Cooking, Cuisine and Class

A Study in Comparative Sociology

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For a list of other books by Jack Goody see p. 253
Intentions and remarks

This essay started life as an inaugural lecture, at least in contemplation. That is to say, while I had little intention of delivering such a discourse, I did have a general audience in mind, one that would not only want to hear the details of a distant culture in which I had worked over many years, but would wish to know something of the general trends of recent work, including my own, and how these discussions took their place in the wider field of social anthropology and the social sciences. I took as my topic one that was receiving attention from a variety of scholars and approaches, that of food, mainly the cooked but also the raw. The subject linked up with the broad contrast between the domestic economies of Europe and Asia on the one hand and Africa on the other, which I had previously tried to examine in terms of the relationships between family systems and modes of production, as well as between oral and literate cultures, that is, in terms of modes of communication. I have tried to present this contrast in as direct a way as I can, perhaps over-simply. Today so much writing in the humanities and social sciences consists in unnecessary obfuscation that is often a way of disguising intellectual problems rather than illuminating them. Subtlety is not a function of obscurity.

The question behind the present essay can be stated in a few words. Why are traditional African cultures largely lacking a differentiated cuisine, even in great states with differentiated political structures? What are the conditions for the emergence of a high and a low cuisine? These questions are neither frivolous nor yet of purely historical interest. The answer bears upon the differences between African and Eurasian societies today and upon the strategies to be used to change or to preserve them.

The form this essay takes can be seen as an expression of anthropological experience, both my own and that of others. It begins with a discussion of general approaches to the subject, those that have dominated the area of interest and have shaped my own enquiry. Here I argue for the contextualisation of social theory, which needs to be linked more closely with the methods and the ends of the enquiry; the potential contribution of apparently alternative approaches has to be assessed in
Cooking, cuisine and class

terms of the analysis in hand. Then I look at cooking in two African societies in which I myself have lived and worked, since my understanding of those cultures provides the point of departure for the empirical questioning. It was dissatisfaction with one formal account of the 'African cuisine' that led me to realise the need, first, to analyse cooking in the context of the total process of production, preparation and consumption of food, and, secondly, to set this analysis within a comparative perspective. Contextualisation is especially important in looking at the African cuisine comparatively, because it raises the question of hierarchical, regional and temporal variations. But, comparative analysis apart, these considerations are relevant even in understanding the meaning of a mode of cooking to the people concerned, since at one level its characterisation involves 'placing' oneself in relation to others, as the English do in referring to 'mother's cooking', to 'Yorkshire recipes' and to the 'English cuisine'; for the actor's context itself is not limited to the set of internal relations of a particular culture, even where that culture can be considered as relatively undifferentiated. The smaller the group, the greater the boundary problems and the less one can ignore the cuisine of one's neighbours. In any case, even in Africa, ingredients have been imported and exported for centuries, especially low-volume, high-priced items like salt, spices and medicines of various kinds. And over the last hundred years the food of that continent has influenced and been influenced by the modes of consumption in industrialised countries. From Ghana cocoa is imported into Europe, America and the Soviet Union; in turn French cube sugar, Portuguese sardines, Italian tomato paste, American corn, are virtually 'staples' of the Ghanaian urban diet, while Yugoslav tractors, Bulgarian wine, Chinese bicycles and Polish conserves have been prominent elements in the recent repertoire of imported consumer goods.

After looking at the wider context of the consumption in northern Ghana, I turn for comparison and contrast to some major Eurasian societies. Here, I narrow down the enquiry to one aspect of the phase of consumption, that is, the cuisine itself. In doing so I try to bring out the relevance of the nature of the system of stratification, its link with the productive processes and the role of the means of communication in formulating and formalising a cuisine. The central contrast is between a social system, even a state (a hierarchic one), with minimal cultural differentiation, and one comprising a hierarchy of estates, castes or classes, with differences in styles of life of such significance as to produce sub-cultures.

In the two following chapters I outline the development of the industrial production of food that now bears so forcefully upon the Third World both as producers of the raw materials and as receivers of the finished product. In advanced countries the industrial process and its related modes of communication, such as mass newspapers, radio and, especially, television, have almost erased many of the external boundaries defining areas of food consumption, as well as rubbing out some of the internal differences between classes and regions. The large-scale importation of foreign produce enables the masses of today to enjoy the luxuries of yesterday's rich. These products are the fruits of the labour of individuals located in poorer countries, and the internal differences in the living standards of the inhabitants of industrial countries have decreased, at least in the initial phases, at the expense of the growth of the gap in consumption between regions and nations, and within those of the Third World. This gap is now beginning to make its appearance even in northern Ghana. For here too the local rich are shifting to international standards while the bulk of the people live at a quite different level of existence, certainly more adequate than in pre-colonial times but far removed from that of their better-off compatriots. Up to the present such differences have not greatly affected the daily meal, even though the social environment of eating varies very greatly.

I look at these contemporary problems before returning to the general question of the differences in cuisine in pre-colonial times, by which I mean the period covering the expansion of Europe over the last five hundred years. The progression is important. For I do not see anthropology as concerned only with the pre-literate or with pre-industrial societies, either by design or by default. For me it is the comparative study of socio-cultural systems in which Nottingham is as relevant as the Nuer. Even confining the field to 'other cultures', we would still no longer be dealing with pre-industrial societies when we are carrying out observational studies. Communities of human beings are not like groups of monkeys; there are no societies in the world today that remain uninfluenced by the world system, that is, by the industrial economy and by the political developments of colonial empires and the independent or quasi-independent nations that succeeded them. If we want to observe or experience the 'simpler societies', we have to study the Third World, whether we like it or not. A scholar who undertakes a field study, even in the most remote area and among the most exotic peoples, needs to acquire some knowledge of how the local relationships articulate with the wider network if he is to understand his data.

On the other hand, in order to understand pre-industrial societies, as distinct from (though the distinction is never absolute) the non-industrial segments of the larger world that we now tend to observe, it is becoming increasingly necessary to turn to evidence of a different kind. You cannot do fieldwork in the past; and 'oral history' needs to be weighed against
Cooking, cuisine and class

Intentsions and remarks

study of other cultures is bolstered by various practical considerations, such as the myopia that often accompanies an enquiry into one's own kind, a myopia that derives from self-identification, the constraints of one's linguistic concepts, and the reluctance to undertake intensive fieldwork ('we know it already'). But such talk may also conceal a plain love of the exotic, the different, even though the exploration of the other is in some sense an exploration of self, cultural and individual, through an investigation of alternative possibilities, the functional equivalents in human living; in another way, of course, it can also be a flight from the realities into which one was born and raised. Whatever gains this particular process of understanding may provide, and useful as many find the technique of participant observation, neither the limitation to one set of societies nor to one set of techniques seems to be an adequate way of defining a specific field of study. This is especially true of today's world. The logical extension of these limitations would mean modes of enquiry different in essence (not just in particulars) for each nation or for each continent. For we Europeans are what Africans see as 'other cultures', their exotic societies; we are (from one viewpoint) their 'primitives', their 'ethnics'. Nor does an attachment to the technique of intensive research, in a world of increasing differentiation, offer any solution in the long term. The problem is not one for anthropology alone but for all those fields of study (theology, history, literature and the like) whose roots lay in the period when the world system was marked by the intellectual as well as the politico-economic domination of the West. The rationale for sociology's field of interest is equally in doubt, a function of its western past and its indecisive present.

It may be that the separation of sociology from anthropology will continue to exist in those western countries where the pre-industrial components were either totally annihilated (as was effectively the case with hunters and simple agriculturalists in America and Australia) or else thoroughly incorporated at a much earlier period (as with 'peasants' in England and the Low Countries). It seems unlikely that this dissociation of academic sensibility will become established in Africa or Asia, and it seems unhealthy that it should exist at all. While we can profit from specialisation, there can hardly be different logoi (logics) for societies of the same (human) species - as if we had different psychologies or anatomies for blacks and for whites, or for developed and underdeveloped, for men and for women.

It is true that another possible line of differentiation exists, based not upon the 'relativity' of the 'other cultures' view but upon the 'absolute' character of long-term development. In the USSR, anthropology (or rather ethnology) was defined as the study of pre-capitalist social formations. And it is a view, phrased in terms of pre-industrial societies,
Cooking, cuisine and class

that is commonly held elsewhere. But a purely 'historical' definition is unlikely to find much favour with those who see themselves primarily as social scientists involved in a process of enquiry based upon fieldwork, a process that includes the observation, analysis and explanation of behaviour. Even those who see the study of past societies as an essential part of anthropo-sociology would be unhappy at the idea of the subject as a kind of generalising, comparative history (whether this be 'ethnohistory' or 'graphohistory'), without any direct observational component. In some areas of enquiry the concentration on secondary, written sources (what the historian refers to as 'primary sources' or the sociologist 'questionnaires') is a poor substitute for watching, participating and asking. Moreover this 'ethnological' experience (with the linguistic and participant supplements that turn it into an 'ethnological' one) is valuable in making judgements even about quite different societies, in getting some ideas of the 'social system', of the nature of 'social relations', quite apart from any more specific advantages it may have.

The ability to place abstract concepts in a particular empirical context, to offer a non-western perspective, to formulate an initial hypothesis linking this with that – these are useful (if not essential) attributes to bring to any study with wider comparative implications. At the same time such studies cannot be restricted to a specific range of 'dead' societies because some problems inevitably point in another direction and require the collection of data in the field. For a comparative sociology we need to consider both the present and the past, and to elaborate appropriate hypotheses, concepts and techniques for their study. These must obviously vary according to the problem in hand, so that we cannot be satisfied with any approach that attempts to limit the range of the problem once technique at our disposal. We must reject definitions that predetermine the scope of the analysis by placing societies in simplistic binary categories, whether of European and 'other' cultures, savage and advanced, simple and complex, traditional and modern, industrial and pre-industrial, anthropological and sociological. And we must reject a definition that prevents us from combining intensive, extensive, historical and comparative techniques of research in the investigation of a single problem.

