A. van der Leeden

Empiricism and logical order in anthropological structuralism

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“EMPIRICISM” AND “LOGICAL ORDER” IN ANTHROPOLOGICAL STRUCTURALISM¹

Anthropological structuralism has, mainly under the influence of the highly original and voluminous oeuvre of Claude Lévi-Strauss, become a subject of general scientific discussion. Specialists all over the world, including historians, philosophers and psychologists, study the many different aspects of Lévi-Strauss' work, which, it should be emphasized, bears a distinctly anthropological signature. It deals almost exclusively with non-Western societies and cultures, and it does so by means of strictly anthropological methods.

It is clear, on the other hand, that many of his conclusions are also important for the natural sciences and the humanities. His *passion de l'inceste*, to borrow Simonis' expression (1968), would seem to be important for anthropologists, biologists and psychologists alike, and the philosophical implications of his work are also evident. Lévi-Strauss himself has on several occasions expressed a preference for the Marxist philosophical system (1955, pp. 49, 50; 1966b, p. 49; Simonis, 1968, pp. 14, 15), but it would also be quite interesting to enter into the speculations and discussions about possible connections with idealistic systems, particularly those of Kant and Hegel.²

Besides these impressions, bearing on particular aspects of Lévi-Strauss' work, I would like to introduce the subject of this essay still further with a few general remarks on the recent discussions of his work. First of all, the steadily growing literature on Lévi-Strauss' structuralistic position could readily give the impression that it presents us with a recent and independent development within the field of anthropological theory. For a number of reasons, however, this would

¹ This is a revised English version of a guest lecture read in November 1969 at the University of Zürich.

² Compare Lévi-Strauss' remark: "La lecture de Marx m'avait plus transporté que je prenais pour la première fois contact, à travers cette grande pensée, avec le courant philosophique qui va de Kant à Hegel: tout un monde m'avait révélé" (1955, p. 49). Simonis quotes this passage too, and adds: "La lecture de Marx révèle à Lévi-Strauss le courant qui va de Kant à Hegel! Ceci est peut-être significatif!" (1968, p. 14 and footnote 4).

be putting things wrongly. For one thing, Lévi-Strauss has himself time and again expressed his scientific debts to his great predecessors Durkheim and Mauss, and to such linguists as Jakobson.

For another thing, French structuralism has since Durkheim's time greatly influenced anthropological thinking, as may be particularly apparent from British anthropology and Dutch anthropology (especially in Leiden).³

For a third reason, we should not forget that structuralistic viewpoints have also been developed quite independently by German and American anthropologists, as well as by anthropologists of many other nationalities. It would be interesting to discuss and compare these different structuralist viewpoints, but this would fall outside the scope of this essay, which deals mainly with the connections between French and British structuralism. Suffice it therefore to add as another general conclusion that in view of the great diversity of existing structuralist opinion it would be difficult indeed to distinguish clearly between structuralism as a particular "specialism" and the kind of global structuralism inherent in anthropological thinking in general. The bewildering variety of concepts of "structure" leaves us with no other conclusion, moreover, than that anthropologists, who all over the world apprehensively call themselves "structuralists", would generally only agree as to the importance of inquiries into fundamental socio-structural principles, to which human societies and cultures owe their continuity and relative "functional unity", as Radcliffe-Brown would have put it. In other words all structuralists study social and cultural *systems*, and to this end they make use of *models* with which these systems can be characterized and generalized. Most if not all structuralists would probably also agree on the importance of the comparative method for structural research.

However, these activities would certainly not seem to constitute the "private territory" of structuralists alone, nor would they have to be taken as a recent anthropological fashion. The history of anthropology shows abundant evidence of anthropologists who studied and *compared* socio-cultural systems. Thus, since Frobenius in 1925 put himself to the task, "den Leser sich in das Seelenhafte oder das Paideuma des Wesens der Kultur einleben, einfühlen zu lassen" (1925, p. 55; cited by Schmitz, 1966, p. 3), it would be quite justified to consider him a structuralist. Lévi-Strauss could not have expressed this more ac-

³ For a summary of the Leiden example, see in particular Patrick de Josselin de Jong (1960).

curately, even though his interest would seem to be directed to a quite different kind of "Paideuma" than that of Frobenius.

However important Lévi-Strauss' views are, it would not be justifiable to identify modern structural theory wholly, as seems to be the general tendency, with his dialectic theory of binary oppositions. This implies the neglect of important contributions made by structuralists of another kind, who can be shown to emphasize different aspects of basic structural processes which are also the subject of Lévi-Strauss' studies. A discussion of the differences in background and of the misunderstandings between these different approaches might provide us with a better basis for the evaluation of their interrelations and of the possibilities for combining these into a more unified approach.

May I as an example refer to the structuralist debate between some British and French anthropologists which is apparent from the literature over the past twenty-five years and has been characterized by Leach as showing a "distinction between the French love of logical order and the English love of empirical detail" (1967a, p. XI).

In a way this is just a manner of speaking, of course, as Leach did not mean to say that English (or should we say British?) anthropologists are disinclined to detect logical order in raw ethnographic material. Nor would he imply that French structuralists study logical systems which bear no evidence whatsoever of the real facts of life: a situation reminiscent of the story of Baron von Münchhausen who rescued himself from the marshes by pulling himself up by his wig. It is indeed a long time since the philosophical debate between the traditional empiricists and rationalists, or between the sensualists and the pure intellectualists. No longer do we accept an anarchy of mere empirical facts, nor would we deny, since Kant, that human knowledge, in spite of forms and categories of knowledge *a priori*, begins with experience and observation (1877, p. 46). As a result of positivistic influences French and British structuralists found their conclusions on the objective analysis of social facts, as Durkheim put it.

