain 'potlatch' type rituals. These involve the conspicuous display and destruction of wealth, and the profligate consumption of luxury foods.They are run competitively by 'big men' 'financed' by calling in debts.This increases ranking differences among men in the midst of plenty.
- 'Trade' in, for example, stone axes, flint cores and artefacts, and in the early bronze age in copper and bronze, had a restricted circulation linked to rank. Variable trading opportunities are therefore a source of inequality.

- Exotic luxury goods, such as types of stone, silver, gold, confer unequal power on those who control their circulation. For example, a Zulu bride can be purchased with a brass ring: see Eileen Krige, *The Social System of the Zulus*.
- Napoleon Chagnon's social circumscription theory suggests that, when there are fewer opportunities to flee from intra-group problems, this intensifies the emergence of rank inequalities.
- The spoils of raiding and war — from revenge to cattle raiding to territorial defence-create inequalities.
- Resource stress.
- Migration.
- Colonialism.

There is evidence for the first nine of these factors operating in the prehistory of the British Isles and north Europe.

Trust: self-interest and the common good

Marek Kohn is a science writer whose previous books include *As We Know It: Coming To Terms With An Evolved Mind*, and *A Reason For Everything: Natural Selection and the English Imagination*. Here he talks to *Radical Anthropology* about his latest work on trust.

Radical Anthropology: In your new book, *Trust: Self-Interest and The Common Good*, you discuss the biological origins of trust. Is trust peculiarly human? Or does it have parallels in the animal world?

Marek Kohn: The primatologist Frans de Waal observes that, "We have no trouble recognising the difference between a trustful or distrustful dog, and we know how long it can take to turn the latter into the former." If an animal can form expectations about how another will act with respect to itself, we can think of it as being able to trust. But the question gets more difficult and interesting if one understands trust as involving a sense of selves and others: that to trust, one needs to have a sense that others are individuals, with interests and motives of their own. Trusting them is expecting that they will incorporate one's own interests into theirs. So this is a question about whether nonhuman animals have what's known as 'theory of mind' — which will doubtless be the subject of heated debate among primatologists for years to come!

RA: If trust has parallels in the animal world, and if human life is so characterised by trust, why it is a problem in the first place?

MK: Sure, there's a lot of trust about, but the particular problem these days is that it doesn't go very deep. A constantly moving, accelerating world reduces the opportunities for trust to grow through experience, familiarity, habit, and the commitment involved in relationships — personal, intimate or occupational — that are intended to last a long time. This isn't to say that trust is a peculiarly modern problem, though. It's a problem in the first place because co-operation is fundamentally problematic between agents whose interests are not identical. To understand how to promote trust and how to place it well, we need to work from first principles to see how interests may be combined into a common good.

RA: And what are those first principles? Are they Darwinian, would you say?

MK: They are; though they can be derived from other kinds of cost-benefit analysis. Differing genetic interests can cause problems of trust, particularly in 'familial' societies where families trust each other implicitly and everybody else very little. This often arises when the state is oppressive or dysfunctional, failing to implement laws fairly and inhibiting the development of civil society: under such conditions the family becomes a fortress.

RA: So traditional societies can be too parochial for widespread trust to develop; modern societies too chaotic. But why do you think widespread trust is desirable anyway? Could we not just get by, as Thatcher implied, with individuals and their families?

MK: Another politician, David Trimble, recently observed (in the context of his experience in Northern Ireland) that trust is "over-rated and frequently misplaced". He has a point. Trust is not strictly necessary to achieve many forms of co-operation, and to focus on trust, as political commentators often do, can be to concentrate on the icing when what matters is the cake.

However, even in situations where cooperation can be achieved without trust, trust may be needed to sustain the co-operation. Reading accounts of informal truces on the Western Front in the First World War, I was struck by the extent to which trust seemed to arise between soldiers on opposing sides, and how such sentiments may have helped to maintain the truces in situations where violations would inevitably occur. In real life, signals are often noisy — in the trenches literally so, the signals often actually being transmitted by gunfire — and so people need to interpret them according to their understanding of others' intentions. No ceasefire would have lasted if any shot was interpreted as a deliberate breach. Trust makes cooperation resilient instead of brittle.