With these preliminary remarks in mind I want briefly to review some aspects of the sociology of cooking as a way of sketching certain developments that have taken place in social anthropology over the last half-century, developments that in Britain are sometimes seen in terms of a movement from the functionalism of Malinowski through to the structuralism (1) (or functional-structuralism) of Radcliffe-Brown to the structuralism (2) of Lévi-Strauss.

Intentions and remarks

Let us briefly consider how we should view these particular lexemes, these 'isms', these single words offered as descriptions of approaches to the social sciences and which are taken by some as denoting 'theories'. The prospectus for a recent journal on 'theory' in the social sciences expresses the founders' hopes to present the vital front of sociological theory, across the range of dialectical and critical sociologies, neo-Marxism and conflict theory, social phenomenology and ethnmethodology, linguistic sociology, historical sociology, structuralism, mathematical and positivist sociology, and the new departures that continually appear.

It is difficult to see these terms as designating 'theories' in the more usual sense in which this word is employed. We are dealing with general orientations (or even with topics of study) which require some more inclusive description than the word 'theory', so often used only for its prestigious associations. 'Approaches', perhaps, might be a more accurate designation, since we are not dealing with any testable assertions, nor even general paradigms, but rather with a variety of modes of attack which each have their gains and their costs but which rarely constitute analytic alternatives. Gellner's comment on functionalism is appropriate here: '...functionalism is only a theory in a very loose sense, of a formal rather than a substantive paradigm.' And again: 'the importance of functionalism lay not in its doctrine, which was quite unspecific in its failure to locate that mysterious mid-point, but in summarising and conveying a certain state of mind and research strategy - look for the way in which institutions reinforce each other and favour stability!' (Gellner 1974: 1166-7). At this level a new theory often takes the general shape of an earlier one. Gestalt theory appears in a different garb as systems theory; aspects of Marxist theory re-emerge once more in various forms of neo-Marxism; evolutionary theory goes out with structural-functionalism and comes back in the framework of comparative analysis. There is indeed a feeling of déjà-vu, a perception in the field of ideology (or theory) of the cycles that were distinguished by the philosopher Spengler and the historian Toynbee among the great civilisations, by the anthropologists Leach and Gluckman among the Kachin hills of Burma and the flood plains of the Zambesi, and by Fortes and others among humbler domestic groups throughout the world. The continuous creation of 'theories' implied in the prospectus displays some of the characteristics of a merry-go-round, defining 'new directions' more precisely than 'new achievements'.

Cycles are by definition non-cumulative, except in a purely quantitative sense. Are we right to observe a lack of theoretical progression? On the most inclusive level the answer is probably that little cumulative
advance can be perceived, only change, a revolving world of non-revolutionary movement. It is on a less general level that advances have been made. To take a restricted area, no one familiar with the development of the study of, say, kin groups, prescriptive marriage or the development cycle would deny that advances had been made over the past thirty years, whatever detailed criticism they may have of the present state of play. Such advances have been associated with individuals identified in their turn as functionalists or structuralists. But the relationship between the general 'theory' on the one hand and more substantive interest or specific hypothesis on the other is rarely clear; especially since a new approach is almost invariably stated (and if not stated, seen) in terms of its opposition to previous ones. That of course is understandable; a new path has to branch off an existing track, and by doing so proclaims its independence or its individuality.

The fact that one element in the emergence of new sociological theory consists of the statement of opposition to the present establishment, and that this process is often cyclical, 'repetitive' in Max Gluckman's characterisation of rebellions contrasted with revolutions (1955: 46), suggests a rather different function for such theory than the paradigmatic changes or gestalt shifts discussed by the historian of science Thomas Kuhn in his book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962). Instead of the revolutions of natural science, we find the rebellions of the social sciences. Rather than crystallising existing knowledge and offering a model for future experimental and intellectual work, such changes indicate a shift of emphasis between possibilities that lie permanently embedded in the analysis of sociological material, e.g. between the actor's or observer's point of view; between qualitative and quantitative methods; between synchronic and diachronic analysis, between the study of surface and deep structure, and so forth. In other words, these polemical shifts may serve to redirect research energy into neglected channels, but in very different ways from the paradigm shifts discussed by Kuhn (as indeed he himself recognises). For they affect 'normal science' in a highly generalised way; they act as signposts, often pointing out a vague direction, rather than serving as a constraining model, a map for new discoveries, a reformulation of past knowledge.

We could, then, easily reduce recent developments in social anthropology to an absurd caricature by thinking of three dominant paradigms as functionalist, structuralist and Marxist. Numerous qualifications would need to be made. There are after all structural-functionalists, post-structuralists, structural-Marxists, as well as 'Marxisant' functionalists and cultural materialists. But while Kuhn's notion of the predominant paradigm is hardly satisfactory for discussing the social sciences, one can point to modes of analysis and explanation that are influenced by these
State of play

The intention of this chapter is not to provide a synopsis of anthropological thought but to sketch out the kinds of attention that anthropologists have given to the study of 'food' over the years, partly as a guide to the general reader, partly to spell out the background to my own interest. After looking briefly at the contributions of nineteenth-century scholars I comment upon work done in the functionalist and structural-functional traditions of British anthropology. But it is the work of the structuralists, and particularly of Lévi-Strauss, that demands more detailed attention, since notions of the 'cooked' and the 'raw' play such a central part in his analysis; more generally the domain of cooking itself has been used to demonstrate the validity of an approach modelled on linguistic binarism.

THE PRECURSORS

In the nineteenth century anthropological interest in food centred largely upon questions of taboo, totemism, sacrifice and communion, that is, essentially on religious aspects of the process of consumption. Typical of this concern was the work of that famous Cambridge figure, Sir James Frazer (1854–1941), who was induced to write articles on taboo and totemism for the ninth edition of Encyclopedia Britannica when its distinguished editor, Robertson Smith, joined him at Trinity High Table after his career in Scotland had been cut short by the appearance of his notorious article under the heading 'Bible'. In 1907, following the successful publication of The Golden Bough in 1890, Frazer’s desire to produce more reliable evidence for his comparative purposes led him to issue a little pamphlet (based on an earlier document that had been privately circulated) which he entitled Questions on the Customs, Beliefs and Languages of Savages, and of which at least three editions were printed by Cambridge University Press. The section on Food begins with the questions ‘Do they eat everything edible? Or are certain foods forbidden?’ The catechism continues, though on a mundane level, until we reach section 138. ‘Is cannibalism practised? Do they eat their enemies or their friends?’ The theme has never lost its interest, especially for those studying the Highlands of New Guinea and for those with psychoanalytic inclinations.

Similar interests marked the work of Ernest Crawley (1869–1924) in The Mystic Rose (1902), a book that stressed the close relationship between sex and food. Crawley was mainly concerned with the religious aspects (and specifically the spiritual dangers) of sexual relations, symbolised by the Maiden–Mother, the Mystical Rose, whose figure ‘enshrines many elemental conceptions of man and woman’ (1927: ii, 261). He also includes a long section on Commensal Relations, which attempts to answer the question, put after the fashion of Plutarch, ‘Why, according to a very general custom, are husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, required to avoid each other in one or more ways, and why, in particular may they not eat together?’ The answer, of course, is framed in terms of the mystery of sex. While the organisation of the table clearly relates to the economy, to the polity and to the wider domestic domain, these activities held little interest for him. The processes of production and reproduction are neglected in favour of consumption, that is of food and sex, and interpreted largely in mystical, or at least ‘symbolic’ terms.

In 1929 and 1931, Crawley published two further, 'studies in social anthropology', the first of which was called Studies of Savages and Sex: a snappy title that bears a close kinship to that of Malinowski's famous volume The Sexual Life of Savages, also published in 1929. Two years later this volume was followed by Dress, Drinks, and Drums: Further Studies of Savages and Sex. In the case of both Crawley and Malinowski an important part of their discussion, with its emphasis on the taboos of sex, clearly derives from Freud's analysis of such prohibitions in Totem und Taboo (1913). That influential volume has been a continuing focus of interest in the work of Meyer Fortes (1959, 1961, 1967, 1974, 1980), which forms part of the important dialogue between anthropology, psychology, psychiatry and psychoanalysis.

Another favourite topic of these earlier discussions was sacrifice, the offering that feeds both the living and the dead (as well as the divine). The feeding of the departed is linked in very definite ways with the domestic relationships existing among the living, and especially, as Cicero argued long ago, with the obligation of the heir to make offerings to those from whom he has inherited (Goody 1962). Outside the sphere of ancestor worship anthropological enquiry has been directed to examining the links between the offering of food to supernatural agencies and other aspects of social organisation. The solidary effects on the community, the moral dimension of the distribution of sacred food, often in a sacrificial but at least in a ritual context, lay at the heart of the well-known study of sacrifice by Robertson Smith (1846–94):
Cooking, cuisine and class

The ethical significance which thus appertains to the sacrificial meal, viewed as a social act, received particular emphasis from certain ancient customs and traditions connected with eating and drinking. According to antique ideas those who eat and drink together are by this very act tied to one another by a bond of friendship and mutual obligation. Hence when we find that in ancient religions all the ordinary functions of worship are summed up in the sacrificial meal, and that the expression of the fact that all those who share the meal are brethren, and that all the duties of friendship and brotherhood are implicitly acknowledged in their common act. By admitting man to his table the god admits his friendship; but this favour is extended to no man in his mere private capacity; he is received as one of a community, to eat and drink along with his fellows, and in the same measure as the act of worship cements the bond between him and his god, it cements also the bond between him and his brethren in the common faith. (1899: 247-8)

Commensalism was seen as the great promoter of solidarity, of community; the communion of brethren establishes and reinforces common ties.

