THE RELATION
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ISSUES IN COMPLEXITY
AND SCALE

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The text of an inaugural lecture given before the University of Cambridge, 14th October 1994, by the William Wyse Professor of Social Anthropology.
There was a moment at a meeting in 1914 when Sir James Frazer raised not one but two gaits of laughter. His listeners could not have been more distinguished. From Cambridge they included the Disney Professor of Archaeology (Professor Ridgeway), Dr Duncoworth whose name is familiar to Biological Anthropology, and Des Haddon and Rivers who can be claimed for the Museum (of Archaeology & Anthropology) and for Social Anthropology.

Following a Royal Commission on university education, the gathering had come to deliberate practical measures “for the organisation of anthropological teaching”. One speaker noted that what Oxford needed “is more system”. The indispensability of the subject to the intelligence and enlightenment of administrators was not in doubt. It would put colonial officers into touch with the real world — accurate knowledge of the customs and ideas of non-Europeans throwing light on their own painfully acquired empirical understandings. Well, as we know, the European war interrupted many plans, though Oxford did in the end get its system. Indeed Meyet Fortes brought some of it with him when he came from there to Cambridge in 1950.

People present then preparing to make representations to the Prime Minister, Asquith, must have thought they were at an epoch-making moment. As far as the advancement of knowledge is concerned, though, epochs probably get made in other ways. One was, conceivably, foreshadowed in Frazer’s joke. (I should warn you that is both a bad joke and frequently retold.)

1 Conceptions, Abstract and Concrete

Frazer’s joke was about the difference between ‘savage customs’ and ‘civilised law’. An administrator investigating the customs in his district “found that they were extremely odious and disagreeable to his mind, and he abolished them all at once. [Laughter.] The natives came to him shortly afterwards and said, ‘Amongst the rules that you have abolished is the rule that we may not marry our sisters; does the Government wish us to marry our sisters?’” [Great laughter].

Remark the conjunction between rules of conduct in the abstract and a rule made concrete through reference to kins. It suggests to me a potent if concealed connection between the connecting of disparate customs and laws and a rule about connections between persons. Possibly the laughter responded to that clinching concreteness. But before I say why there might be any interest in this, let alone epoch-making qualities, let me summon another situation altogether.

Imagine yourself set down in an actual court of civilised law, the year 1993 and the venue the Supreme Court of Justice in California. A woman had contracted with a couple to carry their genetic child for them, with the aid of in vitro fertilisation and embryo transfer. However, relations deteriorated to the point of the couple seeking a pre-birth declaration that they were the legal parents, to which the pregnant woman responded by a counter-claim. The Supreme Court found in favour of the couple, and laid stress or proactive intent. The judge argued: “But for [the couple’s] act-on-intent, the child would not exist...”, quoting the view of a commentator.

The mental concept of the child is a controlling factor of its creation, and the originators of that concept merit full credit as conceivers (my emphasis).

He means the conceivers of the mental concept, valuable in itself as fixing in “the initiating parents of a child”, a sense of their obligations. But this was also a quite dreadful pun. What are we to do with the unspoken conjunction between the (abstract) conception of an idea and the (concrete) conception of a child?
If the two senses of 'conception' are embedded in the English language, there are similar terms of double resonance — generate, reproduce, create. Another set clusters round the idea of connection — affinity, kinship, relative. I see no more of course than that the idiomatic possibilities of resonance are there. The cultural potential may invite one to imagine, as I have not done, connections have not necessarily spelled out. But we do have to hand a well-documented example of an explicit transfer of meanings from this same field. Think how recently 'gender' has so infiltrated in its current feminist usage. We can date that creative moment precisely. Before the early 1970s, in Fowler's terms, it was a grammatical term only, other senses being either a jocularity or a blunder; these days we do not think twice when gender refers to the social classification of male and female persons. Sexual difference in turn has acquired some of the connotations of grammatical inflection: the social and cultural properties of one sex appearing as a correlative of the other.

We might be content to take these as metaphorical extensions or analogies. Many seem to give some shape or sense of materiality to a thought, or intellectualise an experience or bodily condition. An anthropologist would ask why this or that particular conjunction of terms.

What intrigues me is the consistent parallel, the repeated echo, between intellectual propagation and procreation, sex, between knowledge and kinship. These metaphors and analogies are following a particular path. Gillian Beer points to one such path when she notes Herschel's astronomer's vision of the planetary system: what was formerly mere resemblance between bodies in space became perceived as 'a true family likeness; they are bound up in one chain ... in one web of mutual relation'. Darwin goes further: he gives the idea of family a genetic actuality when descent becomes 'the hidden bond of connexion which naturalists have sought under the term of the Natural System'. I would only add that in this culture the act of conceptualisation is seemingly caught up in a similar matrix. Thoughts are conceived as children are; kinfolk are bound together by the idea of their relationship. One may even be the offspring of a thought — as in the Californian case, where intent becomes relational: "intent joins people." If these are puns and conjunctions in the first instance allowed by the English language, and the way it creates verbal connections, then they must also be allowed by English kinship in the way it sets up connections between persons.

I refer to 'English' — that is, English language-speaking or Euro-American — kinship as a modern phenomenon. Although both senses of conceive seem to have been there from the 1300s, other connections appear much later. Affinity seems to have been a relationship by marriage or an alliance between consociates before it became in the sixteenth century a term for structural resemblance or causal connection. Conversely, connection itself, which appears in the seventeenth century, seems to have referred to the joining of words and ideas by logic before it referred to the joining of persons through marriage or (more rarely) consanguinity. The same holds for the term 'relation'.

Relation, already in English a combination of Latin roots, variously a narrative, reference back to something, or comparison, became in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries applied to connections via kinship. The burst of knowledge that we associate with the new sciences was presumably also refashioning the way people represented their relations to one another. From the example of gender, one can only guess at the creative appropriations there may have been. And I say that in order to comment on knowledge-making in the twentieth century.
I am going to suppose that it was a creative appropriation of The Relation, at once the abstract construct and the concrete person, that lay behind some of the dramatic development of anthropology in the middle years of this century. But let me introduce that sideways.

II Kinds of Connections

Of course it is a disconcerting fact that one can find relations home and nowhere. Example St James's Park and the cassowaries. Cassowaries are large, flightless birds from Papua New Guinea and South East Asia. In his essay of 1690 John Locke refers to two on display in St James's Park. The philosopher wanted to illustrate the logical circumstance where a relation could be perceived clearly though the precise nature of the entities so connected might be in doubt. His concrete example was this strange bird, its enigmatic identity contrasting with the clearly perceived relationship between the pair; they were dam and chick. These birds can be somewhat of an enigma in their home country too. The Karam people of Papua New Guinea do not classify it with other birds at all. Here, too, a relation is evident. For the cassowary must be treated with the respect due to kin (they are like men say, their sisters or cross cousins). The Karam ethnologist, Sae Maenje, introduced a further dimension. Saeen insisted on specifying the source of his knowledge in particular locales, for that came to him through a relationship. His father had died when he was small; he knew things because he had walked round with his mother who had shown him.

So out of these connections I could weave a story about connections: the seventeenth century Englishman seizing on the relationship between cassowary parent and child as a concrete example of an abstract problem in human understanding, alongside the twentieth century Papua New Guinean thinking of his knowledge of cassowaries in the abstract as an outcome of a most concrete relation with his own parents. I could add connections. The Karam ethnographer was Ralph Bulmer, one of many Cambridge students who have worked in Melanesia, including Papua New Guinea, as undergraduate when Fortes arrived and supervised by Jack Goody at the much missed Bun Shop.