Well-placed trust makes relationships work better. It allows people to take advantage of opportunities they would otherwise miss, and makes the colours of social interaction more intense.

RA: In your book you say "capitalism has won the global game of how to make a living". Marx and others pointed out that capitalism is parasitic on trust. Workers in the factory, in the home and in society generally operate on communist principles — if my colleague asks me to pass the spanner, I don't charge him for my time; my mum doesn't put a padlock on the fridge. Yet the profits that accrue from this social trust go into the pockets of a small minority of individuals. Isn't the global consensus on capitalism more an example of misplaced trust than of deserved success?

MK: It depends on where you think value comes from. By locating the source of value in labour, Marxism proposes that capital is inherently exploitative and implies that workers are wrong to trust in it. Orthodox economics, on the other hand, welcomes capital as a source of value. In Britain, the old labour movement was deeply mistrustful of capital and management, whereas on the Continent, notably in West Germany, relations between capital and labour were structured around an idea of social partnership which implied trust. Indeed I believe they still largely are, to the workers' benefit.

RA: Trust is not only good for our pocket, you say in your book, but good for our health too. How so?

MK: One specific way that it works is through the National Blood Service. People trust that they would receive a transfusion if they needed it, because they trust unknown others to donate blood, and this public trust encourages people to make the donations. It's a virtuous circle, providing public goods at a reduced cost — the medical good, of the blood itself, and the social good of solidarity.

More generally, trust can be seen as a source of health through its close relationship to equality. The work of Richard Wilkinson, Michael Marmot and others has shown that equality promotes health, while inequality damages it. This effect seems to work through the reduction of stress in social relationships: being a subordinate can mean a life lived in an unhealthily prolonged emergency mode, and shortened by it. Relative equality makes for a healthier social environment. Pleasant, co-operative social relations make for longer, healthier lives: trust, forming a basis for relaxed co-operation, should therefore be good for health.

RA: You quote some studies in your book that seem to show trust is less likely to be spontaneously extended to people of different race. Are multiculturalism and liberal immigration policies therefore doomed to fail?

MK: Not at all. It's hardly surprising to find that ethnic differences may be an obstacle to trust. After all, trust involves confidence in one's ability to predict how others will behave. It is easier to predict how others will act if you share a set of rules and customs with them: you can ask yourself, "What would I do if I were them?" People will build relationships across cultural divides if they are persuaded it is in their interests to do so, and as they learn to co-operate, they will come to trust. On the other hand, if they see their interests as best served by maintaining group divisions, they will reinforce their prejudices and their mistrust. That can happen where civil society is weak and people have little faith in the state as an arbitrator or guarantor of fairness. It may also happen where political strategies promote identity politics. But that doesn't mean that multiculturalism is necessarily divisive. It means that people have to see the benefits of building relationships with others of different cultures, have to find shared interests, and build on the elements in their cultures that they share — which may mean building a new shared culture. People have to want to make it happen, and, as with any relationship, they have to work at it.

RA: What about religion? You put a much more positive spin on the subject than we are used to hearing from science writers. What would you say to 'militant atheists' such as Richard Dawkins? Can we expect trust and moral behaviour from the human animal in the absence of religion?

MK: I'd say, "To an evolutionary psychologist, the universal extravagance of religious rituals, with their costs in time, resources, pain and privation, should suggest as vividly as a mandrill's bottom that religion may be adaptive." In fact, I did say that in my review of Daniel Dennett's book *Breaking the Spell*. Richard Dawkins used it as the epigraph to a chapter of *The God Delusion*, but it didn't seem to make a huge amount

of difference to his argument! They just can't seem to bring themselves to accept the possibility that there might be anything of value in religion.

As for morality, rather than adaptation, I've become increasingly confident that people can manage fine without religion. I used to be in awe of the word of God as the basis of right and wrong, but now I don't worry that people need such an absolute foundation for deciding how they should behave. Good strong relationships between people — implying a profound role for trust — can be just as powerful. This confidence is almost entirely based on my experience of parenthood.