Taking Leach's characterization as a starting-point nevertheless implies that the somewhat ambivalent relations between French and British structuralists to-day still reflect the touch of the old differences between the typically British empiricist attitude and the apparently typical continental want of abstraction. A no longer modern example regards the theoretical views of Radcliffe-Brown, which are generally

considered as a Durkheimian offshoot, though with highly independent characteristics. Radcliffe-Brown took a more pragmatic and dynamic standpoint than Durkheim when he defined social structure as the "network" of "actually existing" "social relations of person to person as exhibited in their interactions and their behaviour in respect of one another" (1952, pp. 53, 191; 1950, p. 10). It is well known, on the other hand, that Durkheim emphasized the "coercive effect" of "social facts" on the behaviour of the individual (1947; Harris, 1968, p. 471).⁴

Judging from the ambivalent attitude of Leach — and of his colleagues with congenial views — in respect of Lévi-Strauss, history would seem to repeat itself. On the one hand one feels admiration for the brilliant and inspiring thoughts of the great Frenchman. On the other hand there is an apparent fear of the formal implications of the models, and the abstract binary oppositions, to which Lévi-Strauss reduces societies as wholes. This tallies with a noticeable concern about facts left unexplained by the models of abstract binary oppositions. It is also connected with a marked preference for the study of partial rather than whole systems (Leach, 1967 a and b; 1968, pp. 1-27; 1970). Some extreme British structuralists even reject these models altogether and would seem to prefer intrinsically psychological methods. All in all the situation would thus still seem to suggest the influence of Francis Bacon's plea for the inductive method, of Hobbes' psychological association theory of sensations and reflections, and of the opinion of the agnostic David Hume that ideas should conform to reflected impressions.

Similar thoughts concerning these empirical connections must have crossed the mind of Lévi-Strauss when he reproached his critic, Maybury-Lewis, for remaining, "to some extent, the prisoner of the naturalistic misconceptions which have so long pervaded the British school" (1960, p. 52).

In my opinion these considerations also introduce some interesting "structural" implications of the matter. The insistence of Leach and his colleagues on the limitations of Lévi-Strauss' structural viewpoint and on the differences in philosophical outlook between French and

⁴ To quote Lvi-Strauss: "Si Durkheim considère la sociologie comme une espèce de psychologie, c'est néanmoins une psychologie d'une nature particulière, irréductible à la psychologie individuelle" (1947, p. 518). This is not to say, however, that Durkheim did not pay any attention at all to individual differences in behaviour (pp. 519-20).

TABLE 1.

A	B
"Empirical detail".	"Logical order".
Partial systems.	Whole systems.
Dynamic processes.	Formal structures.
Variables.	Constants.
Systems as functioning in actual practice.	Closed systems concerning ideals and traditional institutions.
Synchronic aspects.	Diachronic aspects.
Functionalism.	Structuralism.
The individual.	Culture.
Quantitative methods.	Qualitative methods.
Positivism.	Idealism (and Hegel).
Descent theory:	Alliance theory:
"the network of actual social relations";	"construct or model" expressing "norms for social relations" and
"enduring social groups, the concrete lineages".	"rules governing the constitution of social groups and their interrelations".
Radcliffe-Brown, Fortes,	Lévi-Strauss, Dumont,
Goody, Gough and Gluckman.	Leach and Needham.
"The internal observer".	"The detached and external onlooker".

British anthropologists affects their own position too, in a way, as it would seem to prove the correctness of Lévi-Strauss' very theory of binary oppositions if applied to our own little anthropological society. By means of Table 1 it would thus be worthwhile to examine the possibility of fitting the arguments of the British critics into a system of general scientific values, to be taken as the ideal model inducing the current process of anthropological thinking (in our example of course particularly in France and England). The two vertically diagrammed categories of Table 1 have to this end been marked A and B, and are headed by the two opposed notions of our leading motive: "empiricism" versus "logical order".

These are followed by a closely related set of notions, this time cited from Leach's *Rethinking Anthropology*; e.g. "principles of operation of partial systems" (looming large in Leach's preference for "functionalism in a mathematical sense") versus "the interconnectedness between

parts of a whole" (the subject of a "mechanical" kind of "functionalism", disapproved of by Leach, and according to him characteristic of the views of both Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown) (1968, p. 6). The next set continues this line of thought and reflects the general concern of British social anthropologists with the "dynamics" and "variables" of "systems as they function in actual practice", to use a variation on Radcliffe-Brown's original definition of social structure. This obviously contrasts with the view of cultural anthropologists who subject "ideals and other strongly traditionalized cultural institutions" to a thorough analysis of "constants" pertaining to "formal structures" of "closed systems"; our little system incidentally representing such a "closed system". The former would principally seem to take a "synchronic" viewpoint, whereas generally speaking the latter also pay attention to the diachronic aspect. Some adherents of category A would refer to themselves as "functionalists", which from the viewpoint of our diagram automatically implies that the term "structuralists" would be more congenial to people from category B. Again, generally speaking, anthropologists with psychological interests who tend to emphasize the role of the "individual" in his society would mostly belong to category A. On the other hand, category B would be a home for "culturologists", who mostly neglect individual behaviour.