This is primarily a narrational connection, to introduce the way I propose to refer to the work of the [Cambridge] Department of Social Anthropology and the wider community of anthropologists in this university. Many are present here. I shall recognise their presence by sparring their names. — Though several of you, and not just anthropologists, will recognise your ideas in what I say, as will my Manchester colleagues. — The names you will hear from now on are all of former anthropologists at Cambridge, some staff, some research students. That way, I can claim a goodly portion of the profession! And if I restrict illustration to Melanesia, it will be to invite you to scale it up to almost any part of the world. But while anyone can weave ingenious narratives, anthropologists do not pursue connections simply in order to be ingenious. They route them in specific ways.

Social anthropologists route connections through persons. They attend to the relations of logic; of cause and effect, of class and category, that people make between things; it also means that they attend to the relations of social life, to the roles and behaviour, through which people connect themselves to one another. And habitually they bring these two domains of knowledge together, as when they talk about the relation between culture and society.

This is the legacy of the ‘organisation’ of anthropological knowledge for which the meeting in 1914 wished but could not see. It rests on new techniques for analysing relationships.
and distinguished British Social Anthropology from its American and continental counterparts.

Rooting relations through persons became the substance of anthropological empiricism. Whether the relations were intellectual or social, made in fantasy or acted out in daily life, their source in people’s interactions was made significant. Anthropologists stopped talking about savages and their customs, W.H.R. Rivers at St Johns, and his Trinity pupil A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, had set the agenda for another project: how to understand the reality of social life in terms of its own internal ordering, namely as ‘social organisation’. And the enunciation of rules was understood as the moment at which people became articulate about relationships. Rules about whom to marry, to whom to show respect, about rights over resources comprised a virtual model of society. For the anthropologist could make connections between the rules, build up a picture (say) about how residence, claims to land, and respect for chiefs fitted together. ‘Systems’ did not just mean the methodical collation of facts, but something closer to Darwin’s imagery of descent: a system was a working model demonstrating how parts of social life fitted together and had an effect on one another.

And with their penicillin for the concrete, anthropologists identified their systematic descriptions of social organisation with the regulatory functions of the rules to which people adhered; ‘social order’ became simultaneously the description of society and the perceived means of its cohesion.

There was a double emphasis, then, on relations known to the observer as principles of social organisation and relations observed as interactions between persons. The islanders of Melanesia did not specify who was marriageable but where couples should reside, the most punctilious conjugal contracts being on the island of Dobu where couples annually alternated residence. Social structure inhered in relationships relevant to people’s acts and intentions. This concrete location of structure in people’s actions puzzled continental observers of the British scene, but it gave British Social Anthropology one significant edge. The model could be enacted over and again in fieldwork. The tradition of fieldwork meant that anthropologists learnt about systems by entering into relations with those whose social life they were studying. Like Sarm, the apprentice gained knowledge in the course of interaction. This disposition was amplified where kinship was at issue.

In his 1953 inaugural lecture, Meyer Fortes argued that “[m]oral systems exist only as a part of man’s social life; and this is as real and material a part of nature as his body and brain ... This makes it reasonable to suppose that human society exhibits regularities consistent with those found in the rest of nature”. He validates the point: “If we consider only the discovery and elucidation of classificatory kinship systems it is enough to prove this”, Fortes thus moves from moral systems to nature to kinship, and to these shifts in scale adds the elucidation of organisational principles as evidence that anthropology could organise itself. In his view, anthropology was not yet a discipline at the time of the first world war. There was a field of enquiry but no theory: “a definite organisation of anthropological studies” had indeed been required. But he did not mean quite what the 1914 meeting had in mind. The discipline could not have been organised until its theories were, and these were theories about the foundations of human organisation. “[O]ne of our principal aims,” he declares. “is to discover how morals, beliefs and values are shaped by social relations and in turn regulate social relations.”

But why should evidence for regularity come from kinship systems? Fortes evokes an anthropological ancestor who had seen principles of social ordering in people’s classification of relations (that is, kin relations). The field of kinship emerged as a system in its own right, the recognition of a network of relationships which presupposed people’s perception of relations
between relations. — The father of a father or the daughter of a sister. — Yet kin taxonomies initially led to an obsession with categories or classes. There was a time when 'marriages' were seen as the key to everything, a move that failed through too literal an attempt to read laws and regulations into kin terms, as though there were a direct congruence between them. What Fortes and his colleagues did was to make an attempt of scale explicit.

Out of the idea that in the classification of relatives one could find wider social principles came a more general, and utterly simple, proposition: persons are classifiable by their relations to one another. And one could study these with a view to extracting diverse knowledge — political, economic, religious or whatever. Taking up kin relations as a system was an impetus for describing social systems of all kinds. In short, social relations had become an object of knowledge. Social relations may be abstractions, wrote Fortes, but 'in order to be at the disposal of those who engage in them, [they] must become discernible, objectified ... bodied forth in material objects and places, in words, acts, ideas [and] rules.' British Social Anthropology remained closely tied to the conviction that at the heart of systems were persons' dealings with one another, the systems they created for themselves being second-order manifestations of their primary human ability to make relationships. This introduces the idea that ways of reckoning kin connections acknowledge solutions already in a sense existing. The kind of 'recognition' implied in the elucidation of kinship led some to stress its ideological role in relation to other enduring social realities. This was the thrust of Edmund Leach's quartet with taking kinship too seriously. A kinship diagram does not represent a whole society; Kinship, he argued, cannot be considered without reference to its political, demographic or economic implications. To focus on explicit norms of kinship behavour may overlook the realities of political or economic power for which the rhetoric of kinship is a gloss. What remains still at issue is the assumption that anthropological knowledge attends to relations between relations; but kinship must be related to other areas of social life.

Anthropologists hardly invented the idea of second-order modelling or of ideology. Nonetheless, kinship studies gave them a concrete tool for conceiving the complexity of social organisation in these terms. They were dealing with a double ordering of relations: indigenous models of kinship as a second-order classification of ties established through blood and marriage, and their own models of social relations that enabled them to debate the structuring role of kinship systems in society at large.

Rivers had devised what he called a genealogical method for collecting kin terms because he supposed that pre-literates people such as Melanesians apprehended abstract ideas via concrete facts: establish the (concrete) personal relationship and then ask the (abstract) kin term. Fortes transformed the scale of this strategy. For him, in even the simplest societies, relations of kinship are at once a concrete vehicle for conceiving of a social order and an abstract articulation of the relational quality of all social existence. People demarcate the differences in scale through diverse distinctions. Distinctions between kinds of kin may thus distinguish different orderings of social life. Scale is my term, not Fortes's.

III With and Without Scale

Scale has been a headache for anthropology. If anthropology routes its knowledge through persons, the individual person appears to have its own scale, a 'small' entity by comparison with everything we know about society. Anthropological interest
in interpersonal relations seems side-tracked to dealing with 'small scale' societies. We think we know by contrast what complex ones are like — indirect communication via technologies of information transfer; persons dealing with others on anonymous, transient bases; open-ended in all directions. So for anthropologists to focus on kinship only seems to underline the point. For in complex societies, so understood, kinship occupies a domain in social life regarded as minimal in so far as the whole.

