

Central Problems in Social Theory

**Action, structure and contradiction
in social analysis**

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Agency, Structure

The principal issue with which I shall be concerned in this paper is that of connecting a notion of human action with structural explanation in social analysis. The making of such a connection, I shall argue, demands the following: a theory of the human agent, or of the subject; an account of the conditions and consequences of action; and an interpretation of 'structure' as somehow embroiled in both those conditions and consequences.¹

Theories of action versus institutional theories

'Action' and 'structure' normally appear in both the sociological and philosophical literature as antinomies. Broadly speaking, it would be true to say that those schools of thought which have been preoccupied with action have paid little attention to, or have found no way of coping with, conceptions of structural explanation or social causation; they have also failed to relate action theory to problems of institutional transformation. This is most obviously true of the Anglo-Saxon philosophy of action, both in its Wittgensteinian form and in versions less directly influenced by Wittgenstein. Notwithstanding the great interest of Wittgenstein's later philosophy for the social sciences in respect of the relations between language and *Praxis*, we rapidly come up against its limits in respect of the theorisation of institutions. Institutions certainly appear in Wittgensteinian philosophy, and in a rather fundamental way. For the transition from the ideas of the earlier Wittgenstein to the later is effectively one from nature to society: language and social convention are shown in the *Philosophical Investigations* to be

inextricably intertwined, so that to explicate one is to explicate the other. But as expressed in forms of life, institutions are analysed only in so far as they form a consensual backdrop against which action is negotiated and its meanings formed. Wittgensteinian philosophy has not led towards any sort of concern with social change, with power relations, or with conflict in society. Other strands in the philosophy of action have operated at an even further distance from such issues, focusing attention almost exclusively upon the nature of reasons or intentions in human activity.²

Within more orthodox sociological traditions, symbolic interactionism has placed most emphasis upon regarding social life as an active accomplishment of purposive, knowledgeable actors; and it has also been associated with a definite 'theory of the subject', as formulated in Mead's account of the social origins of reflexive consciousness. But the 'social' in Mead's formulation is limited to familial figures and the 'generalised other'; Mead did not elaborate a conception of a differentiated society, nor any interpretation of social transformation. Much the same is the case with the subsequent evolution of this tradition, which has not successfully developed modes of institutional analysis. One of the results has been a partial accommodation between symbolic interactionism and functionalism in American sociology: the former is held to be a 'micro-sociology', dealing with small-scale 'interpersonal' relations, while more embracing 'macro-sociological' tasks are left to the latter.

Functionalism and structuralism are alike in according a priority to the object over the subject or, in some sense, to structure over action. Functionalist authors have normally thought of this in terms of 'emergent properties' of the totality, which not only separate its characteristics from those of its individual members, but cause it to exert a dominant influence over their conduct. The difficulties Durkheim experienced with this notion, in so far as his writings are regarded from the point of view of their connections with functionalism, rather than with structuralism, are well known. Durkheim wished to emphasise that the characteristics of the social whole are separate from those of individual agents, and accentuated various senses in which 'society' is external to its individual members: every person is born into an already constituted society, and every person is only one individual in a system of association involving many others. But neither in his earlier writings nor in his

later works did Durkheim manage to conceptualise the external or objective character of society in a plausible fashion. Durkheim's earlier position is exemplified in *The Rules of Sociological Method*, and associated externality with constraint. Two errors can be discerned in this standpoint. It was a mistake to understand social constraint as similar to physical constraint, and it was a mistake to regard constraint at all as a criterion of the 'social' or the 'institutional'. Taken together, these led to a conception of subject and object which even Durkheim had to admit has serious deficiencies. Society becomes a kind of inhibiting environment in which actors move, and which makes its presence felt through the pressurising effects which condition their conduct. The analogies to which Durkheim appealed in order to illustrate the 'external power' of social facts in his earlier work are clearly deficient. He sometimes compared the properties of society, as contrasted with those of its members, to the combination of elements in nature. The association of oxygen and hydrogen to form water creates properties which are not those of its constituent elements, or derivable from them; the same holds true of the relation between society and its constituent actors.³ But such an analogy only works for those very types of perspective Durkheim set out to criticise, such as utilitarian individualism. If individuals, as fully formed social beings, came together to create new social properties by the fact of their association, as in contract theories of society, the analogy might hold; to support Durkheim's case, it does not.