The attention of these early anthropologists, many of whom were continuously wrestling with their own religious practices and beliefs, was directed towards the ritual and supernatural aspects of consumption. Taboos, totemism, sacrifice - these were the rejects from Christianity and other world religions which nevertheless bore traces of just such practices in times past. All were found distributed across a wide range of human societies and turned up in a varied form even in their own cultures of nineteenth-century Europe. It was a rational explanation of these surviving elements in the light of the evolution of social institutions that such authors were searching for.

Their contribution was far from negligible, despite the rejection of the 'evolution', of 'pseudo-history', of the 'comparative method', by their immediate successors. For they isolated certain widespread aspects of human behaviour that set the terms of much later enquiry. That enquiry took a radically different turn with the development of a tradition of field observation which involved the immersion of the observer in a particular society and hence encouraged the search for relations between different aspects of the total culture. The isolates became recontextualised, ritual acts and beliefs being set within the wider social processes. It was the doctrinal aspect of this research activity that became known as functionalism.

THE FUNCTIONAL APPROACH

Robertson Smith's insistence upon the role of commensalism in establishing and maintaining social relations came very close to one of the central themes pursued by those writers who had been influenced on the theoretical side by the approach of French sociology (and particularly by the work of Emile Durkheim) and on the methodological side by the new stress on the direct collection of data and the experiencing of other cultures by living in them, in other words by participant fieldwork. The most important figures in these early developments were A.R. Radcliffe-Brown (1881–1955) and Bronislaw Malinowski (1884–1942).

Radcliffe-Brown's discussion closely follows the approach of Robertson Smith and Durkheim. He emphasises that among the Andaman Islanders of the Bay of Bengal 'by far the most important social activity is the getting of food' (1922: 227), and it is around food, he says, that 'the social sentiments are most frequently called into action'. These sentiments are implanted in man by a series of initiation ceremonies which at the same time impress upon him his dependence on society. During these performances the growing boy or girl has to give up certain relished foods, a prohibition (or taboo) from which they are later released in the course of the rites. By this means the 'social value' of food is brought home to the individual at his most impressionable age, a form of moral education that is carried out not by one person but 'by the whole society backed by the whole force of tradition'.

Stress is placed on the social function of food in bringing out sentiments that help to socialise an individual as a member of his community. The function is the maintenance of the system; the explanation is social rather than purely religious. While a measure of circularity is present in the argument, it is not without merits, especially when we shift from the macrofunctional (societal) level of the statements we have drawn from Radcliffe-Brown to the microfunctional analyses that he, but mainly the fieldworkers who followed, carried out on the institutional level. For example, some elements of his analysis of the prohibitions on food in the initiation ceremonies have a wider significance. In various parts of the world, whether in first-fruit ceremonies or in entrance rites of the kind we find in the Bagre performances of the LoDagaa of northern Ghana, rituals appear to treat items of food, at times consciously, in a way very similar to that described above. But one continuing limitation in this analysis lay in the emphasis on the 'symbolic' aspects of food, partly because of the neglect of other levels of meaning and partly because of uncertainty about the status of the symbolic relationship.

When anthropologists working in the 'functionalist' tradition discussed the 'symbolism of cooked food', as Audrey Richards did in *Land, Labour and Diet in Northern Rhodesia* (1939: 127), they referred to the way a transaction in food acted as an indicator of social relations. Of a
particular feature of marriage transfers, she writes: 'the giving and receiving of cooked food has become symbolic of the legal or economic relationship which entails it' (p. 127); and again, 'the preparation of porridge...is the woman's most usual way of expressing the correct kinship sentiment towards her different male relatives' [my italics]. As Radcliffe-Brown had maintained, in this way one can explain less explicable forms of human behaviour, see the logic in the illogical, the reason behind the non-rational: 'Customs that seem at first sight meaningless or ridiculous have been shown to fulfil important functions in the social economy' (1922: 330). Strange habits were now explored not in terms of the evolution of human beliefs about this world and the next, but in terms of the part they played in a particular society.

The claim has been made that such 'objectivist' forms of explanation, which are the currency of much sociology, overlook the meaning of the actions to the actor and apply a scheme of interpretation of his actions that falls outside his awareness, even potentially. To him his action may be anything but 'meaningless or ridiculous'.

For some types of enquiry the object has some force if it means that the actor's exegesis of his actions is neither sought nor considered. In the present case, however, the object has less validity since actors are often aware of the advantages of solidarity, in some form or other of that elusive notion. For example, 'asbiya', often translated as 'solidarity', is seen by Ibn Khaldun as a critical concept among the Bedouin (Issawi 1950: 10) where it certainly has more than observer status.

In any case, the consciousness of the actor cannot be the sole source of explanatory concepts or ideas in the social sciences. Dumont has rightly stressed that the social anthropologist looks at his data both 'from within and from without' (1966: 22), a 'positive-cum-subjective' view that he sees 'as lying at the core of serious social anthropology, and particularly in its British form'. The comment is just, since this approach derives from the combination of sociological intent with fieldwork methods; the former inclines towards the elucidation of 'real' or 'objective' significance, while the practice of participant observation, carried out in the language of the actors, tends to stress 'perceived' or 'subjective' meaning.

The more serious criticisms of functional explanations, and indeed structural ones as well, are threefold. First, there is the Popperian problem of validation and acceptability; secondly, there is the ease with which relations and sentiments are posited: thus symbols express social structure, eating together expresses a relationship; thirdly, there is the absence both of a historical dimension and of a non-functional (or dysfunctional) component. Function is seen as giving meaning to the 'meaningless', the preparation of food 'symbolises' a juridical or economic relationship. These claims for functional analysis play on the multiple uses of 'meaning', 'symbol', 'expression', and the enquiry itself gains little by the introduction of such broad-ranging terms. On the contrary, it loses concreteness and, to some extent, credibility. The attribution of kinship sentiments follows from the observation, description or analysis of a woman preparing porridge and engaging in a range of other activities; the characterisation of the jural relationship emerges from the giving of food and similar acts, verbal and non-verbal. The existence of the relations and sentiments is thereby posited on the basis of a series of observed acts. Such notions therefore constitute generalising but not explanatory ones. Nor can they be regarded as symbolised or expressed in actual behaviour except as the result of tautological assumptions. One cannot invest a set of functional principles or structural forms with powers of this kind simply on the basis of evidence derived from their supposed manifestations. That would be to commit, once again, the error of misplaced concreteness.

It would be a mistake to see these anthropologists as only interested in the expressive significance of food. Malinowski himself was more concerned with the processes of production than with the symbolic aspects of food, and his work had a direct bearing upon some of the outstanding contributions to this field made by Audrey Richards. Her first essay on the subject was entitled Hunger and Work in a Savage Tribe (1932) and its subtitle ran 'A functional study of nutrition among the Southern Bantu'. In his introduction Malinowski describes the book as 'the first collection of facts on the cultural aspects of food and eating' (p. ix), and as laying 'the foundations for a sociological theory of nutrition' (p.x). Eating was placed in direct competition with sex. 'Nutrition as a biological process', declared Richards, 'is more fundamental than sex.' The individual man can exist without sexual gratification, but he must inevitably die without food.' But sex came second, not only for physiological reasons. It is 'necessarily a disruptive force in any human society, and one which must be checked and regulated to some extent if the community is to survive', while 'man's food-seeking activities not only necessitate co-operation but definitely foster it'. This declaration closely echoed Malinowski's feeling that, because of Freud, 'modern psychology has been too much dominated by an exclusive, one-sided and unsound interest in sex', an interest which he himself had done much to stimulate in The Sexual Life of Savages (1929) and other works.

Richards goes even further, at least in retrospect, for she later regarded her first monograph as an attempt 'to prove that hunger was the chief determinant of human relationships, initially within the family, but later in wider social groups, the village, age-grade, or political states' (1939: ix).

Being first concerned with problems of nutrition, Richards's primary
Cooking, cuisine and class

orientation was towards the process of consumption itself, to the nutritional system which is parallel to the reproductive system; it has its primary extension from the household to kin group, with an emphasis on sharing and distribution, and its secondary extension to the wider food-producing system of clan or tribe (1932: 213). The physiological basis of human life was clearly an appropriate area for the application of the kind of biologically based functionalism, the satisfaction of human needs, characteristic of some of Malinowski's general statements. Audrey Richards herself had been trained in the natural sciences and later worked with a nutritionist, E.M. Widdowson, in a project which formed part of a wider scheme, promoted by a special committee of the International African Institute, appointed in 1934 'to consider the possibilities of co-operation between anthropologists and nutrition experts in the study of native diet' (1937: 3). But even in this earlier study Richards was not concerned with nutrition alone. While it concentrated on consumption, as a self-declared functional analysis it touched upon the social and psychological context of food, its production, preparation and consumption, and the way these processes were linked to the life-cycle, to interpersonal relationships and to the structure of social groups as well as the problem of 'food as a symbol'. She concluded by stressing the 'sociological significance of food' and the value of 'the study of eating customs' (1932: 214). Subsequently the programme of the International African Institute enabled her to follow up this analysis based on secondary sources with her notable field study on the Bemba entitled Land, Labour and Diet in Northern Rhodesia (1939), which placed patterns of consumption more firmly and more specifically in the context of the whole process of productive activity. The author had been asked to write 'a short book... describing in the case of one particular tribe, the different sociological factors which directly determined the food supply' (1939: ix). So, continuing to tread the borderline between the biological and social sciences, she wrote a monograph, no longer short, describing 'the whole economic life of the tribe', the value of which lay in 'its comprehensive treatment of the subject'. The range and detail of the material is a remarkable feature of this outstanding study in which we find not only description but analysis of a number of topics, such as the organisation of labour in relation to notions of time. Throughout there is an insistence on the 'sociological aspects' of diet and the 'cultural determinants of food and feeding' (p. 405).