Would it moreover be too far-fetched to assume that Table 1 also lends itself to a distinction of "quantitative methods" versus "qualitative methods", the former being used predominantly by anthropologists of category A, and the latter predominantly by those of category B? This would anyhow not be more daring than to follow Schneider's proposition, originally suggested by Dumont, of distinguishing between two kinds of special structural theory: "descent theory" and "alliance theory" (1965, 25). Once accepted, it may be further suggested that all in all the values so far mentioned under category A would be most congenial to the inclusion of "descent theory", whereas "alliance theory" would fit better into category B. Schneider mentions anthropologists like Radcliffe-Brown, Fortes, Goody and Gluckman as typically representing "positivistic" "descent theory" (p. 25). They approach social structure either from "the network of actual social relations" (Radcliffe-Brown) or from the "enduring social groups, the concrete lineages" (Evans-Pritchard) (p. 26).

On the other hand, anthropologists absorbed in "alliance theory" (Lévi-Strauss, Dumont, Leach and Needham are mentioned) take marriage rules, in particular marriages of the cross-cousin type, as

their starting-point. Important to them is the "construct or model fabricated by the anthropologist and presumed to have, as its concrete expression, the norms for social relations and the rules governing the constitution of social groups and their interrelations" (p. 26). "Lévi-Strauss, Needham, and George Homans are all psychological reductionists — each in his own way, of course" (p. 29), the word "psychological" here presumably referring to "dependence upon psychological universals" as Harris puts it (1968, p. 531). Opposing them to "positivistic" "descent" structuralists, Schneider classes Needham, "if anything, squarely on the side of the idealists", and lets Lévi-Strauss and Dumont "go with Hegel" (p. 25).

As a last and highly significant indication, Fortes explains the difference of approach between Leach and Lévi-Strauss by using formulations of Jakobson, who opposed the "functionalist position . . . of the internal observer who . . . 'becomes adjusted to native speaker and decodes the messages in their mother tongue' 'to that of the 'detached and external onlooker' . . . who 'attempts to break the code through a scrutiny of the messages'" (1967, p. 8). "No wonder, then that we functionalists and Lévi-Strauss and his followers seem to be talking past one another. For we and they are looking at the configuration of actor, action and cultural materials of action from opposite sides" (p. 9).⁵

Summarizing the results of this experiment, I admit that it somehow resembles a juggling trick, but it has anyhow also the merit of reminding us of the treacherous interplay between actual observation and equally necessary abstract interpretation as a practically unlimited source of scientific misunderstandings. I am moreover fully aware of its incompleteness and imperfection, and of the questions that it unavoidably raises. Thus, to mention only a few: what is one to make of the occurrence of both French and English names in category B of the diagram of Table 1, if this diagram is supposed to reflect an opposition between British and French structuralism? There are of course differences of opinion between British structuralists, but this does not alter the fact that some of Leach's methodological principles have been chosen as leading notions on the list of category A. It may be doubtful, moreover, whether Needham would be more like an "idealist" than an "empiricist". To continue this juggling-experiment, however, the question could also be reversed, as it may well be asked why the structuralist Radcliffe-

⁵ I owe this reference to A. A. Trouwborst.

Brown has not been included in category B (see also below). To put a different question, one may well wonder whether the classing of the "intellectualist" Lévi-Strauss and philosophical idealism in one and the same category would not be asking for trouble. Moreover, Lévi-Strauss would strongly insist on the empirical reality of his models (1966b, p. 16). As a final example, certainly not all structuralists would approve of considering "synchronic" studies as a characteristic feature of category A alone.

In my opinion, these inconsistencies are partly explained by the fact that Table 1 ventures to bring together a number of opposed views, to which anthropologists often and deliberately appeal in writing, and which may for this reason technically be called "views of participants" expressing either "how the participants see elements in their own culture" or "what the participants consider to be the ideal" (P. E. de Josseling de Jong, 1967, pp. 93, 96). Of course, these views may or may not exhibit structural consciousness (p. 100), and anthropologists no less than other people deviate in actual practice from their scientific confessions. Nor would, as a second and more basic thought, the system depicted in Table 1 make an exception to the well accepted structural rule of the primacy of the relations over the elements in the system,⁶ i.e. the relations making up the constants of the system, and the elements being interchangeable, also within the system. On different occasions they may symbolize different positions within the same system.

I have dealt with these questions at some length as an example of conclusions that can be drawn from a structural consideration of differences in approach between British and French structural anthropologists. From a general viewpoint, the deliberate insistence on these differences also has an artificial or even fictitious side, as it suggests a normative way of reasoning, which may eventually lead to the use of extreme arguments feeding back negatively on the current structural debate. Strictly speaking the only fact of real importance is simply that both French and British anthropologists — to keep this example — have contributed substantially to structuralistic theory. The truth lies as always between the extremes, and it would not seem to be taking an utopian to maintain that the differences can be bridged. As one of the

⁶ Patrick de Josselin de Jong, to whom I owe this formulation of the notion of the primacy of relations over the elements, drew my attention to the following literature which suggests general agreement regarding this structural principle: de Saussure, 1931, p. 163; Lévi-Strauss, 1949, pp. 145-47; 1958, p. 326 ff.; 1962, pp. 111-12; and Leach, 1967, pp. 25-27.