Subsequently Durkheim came to modify his notion of constraint, stressing the moral nature of social facts, and thereby separating physical constraint from the sorts of pressures exerted by society over its members. It is this 'later Durkheim' – who recognised that moral phenomena are both positively motivating as well as constraining in his original sense – who was the main inspiration for Parsons. Parsons's 'action frame of reference' is much more indebted to Durkheim than to the others whose work he claimed to have synthesised in *The Structure of Social Action*.⁴ Parsons understands action in relation to what he calls 'voluntarism', and has sought to reconcile the latter with a recognition of the 'emergent properties' of social systems. The reconciliation is achieved through the influence of normative values on two levels: as elements of personality and as core components of society. As 'internalised' in personality, values provide the motives or need-dispositions which

impel the conduct of the actor; while on the level of the social system, as institutionalised norms, values form a moral consensus that serves to integrate the totality. 'Voluntarism' here thus becomes largely reduced to making space in social theory for an account of motivation, connected via norms to the characteristics of social systems. The conduct of actors in society is treated as the outcome of a conjunction of social and psychological determinants, in which the former dominate the latter through the key influence attributed to normative elements. This effectively excludes certain essential components of the theory of action, as I shall conceptualise it later.⁵

The antimony I have just sketched in also figures prominently in Marxist philosophies. In some part this is traceable to the ambiguous content of Marx's own writings. The Hegelian inheritance in Marx, with its connotation of active consciousness and the coming-to-itself of the subject in history, mingles uneasily and in an unresolved way in Marx's works with an allegiance to a deterministic theory in which actors are propelled by historical laws. The distance between the Lukács of *History and Class Consciousness* and the Marxism of Althusser gives ample evidence of the widely discrepant readings which Marx's texts can engender; although a more apposite comparison, I shall suggest below, is perhaps made between Althusser's views and the phenomenological Marxism of Paci. It has been pointed out often enough that there are similarities between Parsons's functionalism and Althusser's version of Marxism. Such similarities are not difficult to discern: Parsons's theory of the internalisation of values has distinct parallels with Althusser's reworking of the notion of ideology; and the former's identification of the functional problems facing social systems resembles Althusser's conception of the regions that compose social formations – even if for one author the 'determination in the last instance' is cultural, for the other economic. But the most important similarity is surely that, while both systems of thought are concerned to overcome the subject-object dualism – Parsons via the action frame of reference and Althusser through his 'theoretical anti-humanism' – each reaches a position in which subject is controlled by object. Parsons's actors are cultural dopes, but Althusser's agents are structural dopes of even more stunning mediocrity. (For further discussion of Althusser on structural causality, see pp. 155–60.) The 'true subjects' of Althusser's *mise en scène*, as he candidly admits, are the 'places and functions' that agents occupy.⁶

Paci's project is diametrically opposed to that of Althusser in so far as he attempts to provide a reading of Marx informed primarily by the later writings of Husserl.⁷ Paci's theme is precisely the alienation of human subjectivity within capitalism. Like Lukács, he concentrates a good deal of his attention upon problems of reification, or objectification-as-reification, and it must be considered one of the most important contributions of phenomenologically-informed types of Marxism that they pose the issue of reification as central to the critique of ideology: something which is impossible to accomplish in Althusser's scheme.⁸ But Paci's work is largely concerned with radicalising Husserl's *Crisis of European Sciences* as a critique of the reifying character of technical reason. His basic position is closely tied to phenomenology, and is open to some of the objections that Althusser and others influenced by structuralism have quite legitimately levelled against such styles of thought.

These things having been said, Marx's writings still represent the most significant single fund of ideas that can be drawn upon in seeking to illuminate problems of agency and structure. Marx writes in the *Grundrisse* that every social item 'that has a fixed form' appears as merely 'a vanishing moment' in the movement of society. 'The conditions and objectifications of the process', he continues, 'are themselves equally moments of it, and its only subjects are individuals, but individuals in mutual relationships, which they equally reproduce and produce anew . . .'⁹ These comments express exactly the standpoint I wish to elaborate in this paper.