Richards acknowledges the influence of Malinowski's magisterial study of productive processes in the Trobriands, Coral Gardens and their Magic (2 vols., 1935). More directly related to our enquiry was the other work arising from the same survey on nutrition in Africa, especially the article by Meyer and Sonia Forster entitled 'Food in the domestic economy of the Tallensi' (1936), which also dealt with aspects of production and consumption at the domestic level. In his more extensive studies of the Tallensi of northern Ghana, Forster took up themes from earlier anthropologists, those I have called 'the precursors'. Although he examined the processes of production and consumption especially in relation to domestic organisation, he paid particular attention to those aspects of the consumption of food that were clearly connected with religion and with the wider distribution of food outside the household, especially in sacrifice, which he treated as an important mechanism of group solidarity from various angles. The role of the production and distribution of food in the domestic group, the significance of sacrifice for humanity as well as divinity, the meaning of prohibitions on the consumption of food, especially the flesh of domestic animals (totem and taboo) – these have remained important themes in the work of anthropologists in many societies, particularly those characterised by the simpler forms of agriculture.

THE STRUCTURAL APPROACH

In recent years the analysis of cooking has been associated with the name of Claude Lévi-Strauss, whose work displays a very different focus of interest. Lévi-Strauss has declared himself to be an inconstant disciple of Durkheim, much influenced by Mauss. But whereas these authors were mainly looking for links between modes of thought and other features of the social system, Lévi-Strauss, who worked initially within the same tradition, attempts to look at the structure of human thought itself, even of the human mind, l'esprit humain. In simple terms, he attempts to look inwards to the 'deep structure' rather than sideways to other aspects of the surface structure. Or rather, he looks at other aspects in order to elicit homologous patterns, which are then referred to the deep structure. Phrased in this way the undertaking is not so very different from the approach of those scholars who attempt to find common 'principles' or 'themes' in the analysis of a particular society (though the nature of the elements differs). While the main thrust of the functional approach was to examine the interlocking nature of social institutions, its practitioners were often engaged in this very search for underlying principles. However the structural approach of Lévi-Strauss came to assume an affinity, a homology, perhaps an identity between the deep structures of the human mind and of human society, or at least between the unconscious attitudes of individuals and the social structure of a particular group, which even implies at times a causal relationship. To achieve this aim, Lévi-Strauss himself considers a number of problems to do with universals and with the evolution of humanity, problems that
Cooking, cuisine and class

had attracted the nineteenth-century precursors but which had been largely set aside in favour of the intensive observational studies that have absorbed the interests of most anthropologists in recent decades. These concerns are clear in Lévi-Strauss's first major work, which took an established theme, that of 'incest', used a comparative and even developmental framework but applied a set of abstracting and formalising analytic procedures to the material. While he made his mark in the analysis of the institutions that surround sex (incest, marriage, kinship), he then turned his attention to that other basic element in human affairs, food, or rather cooking. The shift of emphasis is clearly seen in the change of titles from Les Structures élémentaires de la parenté (1949), with its Durkheimian resonances, to the first three volumes of his major work on myth, Mythologiques, entitled Le Cru et le Cuit (1964), Du Miel aux cendres (1966) and L'Origine des manières de table (1968). Only the title of the final volume of Mythologiques, L'Homme nu (1971), lacks the direct reference to food, though the equation 'naked' = 'raw' is ever present. His specific theoretical interest in the subject of cooking was first laid out in chapter 5 of his collected essays entitled Structural Anthropology (1958-1963), and it is developed with both brevity and clarity in Le triangle culinaire, an article that appeared in L'Arc (1965).

In his work on myth, Lévi-Strauss had turned his attention to the role of fire in transforming food from the raw to the cooked state, a process he sees as marking the emergence of humanity, just as he had earlier pointed to the incest taboo as the critical factor separating 'nature' from 'culture': the transformations of sex and food by (or into) culture are treated linearly (as homologous) rather than laterally (as interacting). Of course the role of fire, especially the ritual role, had been stressed in many earlier works, in the study of fire festivals, in sacrifice (burnt-offerings), in domestic cults, 'in continuing the incense smoke', to use the phrase of Francis Hsu describing ancestor worship among the Chinese (1949: 76). But Lévi-Strauss made it a dominant component in his discussion of the transformation of food not only in the narratives of myth but also in the terms for the processes by which it is prepared. However his first attempt at a general analysis of 'cooking' was directed to the distinctive features of a cuisine to which he gave the name 'gustemes'.

Given his earlier interest in structural linguistics, in the work of Saussure, Jakobson and others, it was natural that he should apply some elements of a linguistic approach to cooking as a way of eliciting and assessing the distinctive features. One result is the recourse, following Jakobson, to binary divisions of the marked/unmarked type, whose presence or absence is recorded by means of plus and minus signs. A table based upon binary categories appeared in Lévi-Strauss's first

State of play

incursion into the sociology of cooking, that is, in the comments in Anthropologie structurale (1963: 86) upon the difference between French and English cuisine. His intention is clearly comparative at an abstract level, using selected features to make the contrast which is presented in the following terms:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>English cuisine</th>
<th>French cuisine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>endogenous/exogenous</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>central/peripheral</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>marked/not marked</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In other words (he writes, and words are needed both to explain the oppositions and to fill out the corresponding signs), in English cuisine the main dishes of a meal are made from endogenous ingredients, prepared in a relatively bland fashion, and surrounded with more exotic accompaniments, in which all the differential values are strongly marked (for example, tea, fruitcake, orange marmalade, port wine). Conversely, in French cuisine the opposition endogenous/exogenous becomes very weak or disappears, and equally marked gustemes are combined together in a central as well as in a peripheral position.

Can this scheme also be applied to Chinese cooking? he asks. 'Yes, if we restrict ourselves to the preceding oppositions; no, if others are introduced (such as sweet/sour) which are mutually exclusive in French cuisine, in contrast to Chinese (or German)' (p. 86). Abstract these structures of oppositions, see if they are found in other spheres of the same society, and if they are, 'we have the right to conclude that we have reached a significant knowledge of the unconscious attitudes of the society or societies under consideration' (p. 87). The analysis of English or French cooking that results from these procedures excludes the concrete consideration of social and physical factors. What class, what period, are we studying? Is olive oil endogenous to the Ile de France? How relevant is overseas trade or regional difference? Is a binary framework the best way of handling these variables?

Since the binary mode is used so widely in contemporary anthropology, we need to look carefully at its logical basis. To this end it is worth turning to a review of the role of binarism in phonology by Latraverse (1975). The author points out the difference between the logical opposition of contradictory terms involved in the cybernetic model (1/0) and based upon computer technology, and the kind of oppositions found in phonology, which may be of two types, either 'polar' (as in the contrast grave/acute) or else 'absolute' (as in voiced/voiced). In anthropological analyses these various forms are all subsumed under the signs +/−, in the same way that Lévi-Strauss had earlier tried to characterise the relationship between close kin as 'positive' or 'negative'
Cooking, cuisine and class

A measure of formalisation is essential to any comparative work of the kind the author is undertaking. Our doubts are firstly whether in these particular cases the signs are not too inclusive (Goody 1969 [1959]: 45) and whether such contrasts can reasonably form the basis of any model either of the relations between social institutions or of a common deep structure. In any case, at one level there is a confusion between, or at least a merging of opposites and absence, between types of contrast.

The technique of making a linguistic analysis of this kind involves isolating the phonemic contrasts of a language and then entering them on a classificatory matrix, with the ‘distinctive features’, the traits, as the coordinates. The result is a catalogue or verification list (Halle) or a codebook (Cherry). This procedure is the kind envisaged and practised by Lévi-Strauss in his analysis of cooking as well as in the earlier work on kinship. While Latour's rejects some of the criticisms of binarism, his paper gives little encouragement to the attempt to turn a simplifying analytic procedure into an instrument for discovering any important psychological or sociological verities about the structure of the human mind. On the other hand, the procedure possesses more mundane virtues, which are brought out in the author's later contributions and the discussion to which they gave rise.