merits of Schneider's essay on "Some Muddles in the Models", it points to basic similarities regarding the viewpoints of French as well as British "alliance" structuralists. They have on this ground been brought together under category B. We would further still have to find a solution for the dividing line in the middle of the diagram. A dotted line would bring about the necessary shading of the interrelations of categories A and B, and it seems to me that Radcliffe-Brown's case demonstrates the possibilities for this. Classed in category A, Radcliffe-Brown remains nevertheless the originator of comparative structural research among the Australian Aborigines which belongs typically to category B (1930-1931). Lévi-Strauss in a way continued Radcliffe-Brown's line of thought by generalizing and improving his structural models (1949, pp. 189-290).

Furthermore, and now to turn to Leach's and Needham's criticism of Lévi-Strauss — to this end they may and should be transformed into agents of category A, Table 1 — it strikes me that it is not so much focussed on the latter's structural models as such as to his manipulation of these models. Thus, judging from their principal publications and in spite of a number of proposed limiting conditions, both would principally seem to have accepted Lévi-Strauss' diagrammatic representation of the asymmetric system with matrilinear cross-cousin marriage.⁷ This fact is the more striking since it has taken British anthropologists a long time to accept the view that unilateral cross-cousin marriage cannot be explained only by referring to concrete and social rules or behavioural criteria, which have been isolated from the general context in which they occur. This applies e.g. to Radcliffe-Brown, who considered all Australian systems of kinship and marriage, symmetrical and asymmetrical, as variants of one basis symmetrical type: the Kariera system (Figure 1), or the Dravidian system, as he also used to call it (1927, p. 344). According to Radcliffe-Brown, these variants resulted from the influence of the principle of sibling equivalence: in particular the social equivalence of a brother and his sister. Extension of this complex to the generation of their children would make it impossible for a man to marry his father's sister's daughter. Still according to Radcliffe-Brown, two variants developed from this situation: a) highly complex symmetrical systems of the Aranda type (with bilateral second-cousin marriage), and b) asymmetrical systems with mother's brother's daughter marriage (1930-1931, pp. 449-450).

⁷ Compare e.g. Needham (1957) and Leach (1968, pp. 54-104).

FIGURE 1.

Part of a genealogical diagram of the symmetrical (Kariera) system with sister exchange and bilateral cross-cousin marriages (compare Radcliffe-Brown, 1930-1931).

Such is Radcliffe-Brown's interpretation, which I think is unacceptable as he overlooked the rather obvious fact that in a symmetrical system of the Kariera type — Radcliffe-Brown's starting-point — extension of the sibling equivalence norms to the children's generation would not only lead to close and exogamous relations between a man and his father's sister's children, but unavoidably also between a man and his mother's brother's children, mother and her brother under the circumstances being as "equivalent" to one another as father and his sister. This would *ipso facto* make marriages impossible with all cross-cousins, including mother's brother's daughter. Without denying that under certain circumstances principles like sibling equivalence may and indeed do influence marriage organization, Radcliffe-Brown's example leaves us with no other possible conclusion than that a structural explanation of the institution of matrilinear cross-cousin marriage has to start from an asymmetrical model at a more fundamental level of abstraction. Leach and Needham, as I said before, seem to have accepted this view. Both use asymmetrical diagrams (see Fig. 2) which are similar to those of Lévi-Strauss.

FIGURE 2.

Variation on the asymmetrical 'Kachin' system after Leach (1968, p. 51), with matrilineal cross-cousin marriages.

A striking similarity also appears from the ways in which both Lévi-Strauss and Leach have expressed themselves about the abstraction level of these structural models. Thus one may cite Lévi-Strauss' reprimand meant for Maybury-Lewis, who

.... "follows the same erroneous line of confusing a theoretical analysis of models, intended to explain the ethnographical data (by reducing them to common factors), with an actual description of the data, as they appear to the empirical observer" (1960, p. 51);

and Leach who holds that

.... "serious misunderstandings have constantly arisen from a tendency to confuse structural diagrams with ethnographic reality" (1968, p. 61).

In view of these very similar formulations it is truly surprising a few pages further on to find Leach defending a purely empirical explanation of fundamental aspects of the asymmetrical Kachin system, and re-

proaching Lévi-Strauss for not having taken concrete socio-economic and political factors as the starting-point of his analysis of this system. This view most certainly involves a misunderstanding, as it seems to be highly inconsistent to accept the asymmetrical model in theory as an important tool for structural analysis, but to refrain from putting this into actual practice. In view of his keen mathematical interest on the one hand, and his insight into empirical processes on the other hand, Leach should have been more aware of the complimentary rather than contradictory value of Lévi-Strauss' approach with regard to the British empirical approach, and of the notion of reduction implied in the use of structural models. With Patrick de Josselin de Jong we may interpret "the construction of a cultural model as 'reducing an (always complex) set of ethnographical data to a model that is as economical as possible, by means of which we can express the features considered to be essential in a diagram or a formule' ". It needs continuous testing, he explains, by comparisons of different cultural situations within a particular field of study. "A later stage might be the testing of a model which is relevant for one field of study by (data from) another field of study, and thus one could proceed step by step" (1962, p. 110; English quotation from Van der Leeden, 1970, p. 78).