To make matters worse, many noniterate peoples appear to see persons even where the anthropologist would not. And kinship may be claimed for relations between entities that English-speakers conceive as fancily improbable. Papua New Guinea provides notorious examples, as Gregory Bateson 4 found in Iatmul in the 1930s where human beings are simply one manifestation of clan persons also manifested as every conceivable entity in the environment. The tuber, yam, for instance. Reo Fortune reported the same from Dobu. 5 Yams have personal names, give birth, respond to speech, walk about at night. As Stephen Gudeman 6 commented fifty years later, this makes agriculture an activity carried out not in relation to 'nature' but in relation to other human-like beings. Now this should make us think again about scale, and about complexity for that matter.

Dobuans locate their own agency in a world of agents, human and inhuman; indeed, in the same way as persons have to be spurred into action, so does the growth and generation of plants, often through magic, for growth is not an autonomous process. 7 And their conceptions of time, Gudeman says, are not linear. In the beginning everything was related to everything else, and it is in this past which has to be brought back again. "Far from providing a foundation or base for the social order, the economy... is an enactment which refers to other social acts," 8 an exemplary recurrence, 9 reifying what already exists in order to make it appear again — the kinship-based lineage and its persons, human and yam. Forms must be repeated. Husbands and wives keep their yam seed apart in order to conserve its separate lineage identities.

Dobuans take the person as a measure of all things. Personifications have, we might say, a holographic effect, that is, one can encounter 'persons' in all forms of life. As a consequence, there is nothing either large-scale or small-scale about the person. One can have small or large yams or important and unimportant events, but the person as such has no scale. Rather, Dobu personifications can take any scale, appear as any order of phenomena. Dobuans are not confused about the difference between yams and humans; the point is that lineage persons can take the body 10 of either kind of being.

Something not dissimilar is there in English ideas about knowledge. Like the person in Dobu, The Relation, itself neither large or small, can cross scales. It does so by virtue of two properties. They are found in both the abstract concept and the concrete kinsperson.

IV Holographic and Complex Phenomena

I want to understand the creative energy 11 released by the way knowledge was being organised in the middle years of this century — how with hindsight we might see the burst of anthropological activity from the Cambridge School. Perhaps in providing a counterpart to the organisation of knowledge in people's organisation of relations among themselves, the construct relation also introduced scale to special effect. The concept of relation can be applied to any order of connection; this is its first property. It is holographic in the sense of being an example of the field it occupies, every part
containing information about the whole and information about the whole being enfolded in each part. It is a holographic effect to imagine one can make connections anywhere. For the relation models phenomena in such a way as to produce instances of itself. We could call it a self-similar construct, a figure whose organising power is not affected by scale. At whatever level or order, the demonstration of a relationship, whether through resemblance, cause and effect or contiguity, reinforces the fact that through relational practices—classification, analysis, comparison—relations can be demonstrated. It works above all as a model for the kind of secular knowledge ushered in with the seventeenth or eighteenth century conviction that the world (nature) is open to scrutiny. For relations are produced through the very activity of understanding when that understanding has to be produced from within, that is, when things in the world can only be compared with other things on the same earthly plane.

If one's heuristic world is society, relations are demonstrable across any order of event or rule, domain, institution, behaviour. You could look "within" society and find economic and political structures or relations between religious and legal values. Based on his own fieldwork in West Africa, Fortes pursued the insight within the domains of kinship, uncovering people's distinctions between the political and domestic aspects of kin relations. The effect was to show that kinship is not just a familial phenomenon, but contains within itself the kinds of demarcations English-speakers make between (say) public and private spheres.

The relation has a second property: it requires other elements to complete it—relations between what? This makes its connecting functions complex, for the relation always summons entities other than itself. Again, this is true whether these entities are pre-existing (the relation is 'between' them) or are brought into existence by the relationship and thus exist 'within' it. — When one does not only see relations between things but things as relations. This is formally evident in the very perception of relationships as a matter of making connections explicit. We may call the relation an organising figure with the second-order capacity to organise either the similar or dissimilar. Parent and child are similar insofar as they are defined by their reciprocal relation, dissimilar insofar as they are defined by different criteria. (English-speakers can look at anyone and see a child; they cannot look at anyone and see a parent.) The relation as a model of complex phenomena, then, has the power to bring dissimilar orders or levels of knowledge together while conserving their difference. In Fortes's analysis, the distinct identity of the domestic and politico-jural domains was crucial to their relationship. Moreover, the politico-jural relationships of kinship were on a different scale from familial kinship. A homely parallel is the way English-speakers commonly talk of 'a relation' between individual and society: the relation brings together phenomena of quite different scales. A counter-example makes the point. Mary Bouquet, reflecting on Portuguese perplexities over British anthropological theorising on kinship, notes that there is in Portuguese "no separation, such as the English might make, between the [private] person and [public] ... conventions." One cannot in Portuguese, it would seem, contrast persons and system, and therefore cannot relate them, or derive one from the other. As a consequence, the personal genealogy could not be used to collect abstract information.

The English relation as kinsperson also has holographic and complex features. And here we see how knowledge enters the very definitions of kinship. First, one may cut off kin by saying they are not relatives. Then again, anyone who counts may be included, immediate family, in-laws, distant cousins. But what is holographic is that each
usage summons the fields; to call someone a relation implies discrimination between all those possibly connected and those whom one chooses to recognise. — "I would hardly call them relatives?" - Repeated each time is the distinction between what is given and what is open to choice, importing ambiguity to the very term relation itself. People may even say they are uncertain how to apply the term in all cases.

Second, relations are always people related through some other criterion. To hear an English-speaker call someone a 'relation' tells you there is some other reason for the connection than simply calling them that: he is a relative by marriage or she a relative through a unit. If knowledge consists in making explicit a field of connections that already exist, so is connecting kin an open-ended and complex matter. Certain social relations (marriage, tracing ties through consanguinity) form the foundation for others and, beneath it all, ideas about the role of biology (nature), in procession is taken to be the reason for there being kin relationships at all.48

What happens when we bring these two properties (holography and complexity) together, when we consider the facility of The Relation both to slip across scales and keep their distinctiveness? In late twentieth-century parlance, our little continent starts looking like a self-organising device.

Self-organising has been used to describe certain non-linear effects — not a holistic or functional interpretation of 'organisation' but a model that accounts both for the persistence of patterns and the capacity of systems, organic, social, intellectual, to take off into quite new paths. Evolutionary pathways are of course of great interest to our colleagues in Biological Anthropology,49 though I have actually cued the phrase self-organisation from the archaeologists.50 Their concern is with the irreversible outcomes of factors that could have taken many routes — like so many counterfactuals — in their case of outcomes running simultaneously along several quite different temporal and spatial scales. You have to account for the outcome of recent, millennial and geological change all at once. But anthropologists could also borrow the concept from the sociology of science where 'complexity' has acquired quasi-disciplinary status, whose own precedents are claimed to lie in thermodynamics and mathematics, as well as in ecology and biology.51

This is beyond my expertise. It is no beyond my interest, however. If the concept of self-organisation proved of any use to anthropology, we would find that the very notion of 'organisation' had taken off on a new path. Consider one of the new idioms of propagation; the subject matter is knowledge, the resort to biological idiom specifically a prescriptive one, the image a kind of stem, a rhizome. This growth 'assumes' (I am quoting) diverse forms, branches in all directions, and forms bulbs and tubers. It has different principles of connection and there being kin relationships at all.52

If systems — ecological social or whatever — can appear self-organising, so too may our cognitive tools. I suggest The Relation is already there in anthropology as an epistemological device that can work in the same way.