RA: You say that, in modern societies, the "attenuation of traditional authority has created a vacuum in social relations that is being filled by bureaucratic regulation".

Where once there were customs in common, now there are contracts between individuals. Is this development largely good or bad? Is it reversible? What kind of political strategies and real-world projects give us grounds for hope that the future could be more trustful?

MK: You often see signs on buses along the lines of "Please give up this seat for someone who is less able to stand than you". It's welcome that public transport providers are concerned to redistribute seats from those with standing ability to those with a need to sit down, but regrettable that passengers should need to be asked. And the further an organisation goes in its efforts to bring about fairness by regulation, the weaker the relations between people become. When they are required to obey rules, individuals are relieved of the responsibility to make their ethical decisions for themselves, and to think about how they should engage with others. French public transport has a tradition of chapter and verse on this — priority in descending order to 'mutilés de guerre', blind civilians, industrially disabled people, and so on — which replaces individual judgement, and public spirit, with a bureaucratic code. Doing the right thing becomes doing what is prescribed — and if it's not prescribed, it probably won't be done. People's relationships are with authority rather than with each other.

The question is, though, how would they behave if they weren't told how to behave? We should bear in mind that a lot of behavioural prescriptions in organisations have been introduced because people couldn't be trusted not to discriminate against women, ethnic minorities or other groups. Such prejudice has become much less socially acceptable, so by and large people will have become more trustworthy in these respects. At the moment, organisations remain obsessed with achieving standards through detailed bureaucratic prescription, so that will probably continue for the time being. But I can imagine things changing as the costs of such strategies become too tiresome, and as institutions become more confident that their people could be trusted to treat others without prejudice. Trust lowers costs — of lost opportunities as well as of policing behaviour — so organisations should be able to appreciate the value of rediscovering it.

Trust: Self-Interest and the Common Good is published by Oxford University Press, £10.99.

Moving testament to an extraordinary life — Book Review

Review of Pilgrim State by Jacqueline Walker, Sceptre 2008, pp352.

Jacqueline Walker's novel *Pilgrim State* is a fictionalised memoir. She takes the life of her mother, Dorothy, and tells it through a variety of sources, official documents and narratives. The result is a moving testament to a woman who, despite much hardship, instilled in her daughter a strong sense of family.

Dorothy was born in Jamaica in 1915. A conscientious student, she earned a scholarship to study medicine in the US. It was there that she met and married her husband, Clifford Brown. What begins as a passionate and loving relationship soon changes once Dorothy becomes pregnant with their first child, Pearl. *Pilgrim State* is named after the psychiatric facility into which Dorothy is sectioned, after being drugged by her husband while suffering from what may now be thought of as post-natal depression. Her treatment was electric shock therapy. After being forced into giving over her savings, her husband allows for her temporary release. But now that she has been admitted once, it only takes a phone call from him to have her returned there once she becomes pregnant with Teddy, their second child. She is eventually released, the years of (mis)treatment having taken their toll. Deportation back to Jamaica, with Teddy and her third child Jackie, follows. Clifford retains custody of Pearl in the US. Thus begins a lifelong struggle to find a safe place and be reunited with all her children. It is a journey that takes them through several separations, and a move to south London, where they lived, until Dorothy's premature death (in 1965), when Jackie was 11 years old.

Despite these tragic events the story is an uplifting one. Each page is filled with optimism, as we get to know the Dorothy that Jackie knew, with her intellect and love of dressing up and music. It holds out an example of how the bonds between mother and daughter can remain unbroken. This is, at root, an inspiring love story.

But *Pilgrim State* isn't just a novel. It is a challenge to our understanding of what good parenting means. The overwhelming message is that social services failed this funny and courageous woman, and many others like her. What Dorothy needed (and asked for) was support. She didn't get it, but fortunately, this may change. *Pilgrim State* is now on the reading list for all trainee social workers at Brunel University.

The use of myth gives the book an added resonance. The myth of Demeter and Persephone frames the narrative; in the same way that we hear Dorothy speak through Jacqueline's words, Demeter too calls out to us in her distress. There is the separation

of mother and daughter, echoing when Persephone is stolen away into the Underworld by Hades, and the subsequent 'madness' experienced by Demeter as she searches for her daughter.