The next stage in Lévi-Strauss’s analysis of cooking, which appeared in L’Arc (1965), makes use of formalisation and the linguistic model in a rather different way. In the first place the units on which it is based are no longer ‘gustemes’, units of taste, but the basic types of operation (‘technemes’?) for transferring food from raw to cooked. There is a shift from consumption (cuisine) to preparation (cooking). The change holds out more promise if only because the elements are capable of a more careful specification and seem less arbitrary, less liable to internal variation. Like language, he maintains, cooking is universal in human societies. Just as we have the vowel triangle,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{a} \quad \text{u} \quad \text{i} \\
\text{k} \quad \text{p} \quad \text{t}
\end{align*}
\]

which represent the common, simple basis of the complex opposition of phonemes, so we have a culinary triangle. His version is constructed

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State of play

from 'semantic' rather than phonetic elements and takes the following form:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{raw (cru)} \\
\text{cooked (cu}) \\
\text{rotten (pourri)}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{c.t.} & \quad \text{n.t.} \\
\text{c.t.} & \quad \text{n.t.}
\end{align*}
\]

\[\text{c.t.} = \text{cultural transformation} \quad \text{n.t.} = \text{natural transformation}\]

Fig. 1 The culinary triangle (after Lévi-Strauss 1965)

Underlying the structure of this particular model there is a double opposition of distinctive features, first, between elaborated and non-elaborated, and, secondly, between culture and nature. The cooked is a cultural transformation (or elaboration) of the raw, while the rotten (or spoilt) is a natural transformation of both. Referring back to the earlier comments on binarity, the first of these oppositions is seen to be of the presence/absence kind, the second polar.

As the author himself insists, this approach takes its stand on the utility of the linguistic model for the analysis of other cultural data, and for constructing a common deep structure. For him the relation between culture and language is not only an analogy or a model; he maintains in the earlier article that we can interpret ‘society as a whole in terms of a theory of communication’, an interpretation, he declares, that leads to a Copernican revolution (1963: 83). Lévi-Strauss rejects the suggestion, made among others by Haudricourt and Granai (1955), that he has reduced society or culture to language. However he does argue that not only cooking but ‘marriage regulations and kinship systems can profitably be treated as a kind of language, a set of processes permitting the establishment, between individuals and groups, of a certain type of communication’ (1963: 61). Language is therefore the model for the analysis of socio-cultural phenomena, which are interpreted in terms of communication, that is to say, of exchange. Women are like words in language systems and goods in economic systems, objects of circulation: ‘The rules of marriage serve to ensure the circulation of women between groups, just as economic rules serve to ensure the circulation of goods and services, and linguistic rules the circulation of messages’ (p.83).
Cooking, cuisine and class

Note the macrofunctionalist tone of the argument, reinforced by subsequent references to surmounting disequilibrium. It is only rarely that the so-called functionalists resort to statements of this kind, for they are working on a more concrete level of microfunctional analysis rather than on flows through the total system. Note secondly the constant stress on distribution and the absence of any extended consideration of production and reproduction (that is, of filiation as distinct from affinity).

The aim of Lévi-Strauss’s analysis is very different from the comprehensive (or ‘thick’) description of Richards’s account of the Bemba. He does not attempt to provide ‘an exhaustive knowledge of societies’ but ‘to derive constants which are found at various times from an empirical richness and diversity that will always transcend our efforts at observation and description’ (1963: 82–3). The constants derived from studying various ‘sub-systems’ display homologies. To put it another way, the examination of kinship systems, political ideologies, mythologies, ritual, art or codes of etiquette produces ‘a certain number of structures’ which may display common properties, homologies, which as we have seen represent ‘unconscious attitudes of the society or societies under consideration’ (p. 87). Indeed they represent aspects of that ‘uninvited guest, the human mind’.

Some abstraction is clearly necessary for any general treatment of the kind undertaken by Lévi-Strauss, and linguistics offers a precedent not only for the isolation of distinctive features on a binary basis but also for the use of the triangular model for vowels and certain consonants. However, his study of cooking goes on to produce a more complicated figure than the simple culinary triangle with which it began and which only allowed for the transformation of the raw into the cooked and the rotten. Now he introduces other aspects of the preparation of food for consumption, including the processes of ‘smoking’ and ‘boiling’. To the culinary triangle is now added the triangle of recipes, that is, of operations where the first, smoking, is set apart from roasting by the mediation of air, and boiling by the intervention of water. While the author writes of this as semantically based, he is not analysing terms but rather techniques, as is clear not only from the logic behind his introduction of ‘smoking’ as the third element but also in his references to ‘means’ and ‘results’ (p. 28).

This triangle, once again, is seen as resting on the overriding opposition between nature and culture. But the relationship is much more complex: ‘With regard to means, roasting and smoking are on the side of nature, boiling on that of culture. With regard to results, smoking is on the side of culture, roasting and boiling on the side of nature.’ By the first sentence we are to understand that as compared with boiling, roasting requires no utensils, and, while smoking (among a certain South American tribe to which he refers) does use a rack (houcan), the support is ‘voluntarily’ destroyed after every operation, so it is as if it did not exist at all. The second sentence means that roasting changes the meat hardly at all, but smoking turns it into a durable commodity. Meanwhile, the boiled is close to the rotten (i.e. natural), partly because a number of cultures assert this to be so. Note that the boiled is made ‘natural’ because of the language used, that is by metaphor; while the ‘smoked’ is made natural by the destruction of the cultural instrument that created it, a transformation of the metonymic kind since it consists in acting as if the effect stood for the cause.

This opposition leads Lévi-Strauss into a passage that bears the imprint of Hegelian metaphysics and which I quote partly because of the light it sheds on his view of myth:

As a consequence, even when the structure transforms or completes itself in order to overcome a disequilibrium, this is only at the price of setting up a new disequilibrium which is manifest on another level. To this ineluctable dissymmetry the structure owes its ability to engender myth, which is nothing other than an effort to correct or hide its constituent dissymmetry. (1965: 28)

One might remark that, whether or not myth acts in this macrofunctional way, to claim that it does nothing else is hardly acceptable. But so perhaps is the claim itself, for is it really possible that this ineluctable dissymmetry, produced at times by a figure of speech, a metaphor, is based on some kind of basic opposition or contradiction that threatens society to the extent that it has to be disguised or corrected? And if this were so, are there not simpler ways of dealing with a metaphor, or even with a
Cooking, cuisine and class

contrast that might have all have been drawn in the wrong place? Are there not more immediate, more concrete, perhaps more fundamental, causes of disequilibrium which cannot be neglected in the analysis of cooking and which relate to the internal and external strains in society and manifest themselves over time?

The triangle of 'recipes' is further complicated by the introduction of added operations. In a culinary system where the category of roast (rôtir) is divided into roast and grilled (griller), the last should be placed at the hierarchy of the triangle of recipes because it places the least distance between fire and meat. 'Roast' now takes its place between grilled and smoked. Where there is a distinction between boiling and steaming (cuisson à la vapeur), this would be placed midway between boiled and smoked. With the category 'fried', a more complicated transformation is necessary, finally turning the triangle of recipes into a tetrahedron that includes oil as well as air and water among the intervening agents through which active agents such as fire operate on the raw food by means of the set of cultural utensils. This addition allows the distinction between roast in the oven with fat and roast on the fire (à la broche) without any intermediary. Indeed the final elaboration (1965: 29) moves beyond the scope of any simple geometrical representation, including as it does 'oppositions' between animal and vegetable, cereal and legume, which would require listing in some kind of matrix using the binary values, plus and minus.

In this way the author hopes to be able to elaborate a schema that includes all the characteristics of a specific culinary system. No doubt, he adds in parenthesis and very much to the point, there are other characteristics of interest to 'diachronic analysis', as well as those features that concern the order, presentation and behaviour at meals. But it is on the operations he concentrates, and when they have been isolated one can apply the procedure outlined before. Find the most economical way of orienting the elements in a grid, then superimpose these other contrasts, of a sociological, economic, aesthetic or religious kind: men and women, family and society, village and bush, husbandry and prodigality, noble and commoner, sacred and profane, etc. One can then hope to discover, for each particular case, the way in which the cuisine of a society is a language in which it unconsciously transcribes its structure, although Lévi-Strauss notes that it may resign itself, also unconsciously, 'to unveil its contradictions' (1965: 29). The structure then speaks in the language of culture (or in that of an aspect of culture, like cooking) and reveals its totality when the grid of oppositions and correlations derived from any one sub-set is superimposed upon the grid from other sub-sets (e.g. the economic system).

The method requires the abandonment of any idea that one sub-set is

State of play

privileged as against any other, that one sector is more significant, more influential (in a vectorial sense) than any other, an objection that has been raised against various forms of functional and structural-functional analysis. At the same time it depends upon the initial selection of a specific sub-set (or sector) for analytical purposes, the choice of which is bound to influence the subsequent operations. Relationships between the component sub-structures are established not at the 'surface' level, where we might expect to be able to assess causal inference, functional dependency or simply tendencies to influence, but at a 'deeper' level of 'structural causality', of homologous relations or of formal similarity, where any causal networks are much more difficult to evaluate. This means that in approaching the sociology of cooking we have first to set aside other 'contrasts' or variables of an economic or religious kind, in order to establish on the basis of a limited set of data a grid for later comparison, which in practice turns out to be a comparison of a visual or formulaic kind. While the isolation of domains is critical to many types of analysis, the value of postponing a consideration of the links between cooking and the economy or the family to the 'unconscious level' seems doubtful, certainly if it excludes an explanation of such interrelations closer to the surface. Such doubts exist even when we are dealing with semantics where field theory or componental analysis have often proceeded on the basis of the formal isolation of sets of terms (Lehner 1974); the value of these procedures is more open to doubt in the wider behavioural contexts in which such category systems emerge (the lived-in rather than the thought-of to use a popular but deceptive dichotomy). Indeed there is a tendency to spirit away the more concrete aspects of human life, even food, sex and sacrifice, by locating their interpretation only at the 'deeper' level, which is largely a matter of privileging the 'symbolic' at the expense of the more immediately communicable dimensions of social action. The opposition, or assumed opposition, between the definitions of structure of Radcliffe-Brown and Lévi-Strauss (see de Heusch 1971 [1965]: 14), which is more often manipulated to make a polemical point than to advance the study of human behaviour, should not lead to a neglect of the 'surface' in favour of the 'depths', especially in areas as closely tied to the whole domestic domain as that of cooking. Without the consideration of such related areas, comparison and contrast within and between cuisines lacks an essential dimension.