This evidently justifies Lévi-Strauss' basic methods of interpretation of "elementary structures of kinship", even if it is true, as Leach maintains, that Lévi-Strauss' conclusions often strike one as formulated in an extreme way, and even if it is probably also right that Lévi-Strauss underestimates the historical and ethnical complexity of Southeast Asia, China and India. It is also evident that a study of the socio-economic and political dynamics of these systems is as indispensable for understanding their characteristic features as the analysis of fundamentals on the level of the abstract model. Again, however, these considerations do not in themselves eliminate the essential correctness of the methodological starting-point and basic structural conclusions of Lévi-Strauss.

This fact is even strikingly borne out by the implications which Leach himself on partly empirical and partly theoretical grounds attributes to the asymmetrical Kachin system, and which actually tally with the views of Lévi-Strauss. Leach's insistence on the local implications of the three primary vertical lines of his model of the Kachin system (see Figure 2) may be a good example of this. "In my view, the social groups which 'arrange' such a marriage (in particular MBD marriage; v. d. L.) between themselves are, in almost all societies, of

essentially the same kind". "In practice membership of such groups is defined by marriage as well as residence" (1968, p. 56). Leach is further opposed to referring to the smallest functioning units of the Kachin system as "marriage classes", i.e. bilineal kinship categories such as the four units A1, A2, B1, B2 of the symmetrical Kariera systems of Figure 1. In his view asymmetrical systems (see again Figure 2) function with unilineal local lines only. In the diagram it suffices therefore to mark these lines off by single letters (as in Figure 2) or single numbers (1968, pp. 56-64, but originally published in 1951).

Lévi-Strauss arrives at almost identical conclusions by following a different way of reasoning. Symmetrical and asymmetrical systems compare in his view as "disharmonic" and "harmonic" systems respectively. In disharmonic systems the residence rule (Leach's local lines!) and the descent rule are contrasting: e.g. patrilocal residence occurring in combination with matrilineal descent, or matrilocality with patrilineality. In symmetrical systems, such as in Australia, this essentially bilineal situation easily leads to the formation of the said "marriage classes", but it also guarantees the consistency and continuity of the system in the case of an increase in the number of lines, e.g. from two to four as in the Kariera-Aranda sequence. This would however be unnecessary, Lévi-Strauss argues, in the case of asymmetrical systems, which allow of an increase in a theoretically unlimited number of lines without effecting the "harmonic" relation between residence and descent rule: patrilocality thus occurring in combination with patrilineality, or matrilocality with matrilineality (1949, pp. 270-277). The genealogical positions within the system depend largely on the vertical local descent lines, which do not lend themselves to the formation of bilineal marriage classes — the same conclusions, in fact, which Leach would subsequently arrive at.

For a final example of Leach's misapprehension of certain structuralist methods of Lévi-Strauss, may I recall his criticism of the fact that the latter bases his interpretation of the alliance system of the Kachin on its ideal representation as a connubial system with five patrilineal clans circulating their women in a cycle (1968, p. 81). Leach founds his criticism on the consideration that this "verbal model" does not correspond with the actual situation, the patrilineal clans being "segmented into dispersed lineages and these segmented into further dispersed sub-lineages and so on" (p. 81) and the local patri-lineages or local descent groups constituting the only significant units (pp. 79-81).

This is not to say, incidentally, that Leach does not attach any

empirical value at all to the notion of circulation of women. He points out, however, that in reality the number of exchange units, actively engaged in the circulation system is limited to three or four (p. 82). As indicated by his ethnographic material from the Kachin, the notion of circulation of women between three neighbouring local descent groups (or to use the symbolism of Figure 2, women of C marrying men of B, women of B men of A, and women of A men of C) is at work at and between the three Kachin classes, i.e. "chiefly class, aristocratic class and commoner class" (p. 84 and in general pp. 84-90).

Leach anyhow does not carry the argument further than this. He does in one place refer to the urgency of studying the dynamics of the interplay between the "ideal" and "real" dimensions of the Kachin system (p. 64), but this again is not carried out into effect, his analysis gradually ending up in the empirical conclusions mentioned before.

There is more to say to this, however, as Leach would also seem to misapprehend the functional significance of ideals, that is, insofar as these are not to be taken as mere survivals from times gone by. Following Patrick de Josselin de Jong's more recently published and highly interesting discussion of "The participants' view of their culture" (1956 and 1967), it would seem to be quite justified to consider the Kachin "verbal model" as an exceptionally good example of structural consciousness. It draws attention to a very fundamental implication of asymmetrical exchange, as it would seem to affirm that an asymmetrical system needs to be cyclical to function as a closed system.⁸ Turning once more to Figure 2, this means that marriage relations should logically exist between the men and women on the exterior sides of the two outer lines of the diagram.⁹ This is a highly interesting implication indeed, and an additional appeal for a further inquiry into the factors underlying the discrepancy between the ideal pattern of five exchange units and the "real" or empirical pattern of three (or four)

⁸ Patrick de Josselin de Jong drew my attention (personal correspondence of 2-1-1970) to the parallel implications of my opinion about the Kachin ideal marriage system as an extreme consequence of the notion of the circulation of women, and the opinion of Lévi-Strauss on myth: "les positions extrêmes y sont imaginées..." (1961, p. 31). I did not suggest that this would be an implication of ideal patterns of marriage in all societies with elementary structures.