In bringing together the two disparate senses of relation, between ideas, between persons, I have followed the English convention that depicts ideas as abstract and persons as concrete.
V. Retaining Detail and Avoiding Overload

Why should this be of any current interest? I could give several answers. The one I have chosen for this occasion is of course exactitude.

We could certainly note that while The Relation as an intellectual construct could possibly be claimed as a self-organising device in the new sense, it also served the old regime of systematisation just as well. Clearly the concept has staying power. But is there any forward durability to those rather particular mid-century kinship studies that were so important for anthropology in his country and so central to the work being done at Cambridge? There is, but it does not necessarily look like them.

Take the relationship between the abstract and the concrete, whose modern formulations Stanley Tambiah reminds us came in the seventeenth century. Those kinship systems from Melanesia or West Africa invite us to ask what English-speakers make into abstractions, into objects of contemplation. For they tell of elsewhere, where it is persons or relations which are already in the world, there in the abstract, which have to be

made concrete, that is, have to be given body, made to appear. But English-speakers imagine a world of knowledge-making where the concrete is already given in nature, so when scientific knowledge is made concrete it is embodied in technology which by definition "works" in the natural world. It tends to be system and organisation that are contemplated in the abstract. To make them appear one has to make them explicit. This kind of second-ordering leads to certain excesses. It also overlooks certain unremarked features of the "English" world, namely the concrete embodiment of organisation in social relations.

Now those earlier studies were carried forward in a challenging way by Jack Goody. I refer to his work on codifications of knowledge that can be transmitted independently of persons, and on technological innovations some of which affect the disposition of kin, others the disposition of knowledge. He may not have wanted to make that connection, but we might wish to now. It is not only in the search for clinching answers that kinship and knowledge seem to body each other forth. Think again about the Californian surrogacy case.

The means by which we know a child's parents traditionally differentiated mother from father. The mother was known through birth, the father by his relation with the mother. Reproductive technology rearranges these relations and creates new criteria. Here, genetic connection might establish the father's parenthood but it did not solve the question of which woman was the mother; the decision was based on a mental concept: who intended to be parent. If technology was assisting conception (the processes of reproduction and procreation), then the law was assisting conceptualisation (what was to count as kinship and relationship). It does not matter that this is a case in far-off California; the consequences for kinship come from a more general application of new knowledges. Statements such as the following are beginning to sound familiar: "While computer and information technologies are bringing about a regime of
technosociality ... biotechnologies are giving rise to biosociality, a new order for the production of life, nature and the body through biologically based technological interventions". Note that biotechnology requires that the relational bases of parenthood be made explicit in ways once never necessary.

Technology, along with material culture, always had a presence in the Faculty Museum at Cambridge. Now, no-one surveying the teaching of Social Anthropology in British universities today could fail to be struck by the extent to which it has reappeared on the agenda. Indeed, with diffusion being given renewed vigour in discussions about globalisation, it sometimes feels that we are closer to the beginning of the century than to the middle of it. Current interest in technology, however, has come out of its relational potential. The person is seen to have technological as well as organic or social accoutrements or props.

For this is not the beginning of the century but the end, and these interests are rooted through those middle years. Present-day concerns with material culture/technology revive questions about social relation. Indeed it is intriguing to see colleagues from sister disciplines — and I include sociology here — inserting artefacts into social relations with the status of actors. These are more than metaphorical borrowings; they are ways of recasting relations to include the inhuman with the human. The problem of excess comes when technology is regarded as enabling, as a prosthesis that enhances personal performance, and when persons become obliged to demonstrate they have been enhanced.

The very term enhancement implies we are bound to want it, and this is where things begin to get out of hand. Thinking once more of the meeting in 1914, one wonders if anthropologists and administrators would recognise themselves now. They might find a common enemy less in ignorance than in what I call, post-enterprise, the culture of enhancement.

The late twentieth-century culture of enhancement is devoted to making everything explicit. We are all implicated, for it imitates best scholarly practice. But it promotes the illusion that effects should be aims. There is a good case for saying that aims should be explicit. That is what they are: overt goals for organisation. But what gets identified as an aim? Scholars do not imagine that one can have methods and protocols for producing intellectual epochs. Such epochs are effects, outcomes; indeed, effects can become silly when turned into aims. The story can be told against anthropology. My distinguished predecessor, Ernst Gellner, scorns the pretensions of cultural relativism. Of course he is right. A sense of relativism may emerge from the anthropologist's investment in relations, and from taking those relations across cultures. And the effect can be stunning: one becomes aware of the positioning of knowledges in relation to one another. But that revelation works best as the outcome of substantive interests focussed elsewhere — on understanding data by content not just by context. To try to enhance the effect of comparison, to make relativism an aim, produces some of the excesses to which Gellner has so eloquently objected. By analogy, the effect of work carried out in Cambridge may be stunning, may make it "one of the world's leading universities", but how can that be presented, as the format of strategic plans insists," as its mission? A second illusion of the culture of enhancement is to imagine that organisations work better when they are explicit. I borrow from the Vice-Chancellor's comments to Regent House on the 1993 Audit report on Cambridge, a point where, had such moments been recorded, it is conceivable that the congregation would have laughed in sympathy. This was the point at which he observed that the only thing the University was failed upon was failure to be explicit about procedures. "The highly effective implicit way in which Cambridge is organized does not fit well with many current philosophies, and it is sadly the case that much money, and much time, has now to be expended on
making more explicit its sense of purpose." The auditors could not see how it works! The problem is that what might have remained a passing perplexity becomes the basis of policy recommendations. The organisation must be there in the abstract — the university simply has to make it visible. But of course it cannot make explicit what works by being implicit. It has instead to double the abstractions — enhance the systematisation — and what is made visible or concrete tends to be that can be technologically embodied in memoranda or put on disk. Far from energising, such enhancement may divert energy from elsewhere. And it may fatally undervalue the organisation that is already concretely embodied in people's relations with one another.

This is the point at which to capitalise on my observations about the holographic and complex properties of The Relation. It has been argued that "the driving dynamic at the forefront of new scientific knowledge today is what could be described as a 'multi-type complexity'... not only is more than one scientific discipline involved in problem solutions but so too are different kinds of knowledge, both explicit and tacit, for example... (of the tacit) knowing" how to laterally connect ideas from other fields and disciplines." This comes from a talk, beyond Cambridge and anthropeg my altogether, given in Korea by a Director of a Centre for Research Policy in Australia. He points to research being published across disciplinary boundaries. One set of Australian figures suggest that 65% of research from physics and earth sciences departments were published "outside" these fields; psychology publications were spread across 49 disciplines. Some 800 research centres have mushroomed across the Australian university system.

What drives such creativity are new relations of knowledge production increasingly dependent on actor-to-actor exchanges. "Personal networks and immediate personal relations", I quote, "appear to be of crucial importance at the leading edge of new fields — which... emerge and dissolve through network relations rather as do 'self-organising systems'." And what drives the personal immediacy of such networking is uncodified knowledge — including knowledge about how to conduct relationships. "What matters in the 1990s", he said, "is the transfer of both the embodied technological knowledge — in machines, artefacts, and so on, plus the transfer of uncodified capability — in people's tacit knowledge both about the technologies and the social means by which they can be captured."

But one does not have to be talking about research centres and leading edge innovations. The hugely proliferated systems of information-production in which university scholars are caught these days is only made workable by interactions between social beings who maintain multiple connections between themselves through what they independently value as their relations. By virtue of these relations, people sustain a flow of knowledge, that is, select appropriate information, far greater than can ever get systematised. (The argument from commerce is that, in the face of too much information, it becomes more efficient to go to key persons.)