This myth is one of universal importance. It symbolises the necessary periodic separation between mothers and daughters, as a girl matures and marriage takes place. But with each new spring Persephone and Demeter are brought together again. In this, it also speaks of an ancient time when the bonds between husband and wife were not permanent, allowing for a solidarity between female kin, which would have created a new way of living and with it the beginnings of culture.

Myth has long been used as a tool to make sense of our own lives. Separation can, and does, occur. But this need not be the end. Throughout the novel, like the voice of Demeter, we hear Dorothy calling to her daughter, her love never- ending.-Eleanor Leone

Books received

- *Possibilities: Essays on Hierarchy, Rebellion, and Desire by David Graeber. AK Press 2007, pp400.*

Inspiring collection of essays from anarchist David Graeber.

- *What Gives Work Its Value? The Human Worth of a Physical Project by David Wilson. Edwin Mellon Press 2006, pp212.*

A reinterpretation of Karl Marx's value theory.

- *Expedition Naga — Diaries from the Hills in Northeast India by Peter van Ham and Jamie Saul. ACC Editions 2008, pp300.*

Accounts of a trip to the Burmese border to meet the Naga — notorious for their head-hunting activities.

Includes 140-min film on DVD.

Radical Anthropology Network — Letters

- *Dear Radical Anthropology,* Acting as a representative of two Cuban collectives of activists and intellectuals committed to social and cultural research as well as to exploring new emancipation paradigms for our country, Latin America and the planet, I'd like to suggest the creation of a Radical Anthropology Network. The membership of the Cuban groups includes some of the more interesting social researchers of this country. Due mainly to historical reasons, Cuban social science still largely follows European ethnocentric patterns, a fact which seems bizarre to many foreigners because it contrasts with the revolutionary, third-worldist and latin-americanist history for which our country is famous. The need for new approaches is strongly felt. As a result of our debates, my Cuban comrades share many of the goals of the Radical Anthropology Group. I have sent them a copy of the first issue of your journal and all the feedback I received was positive and encouraging. We evidently have many aims in common. We think that co-operation could prove fruitful, and we would like to contribute to your journal, publish a Spanish version of it, organise events, and support community initiatives. We are open for discussion and eager to hear from you.

Dmitri Prieto-Samsonov, Cuba

Editors reply: At the RAG AGM in June 2008, Dmitri's proposal to set up a Radical Anthropology Network was unanimously agreed. Anyone interested in contributing should e-mail stuartrag@yahoo.co.uk.

- *Dear Radical Anthropology,* Congratulations on a fascinating, enjoyable, and inspiring first issue.

I particularly liked David Graeber's article. His work epitomises for me what contemporary libertarian socialist theory should be all about: finding new forms of resistance appropriate to the times we live in. Such openness to ideas is essential to the construction of a praxis that is both ethical and capable of achieving our increasingly urgent goals.

John Green, County Meath, Ireland

- *Dear Radical Anthropology,*

I did a table at the Montreal anarchist bookfair in May and another in Hamilton in June, and *Radical Anthropology* was easily the most thumbed publication on my table. The idea of a radical anthropology was for many people a novelty: "What could be radical about anthropology?" Yet the necessity of such a project is only made more urgent by current attempts to introduce the renamed version of Creationism, Intelligent Design, into the Grade 10 science curriculum. In this context a radical anthropology truly is a revolutionary practice. Congratulations on a great journal. It's my current favourite along with *Aufheben*, *Communicating Vessels* and *Internationalist Perspective*.

Fischer, Toronto, Canada

Has the key social science lost its way? – Final Word

Both Karl Popper and Mario Bunge described anthropology as the key social science. For despite its diversity, anthropology has a certain unity of purpose and vision. It is unique among the human sciences both in putting an emphasis and value on cultural difference, thus offering a cultural critique of western capitalism, and in emphasising people's shared humanity, thus enlarging our sense of moral community and placing humans squarely "within nature".

Anthropology has therefore always placed itself — as a comparative social science — at the "interface" between the natural sciences and the humanities.