⁹ This seems to be the easiest way of explaining the notion of circulation. Judging from their ideal, amongst the Kachin the actual situation appears to be more complex than this. Starting from their "feudal marriage cycle", Lévi-Strauss used a diagram, different and in a way also clearer than the genealogical diagram of Figure 2 (1949, p. 303).

exchange units. The dynamics of the interplay between these patterns would certainly supply us with important information about some highly characteristic features of Kachin society and culture.

Moreover, in spite of, or should I say due to, their normative functions, verbalizations such as the Kachin view of their marriage system do not generally intend to offer a complete and straightforward rendering of the empirical facts, but reinterpret this in symbolical language, structurally often implying the reduction of the situation to a few essentials.¹⁰ For this reason too, more attention should be given to the numerical implications of the Kachin ideal pattern than Leach has done so far. The number of five would somehow appear to indicate an optimal reduction of all collective factors involved in the overall picture of Kachin kinship and marriage relations. For two additional reasons we would have to consider this as an important implication. For one thing, the Kachin are of course unable to survey really all actual consequences of these factors in their totality. For another, it has been pointed out before that the number five is one of a series of ceremonial and "magical" numbers of a remarkable general occurrence in this part of the world (J. P. B. de Josselin de Jong, 1952, p. 51). The Kachin ideal theme of five units cyclically exchanging their women would therefore appear to remain a fruitful subject for further research.

The difficult and thankless task remains to be carried out of summing up Lévi-Strauss' part in the structuralist debate between British and French anthropologists. It is a difficult task indeed because of the versatility of his ideas and the voluminousness of his writing. It is also a thankless task, as it implies criticizing some aspects of a general anthropological theory which pretends to offer an all-embracing explanation (and philosophy) of human existence and the human mind from the single viewpoint of the principle of reciprocity, and from this principle alone, and which for this very reason almost unavoidably betrays the ambiguous effects of extreme and contradictory reasoning. Lévi-Strauss, I would like to add, would at present seem to find himself in the middle of a scientific experiment, each new book giving us a further clue as to the gradual process of the development of his ideas.

¹⁰ Compare Patrick de Josselin de Jong (1967, p. 90). It is in this regard too that he drew my attention to the parallel implications of my conclusions and that of Lévi-Strauss, who holds that myth is not a "re-presentation" of "le donné" (1961, p. 30). Compare also footnote 8.

Many critics of Lévi-Strauss have moreover made the mistake of isolating elements of his view from the general theoretical context in which these occur. This is probably one of the reasons for British anthropologists playing the active part in the debate, and Lévi-Strauss usually confining himself to a passive (or at the most a frowning or even smiling) role, except in the few instances — the Maybury-Lewis case is one example — in which his anger seems actively to be aroused. In a way Lévi-Strauss can of course permit himself to maintain this mysterious silence, his critics, as I have explained, often misunderstanding the basic implications of his approach.

It would be unfair, however, to lay the blame of the misunderstandings exclusively on the British structuralists.¹¹ This will become apparent, I hope, from a discussion of an ambiguous implication of his definition of "elementary structures", in particular if applied to areas such as Melanesia and New Guinea, to which I shall here refer.

The notion of "elementary structures", as developed and used by Lévi-Strauss, refers to systems with types of kinship classification which distinguish between prohibited and possible marriage partners and which therefore bear directly on the marriage choice. Elementary structures are characterized by marriages between people related by kinship ties, in particular between cross cousins (1949, pp. IX-XI). Lévi-Strauss considers cross-cousin marriage as a preferential form of marriage as it would represent the most elementary product of affinal relations between men who exchange their women (pp. 153, 154, 167, 169, 183-186), and secondly, as it provides the connecting link between the prohibition of incest and dualistic moiety systems (p. 185). Cross-cousin marriage prescribes, and therefore stands on the positive side of the prohibition of incest, which only prohibits (p. 167). However, in contrast with dualistic moiety systems, clearly institutionalized results of the influence of the principle of reciprocity, cross-cousin marriage would only appear to be a structural tendency (p. 131).

I would like to add the following comments to these implications of Lévi-Strauss' definition of "elementary structures". Firstly, Lévi-Strauss uses the notion of preferential and/or prescriptive marriages

¹¹ There are other critics as well who in Lévi-Strauss' own structural language have demonstrated the risks, contradictions and ambiguous implications with regard to Lévi-Strauss' structuralist theory, and whose criticism has been positively answered by him. As a well known example, I may refer to J. P. B. de Josselin de Jong, "Lévi-Strauss's theory of kinship and marriage" (1952). A recent example is Simonis (1968).

in a rather unorthodox way, most anthropologists on empirical grounds restricting these notions to marriages which in a given period of time are actually preferred or prescribed by most if not all members of a given society. In Lévi-Strauss' view, however, these notions are highly abstract structural notions, indicating an elementary social process started by the principle of reciprocity, the most fundamental of all social principles. This has been seriously misunderstood by Needham, who considers these notions from the empirical viewpoint, and who has turned the distinction between prescriptive and preferential marriage systems — insignificant to Lévi-Strauss — into the starting-point of his particular line of research. In Needham's view, alliance theory only applies to prescriptive systems of cross-cousin marriage, and emphatically not to preferential systems of marriage (1962a; 1962b, as also cited by Schneider, 1965, pp. 60, 64; compare also Harris, 1968, pp. 504, 512).