Other factors too suggest a modification of the linguistic model used in the seminal work of Lévi-Strauss, apart from the limitations of binarism. In the first place, he argues that the language of cuisine, unlike the language of ordinary life, 'translates' unconsciously, it is not used to communicate between men as much as to express a structure. Here the
Cooking, cuisine and class

link with the idea that the cooking of food expresses sentiments of kinship is close. Secondly, the analogy of the vowel triangle, which derives in part from the nature of human vocalisation, is dropped when the pattern becomes more complex; triangle becomes tetrahedron and more. Thirdly, while the representations (of whatever shape) are presented in an abstract, universal form, the arguments by which the triangle of recipes is attached to the culinary triangle sometimes derive from features of the cooking operations of particular societies, as for example, in the destruction of the rack for smoking meat by a group of South American Indians.

The utilisation of a notion of a particular people for the construction of a general model raises in acute form the problem of objectivism and subjectivism that impinges upon so much sociological analysis. In the present instance the author seems to skip from one analytical level to another. But it raises a related problem of whether we are employing as analytical concepts ones located within the actor frame of reference (e.g. lexemes, the units of some linguistic studies of this kind) or objectively defined operations such as roasting, the elements of which are closer to phonemes. In the latter case we have to be especially careful about the danger of defining the units on the basis of our own cultural experience as actors, as speakers of the language in which we are trying to perform the enquiry. It might seem that the omission of the distinct notion of 'baking', except as cuire au four, parallel to roasting (in the oven as distinct from on the spit), rôtir au four, stemmed from the particular nature of French categories rather than from a more objective assessment of alternative techniques and alternative lexemes.

We are faced here with the consequences of the obvious fact that sociological analyses, unlike mathematics, are carried out in the language of the sociologist. One can invent, elaborate, or borrow technical terms to describe the 'family' in other societies and so try and avoid importing concepts and ideas based upon our own kinship structures. Translation is not the issue since one needs to recognise difference as well as similarity. It is a process in which we are only too liable to give our folk-concepts or metaphors a universal significance, for example when the phrase pot pourri is taken to indicate rapprochement of the boiled to the rotten (Lévi-Strauss 1965: 22).

The lexemic analysis of cooking terms is of course an enquiry in its own right, but different from that either of gustemes or of techmemes (operations, practices). Moreover the same kind of comparative study can be undertaken, as Berlin and Kay (1969) have carried out with 'basic colour terms'. An attempt to analyse comparatively a set of 'basic culinary terms' has been made by the linguist Adrienne Lehrer, a more extended account of whose work is given in the Appendix. Her data come from eight societies and do little to confirm associations such as raw/roasted, that are central features of the link between the triangle of recipes and the culinary triangle. However on the level of operations she agrees that it is possible to say something general about cooking across human societies. This leads her to offer a modified form of the culinary tetrahedron (Fig. 3) which serves as a neat guide for operations but not for categorisations (1972: 169). It is critical to note that she recognises this generality as arising from common techniques, that is from the world outside rather than the structure beneath. Indeed it would be surprising to find that the terminology of cooking did not vary systematically both within and between societies, just as the activities and products of the fields, the kitchen and the table differ from society to society. And not only from society to society but from class to class. For even when the 'structural' approach does not tend to stress the unity of mankind, it tends to overestimate the unity of 'cultures'. Not only are culinary terms themselves more variable than is suggested by the model, but a richer variety of meaning and operations emerges in the interchange of daily life which a formal analysis confined to the terms themselves cannot fully explore. Such a paring down of meaning involves both a cost and a gain. The benefits have often been spelled out; the limitations became clear to me in considering an attempt to apply the culinary triangle to African, rather than to European or South American cooking, an attempt that constitutes a test as well as an exemplar of the approach.

Lehrer's analysis exemplifies the need and value of submitting such general theories to a critical examination from both the logical and empirical points of view. While all theories obviously require a testing of some kind, the nature of functional and structural hypotheses, with their assumptions of fit and homology combined with the initial plausibility of suggestions that give an all embracing unity to the diversity of experience, place them in a special position. The dangers can perhaps be gauged by the ease with which this type of analysis can be parodied. The structuralist analysis of cooking has had its fair share, culminating in that remarkable volume produced by the 'pataphysicians', Asger Jorn and Noel Arnaud, and entitled La Langue verte et la cuite: étude gastrophonique sur la marmythologie musiculinaire (1968). This attempt to apply the approach is a parody, which in itself offers no grounds for rejection. But a liability to such treatment may highlight the softer parts of a theory.

Thomas's attempt to apply this type of analysis to Africa (1960) was a more serious undertaking, but one which, I suggest, reveals important lacunae in the theory. Starting from the remarks on the differences between English, French and Chinese cooking, Thomas tries to isolate similar 'constitutive elements' in the cooking of the Diola of the Casamance in Senegal. The 'constitutive elements' or gustemes that
Cooking, cuisine and class

Thomas regards as significant are patterned upon the structures of opposition and correlation defined by Lévi-Strauss, items (i) and (iii) having appeared in the original article.

(i) endogenous/exogenous
(ii) luxurious dish/poor dish
(satisfying/non-satisfying)
(iii) central/peripheral

It is possible, of course, to describe Diola cooking in terms of such 'pairs', though once again the oppositions display the ambiguities seen in much binary analysis, for some are polar oppositions (A/B) and others marked by presence/absence (A/-\ A); the latter, as in (ii) above, can be seen as a unity rather than a duality. From Lehrer's study and other attempts to assess the structural approach to cognitive categories and operations in a wider context (for instance, Thomas et al. 1976), the gains

of a formal analysis of lexemes and even operations are seen to be more limited than some of the original claims might suggest. With gustemes the problem is yet more complex. In the present case, the process of isolating the 'constitutive elements' seems more like an application of imported analytic categories, the justification for which is rather weak. For their rationale appears to derive from a prior commitment to 'oppositions and correlations', that is, to multiple rows and binary columns, which is presented as part of the structure of the human mind but which could be considered to be a product of the reduction of speech to writing, of the shift from utterance to text.

Let us leave aside such considerations and accept, for the sake of the argument, the utility of these particular gustemes as descriptive tools, interpreting them as coordinates of the same kind used in componential analysis. Starting from here, we still have to recognize the possible limitations of an approach that overlooks internal differences in an attempt to draw out the general features of, say, English cooking, set them against the cuisine of the French and finally to use the same set of elements to analyze food in an African or Chinese context. By concentrating upon the behavioural unity of specific groups, tribes or nations at a cultural level, one may neglect those important aspects of that culture which are linked with social or individual differences.

Comparison is also made more difficult by the exclusion of certain closely related processes that have been defined out of the analytic system, a procedure that is seen by Piaget as one of the advantages of structuralism, but in this case emerges as a distinct hindrance. I refer here to the relation between consumption, production and the social-economic order. The neglect of these processes is seen, first, in the

absence of any consideration of hierarchical (or indeed regional) factors in the references to French and English cooking, and secondly in the failure to give sufficient weight to the biological, climatological and other external factors that act as constraints on social action. This absence is occasioned not by space or forgetfulness; it derives from a theoretical stance. At one point, for example, Thomas makes the following comment upon the subjects of his essay: 'With his realistic peasant mentality, the Diola sees in the meal above all a means of suppressing hunger and regaining his strength.' A note to this passage states that 'In fact this attitude is frequent in Black Africa' (p. 338). One wonders if the author, lost in the more recondite significances of food, can really be so little prepared to acknowledge its more immediate meaning. Not that such an attitude should come altogether as a surprise, since anthropologists are only too prepared to examine marriage with equally little regard for sex. The attempt to define biological factors out of the explanation of social action, the least satisfactory part of the legacy of Durkheim, is as inadequate as the opposite tendency in the writings of some sociobiologists. Neither of these extreme 'theoretical' positions have much to recommend them to the social scientist, and both are carefully eschewed by those who, like Richards and the historians of the Annales school, have made the most substantial contributions to this field. They have seen no need to proclaim the complete autonomy of the cultural.

Cultural approaches

There have been other more recent theoretical accounts of cooking, but to present these in every detail would lead away from the main purpose of this chapter, which is to sketch out the general background of anthropological contributions to the topic of this essay. Let me however refer briefly to two recent studies that represent varieties of what one might call the 'cultural approach', though certainly no more weight should be placed on this term than on 'functional' or 'structural' in a similar context. These are all terms of art that are used to break up the continuities of theoretical and empirical enquiry in ways that are often more necessary as crutches for the commentator than as guides for the practitioner.