Sadly this 'dual heritage' of anthropology, which combined both humanism and naturalism, interpretive understanding and scientific explanation of social phenomena, has come under attack from two types of extremists. On the one hand, hermeneutic scholars, literary anthropologists and the so-called postmodernists, have repudiated the Enlightenment tradition of anthropology. They have thus attempted to reduce anthropology to semiotics — or even to autobiography! — rejected history and social science, embraced a dubious moral and epistemic relativism, and have become increasingly obsessed with the study of symbolism and ritual. On the other hand some anthropologists have gone to the other extreme. Influenced by sociobiology and its offshoot evolutionary psychology, they have advocated a reductive form of naturalism. This has involved the attempt to explain complex social institutions, particularly religion, in terms purely of cognitive mechanisms. They thus suggest that an explanation for religious beliefs and practices is to be found solely in the way the "human mind works". With great aplomb they inform us that religion is a "natural phenomenon", as if this was some new idea. In fact, ever since Ludwig Feuerbach, social scientists have emphasised that god (along with beliefs about deities, spirits, angels and witches) have no ontological basis, but are essentially the products of human consciousness and imagination.

There have been many books and articles that have attempted to define religion. For like reason, culture and economy, the concept of religion has an historical trajectory, and in different contexts diverse meanings. Anthropologist Melford Spiro defined religion as a social institution consisting of patterned interactions with "culturally postulated superhuman beings". This is a useful working definition and emphasises that religion is a social institution — not merely a "symbolic system" (Geertz), or "awareness of the transcendent" (Tambiah), or a "feeling of the numinous" (Otto). Functional

definitions of religion, in contrast, tend to be rather vague, like that of J. Milton Yinger, who defined religion as a system of beliefs and practices that dealt with the "ultimate problems of human life". By this criterion Marxism, evolutionary naturalism and secular humanism are "religions". Indeed, in the US, both John Dewey's empirical naturalism and secular humanism have been declared a "religion".

Long ago, in my *Anthropological Studies of Religion* (1987), I outlined the many and varied ways in which philosophers and social scientists have attempted to understand and explain religion — as a natural phenomenon. I thus critically discussed in detail the many approaches to the study of religion: intellectualist, psychological, structuralist, interpretive, phenomenological, and, especially, the sociological approach derived from Marx, Weber and Durkheim.

In recent decades anthropologists such as Pascal Boyer and Harvey Whitehouse, and the philosopher Daniel Dennett, have enthusiastically embraced sociobiology, and its offshoot evolutionary psychology, as a strategy by which to advance a truly "scientific" study of religion. The basic idea is that religious systems can be explained in terms of pan-human "psychological characteristics", or more specifically, the emphasis is on innate "cognitive mechanisms" or psychological "modules", that have been adaptive in a biological sense, namely, in fostering the survival or reproductive success of humans in the past. Religious beliefs, duly fragmented into atomistic "memes" (which seemingly have a life of their own), are described as "counter-intuitive", that is, contrary to commonsense assumptions and experience. Hardly news to social scientists! Dismissive of other approaches to religion, and ignoring social factors in the understanding of religion, advocates of the cognitive approach make some rather grandiose claims for this mode of understanding. Mario Bunge and the essays in Hilary and Steven Rose's edited volume *Alas, Poor Darwin* (2000) have provided us with some important criticisms of this approach.

As religion is a complex and multifaceted social phenomenon it can be fully understood only by adopting an integral approach, in which all approaches to religion must be taken into account. But historically, anthropology, given its "dual heritage" (embracing both humanism and naturalism) has always combined hermeneutics — the interpretive understanding of religious beliefs and practices — with a social-scientific perspective that seeks to situate religion in its wider socio-historical context. And this dual approach has always been expressed within specific ethnographic contexts. There is thus a need to avoid the extremes of both a narrow hermeneutics, embraced by literary anthropologists and phenomenologists, and the equally narrow scientistic approach of the evolutionary psychologists, who would interpret religion purely in terms of pan-human instincts — cognitive mechanisms. The "dual heritage" of anthropology is surely worth sustaining in order to develop a more integral approach to religion.

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A Critical Introduction (Cambridge University Press 2006).

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