There is no need to mention the limiting effect of this standpoint as to the number of potentially suitable culture areas for the study of systems of alliance. It would mean, for example, that New Guinea would look rather unpromising from the viewpoint of structuralists like Needham because of the relative absence of clearly institutionalized kinship systems with prescriptive or even preferential types of cross-cousin marriage.¹²

¹² Without essentially affecting my opinion, there is more to say to Needham's prescriptive notion than this. To quote from personal correspondence (29-11-1969): "Now, as for Melanesia, for me the question whether or not there are prescriptive systems (I cannot speak about 'elementary structures') is to be decided by the structure of the relationship terminologies. So far as I know, Melanesian terminologies are non-prescriptive. There may be all sorts of preferences, of varying degrees, and even regular affinal links, but these are not sufficient to compose a prescriptive (positive) classification. So you see it is not even a question of 'cross cousin marriage', but of categories and the way they are combined. I think these social features can be given a clear definition and can be clearly determined in the field; but I do not think that the notion of 'elementary structures' is suitable for the analysis of Melanesian or any other societies." Compare also Needham (1958, pp. 75-6), Schneider (1965, pp. 60-72) and Harris (1968, pp. 504-12).

Taking his stress on the prescriptive notion for what it is, I might still add that Needham too seems to identify his "alliance theory" principally with the notion of asymmetrical alliance and asymmetrical cycles, and with the notion of wife-givers versus wife-receivers. For this reason too Needham misjudges the empirical situation in Melanesia and New Guinea. These regions are mainly characterized by symmetrical systems of alliance, and in particular by systems with sister exchange in combination with clearly symmetrical kinship terminologies and dualistic forms of social organization. This would make it quite acceptable to call these systems "prescriptive systems".

Neither would Melanesia and New Guinea, as a second point, look more promising from the viewpoint of Lévi-Strauss' approach to elementary structures. He even considers these regions as a kind of "ante-chamber for the areas of complex structures" (1949, p. 575-576; 1966; van der Leeden, 1970, p. 79), "complex structures" referring to systems in which the choice of marriage is not based on kinship relations but primarily on "freedom of choice" and the circulation of marriage gifts (1949, pp. IX, 568-591).

We are thus dealing with the striking situation that Lévi-Strauss and Needham, differing as to the interpretation of "prescriptive" and "preferential" systems, for largely comparable reasons do agree that New Guinea does not lend itself to elementary structural research. A misunderstanding seems somehow to be involved, and for an explanation I think this time we would have to indicate an inconsistency in Lévi-Strauss' definition of "elementary structures". I would thus hold, most emphatically and contrary to Lévi-Strauss' opinion, that the New Guinea systems may for very good reasons indeed be characterized as "elementary structures" (1960, p. 155; 1970).

Melanesia and New Guinea, as I have explained elsewhere, do in fact supply us with the finest and most convincing ethnographic example of a culture-area with reciprocity and exchange as its principle focus and general principle of social cohesion (1960; 1964). This principle can throughout this area be shown to provide the basis of the economic system and of the socio-political organization, and to be reflected in the symbolism of myths and ritual. The Melanesian and New Guinea systems in all respects meet the basic premises underlying Lévi-Strauss' concept of "elementary structures" of kinship. The informal character of the social processes in these regions, together with the rather general absence of clearly developed social institutions, would even make it possible to study these "elementary structures" as really "elementary" processes, without the "cultural fringe" and complicated symbolism characteristic of these structures in other areas of this part of the world. The following concrete examples could explain this still further.

First of all, judging from the frequency of terms indicating relations rather than positions, Melanesians and Papuans would seem to stress the primary importance of the relations in a system. This concrete manifestation of a fundamental structural principle did not fail to attract the attention of Lévi-Strauss; in *Les structures élémentaires* he freely uses Melanesian examples for the illustration of this principle.

Melanesia and New Guinea also provide us with convincing evidence

of the significance of all primary oppositions on which Lévi-Strauss' social theory is based. This applies in particular to the asymmetrical status of the sexes, throughout these regions bearing out all implications elementary to Lévi-Strauss' interpretation of cross-cousin marriage. One could thus point to the active part of the men in the system of marriage exchange relations, in which the women only function as objects of the exchange. In particular in predominantly patrilineal societies, one also meets the closely related notion that women are only losses, their offspring falling into descent groups other than their original ones. The empirical situation makes it clear, moreover, that the male-female opposition also concretely underlies the distinction between parallel and cross cousins. Even in areas with terminologies of address of the generation type, there are as a rule special terms for cross cousins, i.e. of descendants of a brother and a sister.

To complete the picture, I should also mention the general occurrence of dualistic features of a sociological as well as of a mythological and ritual nature. As obvious sociological examples I could refer to the widely occurring marriages by sister exchange — not rarely the only condition for the otherwise strictly informal way of concluding marriages, and therefore highly suggestive of the elementary nature of the structural processes involved — and to the classical moiety systems on the Melanesian islands proper.