Mary Douglas's general interest in processes of consumption led to the writing of a book with Baron Isherwood entitled The World of Goods (1979). But she had earlier directed her attention more specifically to cooking and, following the work of the linguist Michael Halliday, to 'the analysis of the meal'. Her general orientation derives from the functionalisms and structuralisms of both Oxford and Paris. While she sees food as linked to biological as well as to social facts, it is the latter
aspect that interests her, particularly when she attempts to 'decipher a meal'. In this context, food becomes a 'code'; 'the message it encodes will be found in the pattern of social relations being expressed' (1971: 61). Once again, food is 'symbolic' of social relationship; there is a correspondence between a given social structure and the structure of symbols by which it is expressed' (p. 66), phrases that are very reminiscent of Audrey Richards. As Douglas explains in the introduction to *Purity and Danger* (1966: viii), her structural approach is derived from Evans-Pritchard; the concept of social structure goes back in slightly different forms to Radcliffe-Brown, Durkheim and Spencer, and tends to equate social structure with the aggregate of social relations between 'persons', that is, human beings considered as filling social roles. In fact Evans-Pritchard uses the phrase in two senses, a more restricted concrete one, which refers to 'groups and the relations between groups', and a more analytical one, as a 'system of separate but interrelated structures' (1940: 263) which included the political system.6

The use of the term 'code', like that of symbol and metaphor, is associated with the idea that it provides a means of 'expressing' social structure or social relations, a notion we have found common among anthropologists, whether functionalist, structural-functionalist or structuralist. The terms themselves are often used in a highly generalised way that makes them somewhat ambiguous. On a more specific level we understand what the words mean; that is to say, we understand what constitutes a telegraphic 'code', what the bread and wine 'symbolise' in the Mass, what is 'metaphorical' about the sentence, 'The room was flooded with people.' In each case two languages, objects, words (or concepts) that are logically and perceptually separate are brought together and interpreted in relation to one another by operations of a graphic, ritual or linguistic kind.

But when we speak of food – or a ritual (see Leach 1954, Gluckman 1962, Fortes 1962, and any other anthropological text) – as expressing social relations or symbolising social structure, what is brought together in a similar way? Do social relations and social structure stand in the same relationship to the bread and the wine as the body and blood of Christ, 7 or as a naval cipher does to open speech? The assumption is unacceptable, partly because it pushes the cart before the horse. Whether we understand our enquiry as perceiving existing social relations and social structure, or as constructing them in any of a variety of possible ways, in practice the notions make sense only as abstractions from or constructions of the acts of individuals. Neither social relations nor social structure 'express' or 'symbolise' the acts of individuals because the former are necessarily derived from and totally encompass the latter. It would be preferable to claim that what we have here is metonymy rather than metaphor, but the recourse to rhetoric, the utilisation of figures of speech, does little to improve the logical clarity of the analysis.

There is somewhat more logical justification for using verbs like 'express' and terms like 'code' when we are dealing with ideas of 'deep structure'. For such notions are endowed with generative implications, and it is conceivable that a deep structure derived from surface elements could be used to 'predict' a hitherto unknown surface structure. But in practice there is no adequate way in which this programme could be carried out. Therefore, because the deep structure is derived from surface elements alone and is unknowable without them, it is meaningless to discuss one as expressing the other, except in a circular, Pickwickian sense.

Mary Douglas asks that we consider the meal not simply as an assemblage of binary oppositions (which takes us only part of the way along the path towards a satisfactory understanding) but that we place it in the context of other meals consumed in the course of the day, of the week and of the year, thus extending the restricted analytic field that Lévi-Strauss deliberately adopts on the basis of the linguistic model. The 'meaning of a meal' is found in a system of repeated analogies (or repeated metonyms). This approach is strongly reminiscent of Radcliffe-Brown's attempt to extract meaning by examining similar 'ritual' acts in dissimilar social contexts.8 The procedure is far from standardised but an indication of similarity is given by the words, images and acts of the actors, including their own exegesis of the events themselves. The recognition of repetitive idioms is a common feature of field experience,9 and the examination of the variety of contexts in which they appear must necessarily constitute one level of any interpretation. The same is true of any semantic analysis, for example, the study of the imagery ('symbolism' or metaphor) of a particular poem, play, novel or even author.10 One usage modifies another. So for Mary Douglas: 'Each meal carries something of the meaning of other meals; each meal is a structured social event which structures others in its own image.' But the structuring is not simply repetition and reinforcement; following the lines of contextual analysis, we must also see the elements as reacting to the different situations in which they occur (1971: 69). In addition, she suggests, the symbolic structure must be seen to fit squarely with some demonstrable social considerations; otherwise the analysis has only begun (p. 63). For the fit between the medium's symbolic boundaries and the boundaries between categories of people is its only possible validation. The fit may be at different levels, but without being able to show some such matching, 'the analysis of symbols remains arbitrary and subjective' (pp. 68–9).

The formal analysis of the meal, suggested by Halliday (1961) and
Cooking, cuisine and class

elaborated by Douglas, is of value quite apart from the question of the relation of the 'structure' of the meal to the structure of other repetitive clusters of human behaviour. For while we accept the need to search for meaningful relations, the problem lies in evaluating what we find. In the end the interlocking nature of these relations must be a matter for empirical validation within a framework of theoretical assumption. The danger of functional and structural analysis lies in unchecked and uncheckable speculation. The burden of proof always rests with the proposer, and the 'fit' must be demonstrated, or at any rate supported, rather than simply assumed. Otherwise the intellectual enterprise becomes a matter of mere assertion.

The contextual analysis of the meal, like the study of repetitive idioms, takes us part of the way along the road and adds another dimension to our understanding. Its strengths and its weaknesses derive from the tendency to limit the search for relations to an abstraction called a 'cultural system', a tendency that contains the same kind of danger surrounding the efforts of Durkheim and Parsons to establish the autonomy of social factors or, more widely, of the social system. In some social and intellectual contexts this conceptual isolation is associated with the desire to set up 'anthropology' and 'sociology' as independent fields of study and units of academic organisation. Whatever its origins, the isolationism of the 'cultural' approach tends to give material and hierarchical factors less weight than they deserve while the concern for continuity often leads to the neglect of change and that for holism to the neglect of difference. Phrases like 'deciphering a code' suggest a defined and objectively determined locus and content of 'meaning'. Given that other writers, for example those in the tradition of Parisian structuralism, carry out their 'decoding' in different terms and with different assumptions, the existence of any such objectively determinable relations seems somewhat doubtful.

The autonomy of the cultural is much more of an issue in the second study we have in mind, the work by Marshall Sahlins entitled Culture and Practical Reason (1976) which consists of an extended debate against the idea of praxis theory that 'human cultures are formulated out of practical activity and utilitarian interest' (p. vii). Rather, they are created by symbolic, meaningful or cultural reason which structures utility. Indeed, he claims 'that the contest between the practical and the meaningful is the fateful issue of modern social thought' (p. ix). The object of anthropology is to concern itself with culture, 'collective tradition', with meaningful orders of persons and things, orders that are not free inventions of the mind but are essentially (though this is not stated in the Preface from which I quote) 'symbolic orders'.

The cultural system here has its own 'cultural logic'. Only by reference

State of play

to such a calculus can we explain the eating habits of, say, the Americans, who reject the flesh of horse and dog on grounds that cannot be explained by any variety of utilitarian theory. The problems arise mainly because of Sahlins's relentless binary approach to social theory. He is unwilling to allow explanations that derive from the interaction of social and biological phenomena in the manner adopted by Audrey Richards and others. Like Parsons he would see this as the biologising of social theory and of cultural reality. The result is an approach that, whatever its other merits, tends to assume a cultural unity that inhibits reference to internal differentiations, to external socio-cultural influences, to historical and to material elements.

Changing worlds

Despite the framework of opposition given to or assumed by the various approaches I have discussed in the context of the sociology of cooking, it is clear that they are not so much alternatives as complementary, at least in some of their aspects; a concern with 'meaning' (at whatever level) does not exclude a concern with the social role of food, which some see as an important kind of meaning. Indeed much of the disagreement lies not at the level of theoretical practice but at theoretical assertion. One example we have taken is the use of the idea that social action 'expresses' or 'symbolises' another order of being, that is, a relational or structural order. Indeed the notions of relationships and structure are themselves used in more similar ways than polemical or ideological frames, such as 'rationalism' versus 'empiricism', allow for.

However one dimension that all these various approaches play down is time - and to a lesser degree space. The importance of the developmental cycle in the domestic economy was raised by the work of Fortes, Richards and others, and it is a theme taken up in the following chapter. What is absent is a consolidation not of the 'cyclical' aspects of time but of the longer-term, developmental, ones. Its absence arises partly from the objections of Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown to any confusion between history and anthropology, between diachrony and synchrony. It is understandable that in the course of intensive observational studies that their energies and explanations should be directed elsewhere. Besides which many of the 'pseudo-historical' speculations of their evolutionist precursors left much to be desired, both from the standpoint of evidence as well as intellectually. Even where they do not object to history, they do not use it in any precise way. Lévi-Strauss does put forward some hypotheses of a developmental kind, but makes little effort to give them flesh; for him, history consists in a vague recourse to transformations is the 'unconscious elements of social life' from the
Cooking, cuisine and class

study of which anthropology is said to draw its 'originality' (1963: 18, 23).

A similar vagueness, even hostility, marks their view of the comparative approach, which was also based on the supposed shortcomings of their predecessors. The formal objections of these writers to comparative analysis over time and space are well-known; Lévi-Strauss appears to support Boas's criticism of that method and comments adversely on Malinowski's use of comparative sociology. Evans-Pritchard, Leach and others have expressed grave doubts about the enterprise. Yet at the same time, all these writers, each in their own fashion, have undertaken comparisons, often very valuable, and mostly of the rather unsystematic kind to which we all succumb.

The blatant contradiction between 'theory' and practice requires a more satisfactory resolution. History and comparison, or more precisely the use of historical and comparative data, need to be brought back into the forefront of the study of society, not as slogans but as ways of developing and testing more substantive theories and more fleshy hypotheses.