This is the real world of the late twentieth-century scholar. So, like organisation, knowledge has a second locus. It is not just made concrete in technology. It is also embedded in people's relations with one another, and may link persons just as kinship substance does, although one would not want to call them kinship networks. They may appear kinship-sized.

There is a chance that the present prestige of communications technology might make visible what was concealed by those conventions of scale that regarded the interpersonal as 'small-scale'. The conventions could not have been more wrong. Networks can take any scale — have the power to cross different organisational levels — precisely because each relation
invokes a field of embodied [social] knowledge about relationships. So perhaps such social relations will survive anyhow. After all, similar networks always existed alongside the disembodied apparatus found in libraries and in paradigms. And, as I remember Audrey Richards talking about the telephone which enabled Elrod "villagers" to keep up contact with distant kin, they would seem only facilitated by those electronic devices such as fax, xerox machine and personal computer. At the same time these artefacts are the very instruments of the speeding up of information acquisition and transfer that makes short-circuiting through interpersonal links a desperate necessity. But more than that, they are also instruments of the counter-productive activity of enhanced systematisation: And this is the juncture at which I have a little trouble with them.

Intellectual procrastination, relapses of creativity, introduces the question of where our energies go. One does wonder how as university scholars and administrators we have connived in an externally imposed ethos of management that is not just old-fashioned but at times antithetical to creativity. I do not mean that we should overturn the need to be accountable nor that we cannot improve the way we impart information to students. And, absolutely, I do not see any return to departmental styles as they were forty years ago. My question is, simply, from which kinds of activities should we draw our criteria of good practice, and by the same token invest in?

The systematisation of knowledge is one thing. Without the disembodied abstraction of information in books or papers, there could not be the same accumulation of insight or data. Moreover, camembert as institutional codification is, it has always been important as a democratic safeguard against elitism; those in power tend to cling to implicit practices, a good feminist point, to follow Henrietta Moore. It is an aid to transparency and open government, and my scepticism should not be taken as dismissal. Yet we understand too little of the creative processes that go into the production of knowledge. Abstract knowledge is an end-result, the effect of creative work, whether it took place in a laboratory or in the Lake District, the outcome of processes going on elsewhere and in other modes. A book may reproduce some of the creativity that went into its making when it generates ideas in the reader. That is the point: readers generate their own responses by everything brought to the reading — you don't (ordinarily) read a book by writing it over again. In short, output cannot be measured against input, for they involve activities of different scale.

Yet what we see is systematisation gone mad. And it has gone mad in the name of enhancing the system. A despairing chair of an academic board wrote to the Secretary of State for Education in 1993 that the director of his institution had in the course of a single year to provide information under the following rubrics: the Research Assessment; Exercise (URF), Research Performance Indicators for the Annual Survey of Publications (CVCP), Academic Audit (CVCP), Quality Assessment (HEFCE), Guidance for good practice in respect of quality assurance systems procedures (HEQCO), Review of the Academic Year (Flowers Report) (CVCP), and so forth, over and above strategic plans, operating statements and financial forecasts, not to mention Higher Education Funding Council circulars of which no fewer than 20 had been received by the May of that year. Think of the human activity at the xerox machine alone.

What has been observed of chaos graphs could as well be said of such exercises — disembodied but prosthetically enhanced by electronic technology.

I can summarise these points in an observation about scale. Person-to-person networks that succeed by replicating the conditions under which persons relate to one another, work, as relations do, holographically. Their power is that interpersonal relations can take any scale, be productive at any order of
encounter, whether in a small university department or across the globe. It is a mistake to think they can be measured by size. But they do demand time, energy and cultivation, and that is what is at stake. It would be an equal error to fail to acknowledge scale elsewhere. I would point to the significance of recognizing different scales of endeavour in fundamental creativity. The reproduction of knowledge is a complex, heterogeneous and non-linear process that involves concrete as well as abstract relations. And there can be no procedures for success; or rather, the procedures are not the success. This is where stated aims sometimes look silly. In human reproduction no-one ever reproduces themselves: they always see themselves in another form.36

There is some future profit, I think, in theorising The Relation that was such a key devise, and key figure, in anthropology’s interest in kinship. But those mid-century kinship studies cannot be turned into present aires: they are (in turn) for studying, not imitating. If they have produced concepts applicable to other areas of enquiry, we do not enhance their effect by striving to write the books over again.

Of eight articles in the most recent issue of the Royal Anthropological Institute’s journal,37 three — the authors from London, Israel, the States — caught my attention. They recapitulate some of my own themes. Adam Kuper voices a plea for generating debates that will have resonance beyond our immediate fields.38 Nurit Bird-David discusses social relations among a tiny forest-dwelling population in India, challenging how we might think of ‘face-to-face’ connections.39 Debora Battaglia comments on jokes told by migrant Trobriand Islanders in Papua New Guinea’s capital Port Moresby, though they were not comic like Frazer’s and do not bear re-telling.40 These were, however, jokes about the inappropriateness of enhancement — people were planning a yam competition but the quantity of the urban harvest would not of itself be an index

of creativity (her term is generativity) for the appropriate social relations were not in place.

The articles caught my attention for another reason: they are all by former research students at Cambridge. And there is a fourth, by a student of such a student,41 but I shall avoid any puns about issue. Let me just borrow from the idioms I have been making explicit. The point of course is to ask how else one might celebrate the generative power of a Department but in the generations of scholars it produces?
The text can be read with or without the notes. I have included these notes and references in recognition of the obvious fact that the connections one makes are at once one's own and not one's own at all.
The preceding judge speaks, with a general observation about legal questions raised by applications in reproductive technology before coming on to a particular case. When one woman gave birth to the genetic child of another, is she parenting, who is the child’s natural parent? In California law there can only be one natural mother, following earlier legislation which abolished the distinction between legitimacy and illegitimacy children.

8 At 783, see n. 5. The phrase ‘mentally conceiving’ and ‘informing’ parent were already in 18d-laws (eg. in George P. Smith, ‘The case of Baby M: the baby’s letter box’, in L. Oosthuizen (ed), Surrogacy Motherhood: Politics and Privacy, Bloomsburg: Indiana University Press, 1999, in which Frances Price early argued by abstention). The judge cited three commentators in all. Another had observed that the interfering parent are “the first cause” or “prime mover” of the procreative relationship; the third had argued that reproductive interference extends “affirmative intentionality” as to that “intentions that are voluntarily chosen...ought presumptively to determine legal parenthood’ (at 783, see n. 5). However, a dissenting opinion from the bench challenged the first case argument for its misleading evocation of intellectual property rights, and challenged the focus on the genetic rather than the biological carrying mother who was every bit as much a conscious agent of creating.

9 H.W. Fowler, A Dictionary of Modern English Usage (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957 edition). His citations in full is as follows: “to talk of persons or creatures of the masculine and feminine gender”, meaning of the male and female sex, is either “a sayown or is a blander” (p. 211, original italics). The grammatical term related to kinds or classes according to whether they were masculine, feminine, common or neuter in reference to persons, gender had the connotations of a kind or sort, as in the ‘general gender’, a common sort of people.