These notes as such would already suffice to contradict Lévi-Strauss' view of Melanesia and New Guinea as regions of rather complex systems of kinship and marriage. I would maintain, furthermore, that the relative absence of institutionalized preferential and/or prescriptive marriage systems are a particularly clear indication of the ambiguity and misleading effect of the occurrence of this basically empirical notion in Lévi-Strauss' definition of "elementary structures". It contradicts another and much more fundamental assumption underlying the same definition, i.e. that cross-cousin marriages have to be considered as a structural tendency rather than a formal institution. The correctness of the latter assumption would indeed seem to be borne out by the Melanesian and New Guinea facts. These, I recall, are suggestive of a general structural situation favourable to the development of cross-cousin marriages, which in individual cases have indeed been reported to occur. This development process is very much hampered, however, by opposed influences of external factors, such as extremely difficult living conditions "due to the unfavourable natural environment, but a cultural factor is at work as well. Tense situations exert

a harmful influence on interpersonal and inter-group relations in many Papuan societies. In little groups, conflicts have serious consequences. The influence of sorcery accentuates the instability of the community, the tendency to group fission, and the preference for living in small, scattered units" (Van der Leeden, 1960, p. 139). In my opinion, the "indications that in New Guinea the social structure is mainly realized along the lines of interpersonal genealogical relationships" (p. 138) would also have to be viewed against this background.

The combined influence of these restrictive factors, cultural as well as extracultural, also calls up the image of "structural looseness", for which Melanesia and New Guinea have become generally known in the anthropological literature. It will be clear by now, I hope, that it would be incorrect to attribute this to a general lack of organization. It is the result of the interplay between the different levels of the structural process. To study this interplay, we would have to combine the analysis of phenomena on the level of "elementary structures" with that of cultural and extracultural factors which influence these elementary tendencies. It would thus become possible to see how these tendencies have been bent, so to speak, to meet the rather restrictive demands of these external factors on the general system. This would be a useful counter-balance indeed to the concept of "structural looseness" with which Melanesian and New Guinea types of social organization have sometimes rather narrowly been characterized.

In conclusion a summary may be given of the principal points of this essay. A structuralist debate is going on between anthropologists with a "French love of logical order" and others with a "British love of empirical detail". These quotations, taken from Leach, have been seen as the main theme of a diagram of binary oppositions (Table 1), which has the aim of illustrating the various positions in this debate. From a general point of view, however, this model remains a fiction. One does not need to be a utopian to maintain that the misunderstandings between the opponents in the debate can be bridged, neither of them being wholly right nor wholly wrong, but apparently only partly right *and* partly wrong. It would help, for a start, if representatives of both categories (of Table 1) became more aware of the different levels of structural abstraction. Even distinguished structuralists such as Leach and Lévi-Strauss have in this regard not always been consistent. Leach, it has been shown, mixes up the abstract and concretely empirical implications of the structural model of asymmetrical systems. This

incidentally makes it rather hard to class him as belonging to either category A or category B of the diagram. Lévi-Strauss too follows ambiguous ways of reasoning and misled Needham by defining "elementary structures of kinship" (and how elementary these are!) by using the essentially empirical notion of "preferential" and/or "prescriptive" marriages. Even if it is justifiable to turn these notions into basic structuralist concepts, it would still have to be considered as one of a whole complex of "elementary features", which together characterize particular systems as "elementary structures". As a consequence, and wholly in line with the fundamental implications of Lévi-Strauss' own theory of social structure, "elementary structures" may also occur in regions with ill-developed cross-cousin marriage organizations but exhibiting all or most other features characteristic of these structures.

It should on the other hand also be emphasized that both viewpoints have led to important complementary, *and not contradictory* conclusions, drawn at different levels of abstraction, and concerning different aspects of the same structural processes. The example of New Guinea (and Melanesia) has shown the urgency, I hope, of the combination of research projects of both category A and category B type, to keep to the symbolism of Table 1. It may convince the anthropologists with a category A complex that regions such as New Guinea should not be characterized only on the basis of cultural variation and particular social processes, but also on that of generally occurring similarities of an elementary structural nature.

Under these circumstances, structuralists of category B would on the other hand also profit from the activities of their colleagues in category A. Once more taking Lévi-Strauss' views as a point of reference, I would first of all like to repeat that he is at present probably too involved in the process of working and writing out his general structural theory to worry about relatively isolated details such as the applicability of his definition of "elementary structures" to areas such as Melanesia and New Guinea. However, another generation of anthropologists with category B type of interests should be well aware of the extreme implications and the formalism of his sociological views, and in particular of the pitfalls of his distinction between "elementary" and "complex" structures. Somewhere in *Les structures élémentaires* he admittedly considers "complex structures" as resulting from the combination of "elementary structures" (1949, p. 575). The distinction is therefore not a radical one, as would also be apparent from another statement, taken from a more recent publication, i.e. that "the notions

of 'elementary structures' and of 'complex structures' are purely heuristic — they provide a tool for investigation — and that they cannot be used alone to define a system" (1966b, p. 18). Nevertheless, his actual use of these notions contradicts this and reveals him as a prisoner of his own dialectic thinking. It could eventually lead to an unjustified shift in their meaning, i.e. "complex structures" gradually becoming associated with "structural mobility" and even with "structural disintegration".

It may in conclusion be agreed that the inquiry into the characteristics of particular societies and cultures makes up an essential task of anthropologists, irrespective of methodological differences. These characteristics are as much the result of unique socio-cultural functions and processes at a concrete empirical level, as of principles at work on elementary levels of human thought and action. Weighing these in the balance therefore remains the leading motive of all structuralist research.

A. C. VAN DER LEEDEN

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