The reintroduction of the historical and comparative dimension into anthropology is often associated with the influence of Marx, though he has been used to justify other trends. Some have seen Marx as the first structuralist. Lévi-Strauss has spoken of his own 'endeavours to reintegrate the anthropological knowledge acquired during the last fifty years into the Marxian tradition' (1963: 343), and some of his colleagues have tried to create a structural Marxist approach in anthropology stimulated by the writings of Althusser. The influence of Marx has also strongly affected analyses of the domestic domain carried out by a number of other French scholars, in particular by Meillassoux (1975). In the work of a number of American and British anthropologists, for example, White and his students, as well as Gluckman, Gough, Worsley and others, the influence has been less explicit but nonetheless present. It has helped to keep alive an interest in placing the results of particular synchronic studies in the wider context of 'la longue durée', in the setting of the major changes that human societies have undergone in the course of their development.

There are important reasons of a theoretical and empirical kind for paying more attention to the time dimension. When anthropologists talk about the culture of food, they tend to see this as a continuing normative structure that, in the words of one recent writer on the subject, 'absorbs or rejects foreign imports according to their structural or stylistic compatability' (Chang 1977: 7). One can view the work of writers like Lévi-Strauss, Douglas and Sahlin as attempts to specify the structure of the culture that exercises this selective supervision and that is often specified by isolating sets of linked lexemes, 'classificatory systems', 'distinctive features' or 'constitutive elements'. These are certainly not the only ways of characterising a culture. But however it is done, there is little evidence, except of a purely post hoc kind, on which to base the claim that the decisive element in the selection of alternative possibilities, whether these are created by external contrast or by internal change, is solely or even mainly the voice of this abstract structure, which is homologous with what Khare calls 'ideology' and others 'a classificatory schema' or deep structural paradigm.

The related assumption that continuity occurs at the underlying level while only the surface changes seem open to question, partly because of the mainly retrospective character of the evidence. But as we have argued earlier it is equally possible for the 'trivial' to survive over time, at least in a literate culture, simply because it is not closely entailed with the more central features of the social system; the more peripheral a feature, the greater the possible autonomy. The alternative assumption tends to place conflict and contradiction on the surface, the boundary, the periphery, rather than at the centre, especially in so far as they lead to structural change. It is not surprising, therefore, to find so-called 'conflict' theory, which owes a general and diffuse debt to Marx, standing in opposition to much cultural and societal analysis that favours a more integrated, a more 'fitting' representation of social action. For it tends to concentrate on the role of internal and external contradictions over time, the opposition between individual groups and sub-cultures, and the external conflicts that are not simply part of the repetitive structure but alter the control over resources, the locus of domination or even the nature of the socio-cultural system itself.

Neither approach holds the monopoly on truth; nor are they alternatives in any real sense. Elements of social behaviour continue over time, others change. The idea that even revolution alters all is as naïve as the view that the Chinese are just as they were before the victory of the Communist forces. As the Hsüs point out (1977), the Revolution may not have altered Chinese cooking itself, but it did significantly modify the enormous meals and banquets of earlier times. The reason for this change, which was certainly not superficial, lies in the nature of earlier Chinese society, with its far-reaching differences in styles of life that were so marked in the restaurant culture of banqueting. We find that the contradictions inherent in the internal differentiation of cooking emerge more clearly in the work of those writers who modify the holistic assumption of much socio-cultural theorising. For the different forms of consumption in hierarchical societies are not simply transformations of a timeless cultural pattern that continues unaffected by a changing social system. They are in conflict with one another not only at the formal level
Cooking, cuisine and class

but in action too. They may generate conflict and conflict may generate change.

Change in the cuisine also comes about as the result of the introduction of ingredients and techniques from outside. While the domain of cooking is in many ways highly conservative—for reasons that will be discussed later—there have also been surprising changes. The advent of the potato in Irish diets, the appearance of the tomato in America, the land of ketchup, of maize and cassava in Africa, are all relatively recent. Since the sixteenth century, the cuisines of both Africa and Europe were transformed through the introduction of numerous cultigens from America, though both the potato (the ‘Irish’ potato) and the tomato (the ‘love apple’) were only taken up much later in the United States itself. It is difficult to conceive of Italian food without pasta and tomato paste. But the use of pasta may have arrived from China via Germany only in the fifteenth century.13

The study of change necessarily requires historical sources and methods. Some of the most interesting studies of food have been carried out by the contributors of that great journal of social and economic history, Annales E.S.C., founded by Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre. The leading figure has been Braudel whose Capitalism and Material Life, 1400–1800 (1967 [1973]) contains a substantial section on food in Europe, the consumption of which he links directly with the processes of production. In 1961 Annales launched an appeal for more historical work not only on the study of nutrition but on food in general, eliciting a statement by Roland Barthes (1961 [1979]) on the ‘psychosociology’ of contemporary food consumption as well as a series of more specific studies.14 The most important of these is an exhaustive book by Louis Stouff, Ravitaillement et alimentation en Provence aux XIVe et XVe siècles (1970) that also provides a useful bibliography for the France of that period. Stouff concludes by denying that there was an original Provençal cuisine in the late Middle Ages. The general elements of its food were found all around the Mediterranean. That outstanding feature of ‘traditional’ Provençal cooking of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, olive oil, was used only for eggs, fish and frying beans. Otherwise it was the fat of salted pork, used particularly to flavour the soup of peas, beans and above all cabbage. This was the basic food, he claims, of the ordinary folk of Provence, just as it was in the rest of Europe at that time. The aristocracy also enjoyed a cosmopolitan menu but of a different kind (1970: 261–2). ‘Traditional Provençal cooking’, like many other folk-ways, only emerged in recent times, a salutary thought for those attached either to the holistic or to the timeless view of culture.

Work on the social history of food has not of course been confined to France, nor yet to Western Europe. The series of studies edited by K.C.

State of play

Chang on Food in Chinese Culture (1977) combines both historical and anthropological perspectives. Theoretically more important is that wide-ranging essay by Mintz on ‘Time, sugar and sweetness’ (1979). In this paper the author examines the political and economic forces behind the availability of sugar, the increasing sweetness of the European diet and its relation with slavery, indentured labour and the production of primary commodities in the Third World. The concentration on ‘meaning’ in a specific cultural context, he argues—and it is essentially the same argument as my own—has tended to push aside studies of longer term change. Even if one is trying to analyse meaning, symbolic structures cannot be treated as timeless; the meaning of sugar for the Lancashire mill worker is not determined in the metropolitan heartland alone. It is embedded in a world economy.

My own discussion of cooking takes place not so much in terms of the dichotomously based structures of gustemers, lexemes or even technemes, but of the more diversified structures of household and class. Food and sex must both be related to the central human process of production and reproduction.15 Since the former is linked to the mode of production of material goods, the analysis of cooking has to be related to the distribution of power and authority in the economic sphere, that is, to the system of class or stratification and to its political ramifications.

More specifically, the study of the process of providing and transforming food covers four main areas, that of growing, allocating, cooking and eating, which represent the phases of production, distribution, preparation and consumption:

Processes
Growing
Allocating/storing
Cooking
Eating

Phases
Production
Distribution
Preparation
Consumption

Locus
Farm
Granary/market
Kitchen
Table

To which should be added a fifth phase, often forgotten:

Clearing up

Disposal
Scullery

It is in the first of these phases that economic factors most clearly dominate,16 since it is linked to aspects of primary production, the work organisation and the technology of producing and storing food, leading to the distribution of what is produced. The process of allocation is the most overtly political phase, because it is here that demands for rent, tribute and tax intervene, as well as the internal divisions within the domestic unit for conserving as seed, for sale in the market and above all for consumption until the next harvest. In the third phase, the
preparation of food, we shift from the field and the granary (or market-place) to the kitchen, to the arts of cooking and the cuisine. This is the arena allocated to women rather than men, and to servants rather than mistresses, where the system of division and stratification of domestic or patrimonial labour is made explicit. The fourth phase is that of the table, the consuming of prepared food, both the cooked and the raw, where the identity and differentiation of the group is brought out in the practice of eating together or separately, as well as in the content of what is eaten by different collectivities; this is the arena of feasts and fasts, of prohibitions and preferences, of communal and domestic meals, of table manners and modes of serving and service.

The boundaries that we adopt for any particular study are largely arbitrary – do we choose a set of cooking terms, a set of operations, a set of recipes? My own predilection is to try to link the nature of different cuisines to the ways in which food is produced, and to relate the system of agricultural production to the question of ‘manners’, ‘cuisine’ and more generally to the sub-cultures and social strata that are differentiated by their styles of life. It is possible to express some of these features in binary form. But I am more interested in seeing the endogenous/exogenous contrast in terms of the development of trade and other modes of exchange, and in seeing the presence of a concept of ‘baking’ as related to the adoption of the oven. Above all I am concerned with the existence and emergence of internally differentiated cuisines, which I see as related to the contrast between the ‘food-ways’ of Africa and Eurasia – to use Simoons’s term for ‘the modes of feeling, thinking, and behaving about food that are common to a cultural group’ (1967: 3). In this context ‘Africa’ and ‘Eurasia’ have more than a geographical significance. Certain of these internal and external differences in ‘food-ways’ or ‘nutritional systems’ are related to the wider socio-economic situations that mark those continents. At the same time it is important to stress the similarities between various socio-cultural systems (manifestations of the total human situation, rather than the human mind per se) as well as the internal similarities that may crystallise around a common tradition. One has to aim at a balance between the acceptance of the dogma of cultural unity on the one hand (whether on the surface level of meaning to the actor or on the underlying one of homologous structures) and the recognition and explanation of diversity on the other. Methodologically, the investigation of concomitant variation still provides a fertile bed in which to cast the seed of a comparative sociology.

Like other social sciences, social anthropology does not produce sudden discoveries to parallel the decoding of Linear B by Ventris, nor does the idea of a revolution by paradigm shift have much relevance.