10 Ann Oakley (Sex, Gender and Society, London: Temple Smith, 1972, p. 160), crystallised the distinction between ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ as a distinction between biological difference and social classification. Much was being written around this on the biological and behavioural/sociological aspects of ‘sex differences’ without recourse to the term ‘gender’ (eg. G. The Development of Sex Differences edited by Eleanor Macmury (London: Tavistock, 1961) or Males and Females by Christine Hart (Pergamon 1972)). But ‘gender’ then moved into place so rapidly that Gilbert Herdt could write in 1994 (Introduction to his edited volume, Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History, New York: Zone Books) that the idea that sex was to remain as gender was to culture has been a canonical view for “more than fifty years” (p.51). His exploratory interest in a “third gender” (grammar goes from) only makes sense in reference to the gendering of persons.

11 Among other types of linkages, eg. an Anthony Ciddor (Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age, Oxford: Polity Press, 1991, p. 219) reminds us of the modern construction of reproduction as both biological and social continuity. James Bond’s Affiliates and Enemies (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990) deploys the double category of “affiliation” as both marital alliance and the values of”stratification and reproduction.


13 Ibid. p. 170.

14 The phrase is Janet Delgat’s (see n. 3). She points out how intent, a thought about what one would like to do or be, becomes constitutive “intent joins people more strongly than any contract case”. Biological potential may also be likened to a thought (to an idea or concept). When the British Parliament was debating the 1990 Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill prior to its enactment, the then Prime Minister, Lord Adames, introduced the term ‘conceptual’. A designation was needed for the early precursor of the embryo. This was part of a definitional debate: see Pat Spafford’s ‘The ultimate role of the pre-embryo’, forthcoming in Between Monsters, Mother Guidancists and Cyborgs: Feminist Perspectives on Science, Technology and Health Care, ed. N. Lykka). He added “the point about using the word ‘conceptual’ is that in that stage the fertilised egg is a concept of a new individual and not the individual. It is only when the blueprint has been achieved ... that one can say the embryo starts”. In other words, the concept is seen as a chonromatoid material in the process of being formed into an individual, which at that stage is partly notional (a concept). The remark is quoted by Sarah Franklin in Technologies of Procreation, Kinship and the Age of Antisonal Conception (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993) p. 110: she and the other authors of the book, Jennifer Edwards, Eric Hirsch and Frances P. Price, have provided much of the stimulating to my interest in this field.

15 In the dual sense of meeting soul(s) (becoming pregnant) and taking something into the mind (grappling an idea); only here is ‘concrete’ used more loosely to cover both conception of (a woman) and beginning (of a man).
16 - A usage that seems tenebrous became prevalent, in certain circles at least, in Jane Austen's time (see perhaps Hardner & Daniel Segal, Jane Austen and the Fiction of Culture, an Essay on the Narration of Social Realities, Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1990, p.33). They suggest that 'connection' meant the socially constructed and mutable (their phrasing) dimension of the kinship tie as opposed to its natural basis in blood. I note that like the Anglo-Saxon 'kin' before it, 'family' seems to have referred to the household before it became in the seventeenth century a term for an assemblage of items.

17 - To the extent that, when the substantive 'relation' is personalised, it denotes a kinship tie and nothing else (see e.g. Raymond Firth, Jane Hockett and Anthony Forgy, Families and their Relatives: Kinship in a Middle Class Sector of London: an Anthropological Study, 1969, pp 93-6).

18 - John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, London, 1960. The OED indicates that there were case-studies in St James' Park in 1611.

19 - Locke, ibid., p. 237 (New Edition, London: Ward, Lock & Co, no date). The illustration of alien connection had been preceded by a reference to human kinship. In talking about the way that the very act of comparison (bringing items into relationship) is a clarifying exercise, he argued that 'in computing two men, its reference to one common parent, it is very easy to frame the idea of brethren, without yet having the perfect idea of a man' (p. 236), before chapter XXV ('Of Relation'), he takes kin relationships as immediately accessible exemplars of logical relations. Thus he gives as examples of correlative terms obvious to everyone 'father and son, husband and wife' (p. 236).


21 - Bulmer approaches the 'uncanniness' taxonomic position of the flightless cassowary by several routes. His suggestion about sisters and cross-cousins (mother's brothers' or father's sisters' daughters, terminologically 'sisters' from a man's point of view) is that these figures offer a cultural metaphor for antithetical relationships of closeness and distance. Men are both close to and distant from wild cassowares; one cannot marry close human sisters, but one can marry distant (wild) ones. (See The Kalam Cassowary revisited, by Ken Preuvene in Man and a Half, Essays in Pacific Anthropology and Ethnography in Honour of Ralph Bulmer, edited by Andrew Prewsy, Auckland: The Polynesian Society, 1991, 1991 [see n. 22]) offered a further analogy, saying that the cassowary is also like a cross-cousin to the domestic pig (pigs and men together belong to the settlement by contrast with the forest).

22 - "My mother would tell me where she had accompanied my father, and point out each place" (in Saun Mijepit and Ralph Bulmer, Birds of my Kalam [Karam] country, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1977, p. 184).

23 - Ellison Mabbutt refers to this as the 'department pub' of the time ("Hans Broelmans gift a party", in Men and a Half [ibid.], Ralph Bulmer was subsequently founding Professor of Anthropology at the University of Papua New Guinea, Port-Moresby.

24 - I take 'note' from Gillian Gillmor, Between Culture and Fantasy: a New Guinea Highlands Mythology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) p.8, and her engagement of Gimi myth as rooted through Gimi ritual practice, that is, practices of audience structuring and in counterpoint to myth, that is, practices of audience structuring and in counterpoint to myth.

25 - In his inaugural lecture published in 1953, for example, (Social Anthropology at Cambridge since 1900, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 38) May Fairhew refers to culture and social organisation as two complementary frames of reference within which anthropology works.

26 - I take a liberty here: the meeting was primarily concerned with the organisation of anthropological teaching...


28 - Some discussion may be found in Marilyn Strathern, After Nature: English Kinship in the Late Twentieth Century, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. 121-23; cf. n. 56 below.

29 - W.H.R. Rivers opens his lectures on Kinship and Social Organisation, London: Constable, 1914, p.7, with the words: 'The aim of these lectures is to demonstrate the close connection which exists between methods of denoting relationship or kinship and forms of social organisation' (my emphasis). (The connection is one in question of causal determination.)

30 - In the same way as, for example, the notion of a 'corporate group' at once offers a formal description and indicates unity in action (see Meyer Fortes, Kinship and the Social Order: the Legacy of Lewis Henry Morgan, Chicago: Aldine 1969, p. 205).

31 - Fortes 1953, pp. 34-5 (no n.25).
domestic and political-jural domains (see below, p. 21). Writers sometimes have problems keeping the two terms, consensus and abstract, under control. Leach (Social Anthropology: A Natural Science of Society, the British Academy's Radcliffe-Brown Lecture for 1970, published in the Academy Proceedings vol LXIII of the same year) makes hay of Radcliffe-Brown's contradictory Usage.

45 - If there was a phrase that haunted my undergraduate learning years (1960-65) it was "Let us distinguish between...". In considering indigenous distinctions, institutional or conceptual (Brown 1969 pp.110, 118 etc.; see n. 30), one was considering the way people made different domains, realms, areas of life for themselves. Not all distinctions mobilised different scales or orders of events, but the capacity to make such distinctions was key evidence for when they did.


49 - Gudeman ibid., p. 132. He then proceeds to compare the ideas of the Papua New Guinea Dobu with those of the central African Bemba studied by Audrey Richards, where hierarchical values instead lead to figures (such as animal spirits) being interposed between human persons and the natural world.

50 - Gudeman ibid., p. 141. He calls gardening a reflexive construction, in that its actions are modelled on other actions. (For an echo compare my After Nature, p. 87, see n. 28.)

51 - Paul Connerton, How Societies Remember Cambridge: CUP, 1989 p. 65; above, 65; everyday life envisaged thus is passively "stream-lined through "a rhetoric of re-enactment". I take this opportunity to thank Paul Connerton for his several observations on my arguments.

52 - And so, too, many persons may appear 'within' persons; see Gillian Gilliver, "The Flute myth and the law of equivalence: origins of a principle of exchange", in Big Men and Great Men: Persuasions of Power in Melanesia eds. Maurice Godelier and Marilyn Strathern, Cambridge:
CUP, 1991), and Roy Wagner's comments in the chapter preceding ('The fractal person') which develops the concept of holophrasy in this context.

53 - On the significance of 'body' in this sense, as a 'support' for the person, see Maurice Leroi's Le Klame: Person and Myth in the Melaniean World, trans. by R.M. Oelof, Chicago: Chicago UP, 1979, ch. 2 & 3; also Deidre Battaglia, 'Projecting personhood in Melanesia: the distinctions of infant symbolism on Sabal Island', Man (N.S.), vol. 18, pp. 280-304.


55 - The paraphrase is after David Bohm; my use of holophrasy to the elucidation of cultural materials derives from Wagner, e.g. Symbols that Stand for Themselves, Chicago: Chicago UP, 1986.

56 - In the last chapter of The Order of Things (trans. 1970, London: Routledge), Michel Foucault addresses the deferring effects of knowledge that knows itself as final. We may see relations (in the sense used here) as an effect of just such a fiction that conceives of things as 'constraining' the principles of their existence within themselves' (p. 317). For a critique of twentieth-century exemplars from biology, see Evelyne Fox Keller, 'The language of reproductive autonomy' (1987, reprinted in Secrets of Life, Secrets of Death: Essays on Language, Gender, and Science, New York: Routledge 1992).

57 - E.g. Fortes, 1969, pp. 25, 72, 80, see n.30.

58 - Complexity in this sense illusions systems not just heterogeneous in composition but too enfolded in extent (as in Levi-Strauss's complex structures of kinship). 'The Darwinian world is always capable of further descriptive' (Boyd 1983, p. 55, emphasis omitted, see n.12).

59 - Connections 'within' may be seen as another example of connections 'between'; see Bertell Ollman's discussion of 'The philosophy of internal relations' (Alchemy. Man's Conception of Man in Capitalist Society, Cambridge: CUP, 1971). For quotes Latour, 'there is no term so absolute or so detached that it doesn't enclose relations and the perfect analysis of which doesn't lead to other things and even to everything else, so that one could say that relative terms mark expressly the configuration which they contain.' (Ollman, p. 21).

60 - Ollman, ibid, p. 27 on Man's attempt to distinguish two types of relations; in this usage 'things' and 'relations' correspond to what some symbolic anthropologists after Wagner, see n. 55) might wish to call figurative and literalconnections or macrocosmos and microcosmos.


62 - As someone interviewed by Raymond Firth and his team in North London said of her mother's father's daughter's wife's cousin and another of her son's husband's (R. Firth, J Hubert and A Fung, Families and Their Relations: Kinship in a Middle-Class Section of London, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1969, p. 97).

63 - A theme of the material I wrote up for Anecho Richards (Kinship at the Core: an Anthropology of Ethnic, a village in north-east Essex in the nineteenth-century, Cambridge: CUP, 1981). A quite different argument is put forward by C.C. Harris (Kinship, Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1990), namely that what we read as ambiguity is a function of the fact that 'kinship' simply does not work as a denoting term.


66 - E.g. Susan van der Leeuw, 'Social and natural aspects of degradation', paper prepared for 'Deasrailisation in a European context', a summer school organised by DG XII of the Commission of European Communities, Alicante, Spain, 1993, where society is referred to as a self- organising system of communication. I am grateful for permission to cite this unpublished paper. (For a biological anthropologist's comment on the 'extraordinary range of scales' -- from hundreds of millions of years to days and months -- across which accounts of human evolution may have to reverse, see Robert Foley, 'Causation and consequences in human evolution', JRAI (formerly Man) NS(30) 1-20, 1995, pp. 17-18.)


68 - Antonio Ecaizar ('Welcome to Cybersia': Notes on the Anthropology of 'Cyberculture', Current Anthropology, 35, pp 211-31, 1994) has brought this home, no doubt rather late in the day, to anthropology.

Press, 1987, as cited in Eccles 1994, ibid p.222, who refers to their work as offering a most thorough review to date of the pervasive character of self-organizing processes. David Harvey (The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change, Oxford: Blackwell, 1989, p. 43) reproduces a 1985 situation of features ascribed to "modernism" and "postmodernism" comprising "thematic" to "root". The identity with which the newly illuminating distinction between thesis and root has flowed across cultural analysis is a phenomenon in itself. One interesting treatment is Lilian Mikk; "National geographic: the rooting of peoples and the territorialization of national identity among scholars and refugees", Cultural Anthropology, 7, 1992, pp 24-44.

70 - "What goes without saying", in Adam Koper (ed), Conceptualizing Society, London: Routledge, 1992, p. 128 (emphasis removed). Stock is addressing congeners in creative theory; the core idea, he says, is that "most knowledge, especially the knowledge involved in everyday practice, does not take a linear,logico-sequential form but rather is organised into highly complex and integrated networks or mental models most elements of which are connected to each other in a great variety of ways" (p. 130).


72 - On the notion of density as a relational effect, that is, as the outcome of the devices, props and processes which sustain the character of things, see John Law, Organising Modernity, Oxford: Blackwell, 1996, p. 102.


75 - Both of the intended parents were "genetically" related to the child but the adoption was not sufficient to the "mother's" case. As a result of the hearing, the "father" (idenntly proven) was so to speak proven again as an initiating parent like the mother.

76 - Eccles, 1994, ibid p 214.

77 - In From Physics to Anthropology ... and Back Again: Prickly Pear Pamphlet No. 3, Cambridge, 1994, p 48, Simon Schaffer calls for a rejuvenated return to/from the spirit of fieldwork at the beginning of the century. It might inspire, he says, "the return of field techniques to our own institutions".

78 - Pruss Law, 1994, p. 3, see n 72. "We are all artist of arranges of bits and pieces ... without our props we would not be people-agents, but only "butch", emphasis removed.

79 - I refer to the works of Bruno Latour, John Law and colleagues. Though coming from a very different British background, Anthony Giddens has tackled ideas about sociology beyond the human agent in quite original ways.

80 - The phrase human and citizenship comes from Donna Haraway (see, for instance, her collected essays, Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature, London: Free Association Books, 1991) whose interest is in critique of actor-network theory and the sociology of science drawn on a field of feminist scholarship that remains mindful of social relations.


82 - Context remains one of anthropology's essential heuristic devices, but, when it is the locus of explicit cultural attention (as demonstratively evinced at the universal exhibition in Seville, Expo 82 [Perrey Harvey, Culture and context, the effects of visibility] in B. Dilley ed, Context and Interpretation, Oxford: Oxford U.P., forthcoming), it becomes increasingly problematic (also chapter 8 in Marilyn Strathern ed., Shifting Concepts: Transformations in Anthropological Knowledge, London: Routledge, in press).

83 - However, I would say that the trying to create a programme out of relativist insights can become the tyranny when Gellner instead finds absurdity in "relativism" for — among other things — not having any programme (Postmodernism, Reason and Religion, p. 97, see n 81). For a comment on objective views of relativism that imagine relativists in trying to describe the objectivist's world with their principles taken out, see Barbara Hermann-Smith, Consequences of Value: Alternative Perspectives for Critical Theory, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1988, ch 7.
The relationship.

84. I quote from the University of Cambridge's Strategic Plan, 196-4 to 1967-8.

85. From the case of the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Sir David Williams, to Regent House (The Regent House, 15 October 1993, p. 47, original emphasis). (Two audits in question were undertaken by the Academic Audit Unit of the former Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals, now the Quality Audit Division of the Higher Education Quality Council.) "One of the ironies of the present situation is that we have to present the world and successes of the University to the outside world in terms which satisfactorily explain how we meet the value system underlying the present management philosophy and linguistic idiosyncrasies, yet without misleading or denying the highly productive way in which the University is actually organized": he adds that although the Higher Education Funding Council has been at pains to stress: "it is not a planning council, "we are increasingly called upon to: codify and publish our planning strategies" (p. 47-8).

86. Appear_what he calls incorporating (as opposed to inscribing) practices, Constitution (1989, p.10, see s. 51) points out that their backgrounded, and thus implied, is a dangerous feature of the practice themselves, which cannot be well accommodated without a dictation of the conscious attention that it itself needs. It might need after all (see s. 51) original emphasis. On the difference between proprietary knowledge, codified and public, and tacit knowledge "implicit in the professional and institutional culture of a field", see Michael Gibbons et al., The New Production of Knowledge: the Dynamics of Science and Research in Contemporary Societies, London: Sage, 1994, p. 25. The authors suggest that the "sensitivity of tacit over proprietary knowledge brings the culture of technically advanced firms much closer to academic culture then is usually assumed" (p. 26). Among the authors, Helga Nowotny has a dual interest in knowledge systems and in the phenomena of self-organization.

90. Efficiency may well be related to keeping the interactions informal. A conversation with Stephen Hill was very illuminating in this context.


92. The telephone network here works as a substitute for and enhancer of face-to-face contact, by contrast with the Arnhem view that only face to face contact can be constitutive of community — their leaders have banned horse telephone since 1909 (Diana Ziemann Ulfhede, "The Arnhem and the telephone: resistance and accommodation", In Consuming Technologies: Media and Information in Domestic Spaces, edited by Roger Silverstone and Eric Hirsch, London: Routledge, 1992).

93. On the speed of acquisition in the context of capital's constant need to increase profit (the self-employment of capital), I note BRETON, 1963, ch. 8, see s. 54. Harvey (1985, p. 281, see s. 60) comments that Brandt's one-sidedly exaggerates the effects of speed and technological flows in his image of society as a crisis of explanatory logic (the triumph of effect over cause), and points to counterbalancing tendencies towards greater rigidity. But if people react to perceptions of flux and speed by trying to enhance conservatism, an — Harvey's example — by leasing to an ever greater extent against the, Brandt's point about effect is made, I have argued elsewhere, in connection with late-twentieth-century Euro-American ideas about the family, that sometimes there seems more of both 'tradition' and 'change' around.

94. Taking us back to older understandings of 'organisation' as a regulatory mechanism that can be codified in rules, protocols and procedures. Of course 'old' and 'new' forms co-exist side by side (Slater Wright, ed. The Anthropology of Organizations, London: Routledge, 1994, p. 2 [Introduction]). The contrast she draws between a 'strengthened Fordist' and a 'flexible' company culture echoes that of the two modes of knowledge organisation is commercial enterprises identified in The New Production of Knowledge, see a. 89. Mission statements, thus, would seem to belong to both.

95. I am thinking particularly of quality control mechanisms in higher education and the kinds of representations of 'quality output' they require. They often presume the intransigence of a direct, iconic relationship or coherence between quality and what can be 'seen' as output. Yet think of the reverse case: interpreting evidence often presumes an indirect relationship between the 'visible data and what produced it. Disney Professor of Archaeology's inaugural lecture was on just this topic (Cohn Reinhard, Towards an Archaeology of Mind, Cambridge: CUP, 1983). For
an anthropological example of misplaced congruence, see n. 9. In any case, the iconic ‘matching’ of performance and productivity is hypothesized in these management practices that recognize the obsolescence of creativity. I was struck by the description one senior manager gave me of the prevalent ethos which influenced his own office organization: small working groups [and see n. 88], with people on fixed-time, egalitarian in manner, following largely undefined conventions and cultivating interpersonal relations in non-specific ways that need have no direct bearing on the job in hand. This could have described a small academic department of a couple of dozens ago! The (inefficiency of the whole, relational person goes against the de-skilling and de-professionalizing tendencies in these quality control mechanisms that work by including separately measurable components of productivity. For one, well established, rendering of ‘management’ [by term] versus benchesmen [term used by the networkers], see Jeanne Edwards’ account of housing aid workers in Anthropology of Organizations, p. 199 (see n. 94)

96 – Exposing and unravelling the power relations embedded in traditional structures is one of feminism’s projects (but also see Hermione Moore’s critique in Feminism and Anthropology, Oxford: Polity Press, 1988).

97 – “A threshold you prise somewhat” was how Ongka, a former big man of the Massawari people in the MIH region, Papua New Guinea, described some people’s first having an overhead plane (see Ongka: A Self-Account by a New Guinea Big Man, edited by Andrew Strathern, Duckworth, 1979).

98 – I am very grateful to Professor Michael Kaufmann, Director of the Courtauld Institute of Art, for this information.

99 – Quoted by Kathleen Riddick, ‘Stranded histories: feminist allegories of artificial life’, Research in Philosophy & Technology, 15: 163-82. Thanks to Sarah Franklin for drawing this to my attention.

100 – I needed this idea in order to comprehend various Melanesian practices (see The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia, Los Angeles & Berkeley: California University Press, 1998). The insistence on matching, on congruence between performance and output, on being able to ‘see’ quality [see n. 95], emphasizes immediate effect in ways that may innovate people’s orientations towards the future. Imagine an education system which encouraged teachers and learners to emphasize their own performance at the expense of what can be handed on to others. For the problem is that, in real life, the learner does not necessarily match output, express, give evidence for the latter. While there are, for instance, contexts in which it is crucial that students replicate information in the mode in which it is received, the reproducibility of knowledge requires the student to process information in ways that work, correctly, for his or her times and circumstances. What is best learnt may not necessarily “look like” what is best taught.


103 – B Bird-David “Sociality and immediacy: or, past and present conversations on board”, Man Vol. 29, pp. 583-603.

104 – D Battella “Reloading reality: some practical problems with objects as property”, Man Vol. 29, pp. 631-644. Jokes were constantly told against the Baus, members of the lowest of the Trobriand ranked sub-class (they enjoyed a reputation for powerful sorcery). The sponsor of this particular yarn competition was a Bau man; the size of the harvest yield was to be reexamined and prizes awarded. Baus were claiming typical Trobriand creativity (productivity), for they could not in the end lamentate it. They were out in the right relationship with members of other Trobriand subclasses: “Baus patterns of conduct, combined with their reputation for powers, amounted in advance any cultural activity of Baus as a model only of virtue... [The threat at the opposite of generative collective action was always invisibly foregrounded by the Bau presence on any scene representing... generativity]” (p. 3).

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