Time, agency, practice

I shall argue here that, in social theory, the notions of action and structure *presuppose one another*, but that recognition of this dependence, which is a dialectical relation, necessitates a reworking both of a series of concepts linked to each of these terms, and of the terms themselves.

In this section I shall consider some issues concerning the theory of action, before attempting to connect agency with a conception of structural analysis. I shall draw upon the analytical philosophy of action, as developed by British and American philosophers over the past two decades. But I shall want to say that, as characteristically formulated by such writers, the philosophy of action has a number

of notable *lacunae*. One, which I have already mentioned, is my main concern in what follows: the analytical philosophy of action lacks a theorisation of institutions. Two other considerations, I shall claim, are vital to such a theorisation. The first is the incorporation of *temporality* into the understanding of human agency; the second is the incorporation of *power* as integral to the constitution of social practices.

I regard as a fundamental theme of this paper, and of the whole of this book, that social theory *must acknowledge, as it has not done previously, time-space intersections as essentially involved in all social existence*. All social analysis must recognise (and itself takes place in) not just a double sense of *différance*, but a threefold one, as I have already indicated in a preliminary way in the previous paper. Social activity is always constituted in three intersecting moments of difference: temporally, paradigmatically (invoking structure which is present only in its instantiation) and spatially. All social practices are *situated* activities in each of these senses.

I shall take up problems of time-space relations in some detail in a subsequent paper in the book (see pp. 198–233). At this juncture I shall confine my attention to temporality and problems of agency. No author has illuminated these problems as much as Heidegger. In surveying the claims of Kant's transcendentalism, Heidegger notes that the Kantian *a priori* implies the mutuality of time and being: that which makes the thing what it is 'pre-cedes' the thing. But the effect of Kant's philosophy is to translate the underlying theorem of Classical philosophy – that what is real is time and space – into the proposition that *appearances* are in time and space. Leibnitz's view is in this respect more satisfactory; Leibnitz held that we cannot treat time and space as receptacles 'containing' experience, because it is only possible to understand time and space in relation to objects and events: time and space are the modes in which objects and events 'are' or 'happen'. Similarly, for Heidegger *seiend* is a verb form: every existent is a be-ing that is temporal. As one commentator puts it: 'Being appears to us, in time, as the Becoming of the Possible . . . futurity comes into our ken in terms of possibilities . . . the question of time is transcendently the ontology of the possible.'¹⁰ What Heidegger appears to ignore – and it is this which makes strongly historicist readings of his work possible – is the necessary insertion of a paradigmatic dimension in time-space relations. In the approach to social theory developed below, I shall

argue that time, space and 'virtual time-space' (or structure) – the threefold intersection of difference – are necessary to the constitution of the real. Or, to express the point in another way: the syntagmatic, which both differs and defers, necessitates the paradigmatic, although the latter is recursively dependent upon the former.

A. N. Whitehead says somewhere that 'What we perceive as the present is the vivid fringe of memory tinged with anticipation'. Heidegger stresses the link between *Andenken* (memory: literally, 'think-on') and *denken* (think) in holding that the experience of time is not that of a succession of nows, but the interpolation of memory and anticipation in the present-as-Being. Neither time nor the experience of time are aggregates of 'instants'. This emphasis is important for various reasons. One, which bears directly upon the treatment of action by analytical philosophers, concerns the conceptualisation of acts, intentions, purposes, reasons, etc. In ordinary English usage, we speak as if these were distinct unities or elements in some way aggregated or strung together in action. Most British and American philosophers of action have accepted this usage unquestioningly. In so doing they have unwittingly abstracted agency from its location in time, from the temporality of day-to-day conduct. What this literature ignores is the reflexive moment of attention, called into being in discourse, that breaks into the flow of action which constitutes the day-to-day activity of human subjects.¹¹ Such a moment is involved even in the constitution of 'an' action or of 'an act' from the *durée* of lived-through experience.¹²

'Action' or agency, as I use it, thus does not refer to a series of discrete acts combined together, but to a *continuous flow of conduct*. We may define action, if I may borrow a formulation from a previous work, as involving a 'stream of actual or contemplated causal interventions of corporeal beings in the ongoing process of events-in-the-world'.¹³ Certain comments need to be made about this. First, the notion of action has reference to the activities of an agent, and cannot be examined apart from a broader theory of the acting self. It is necessary to insist upon this apparent tautology, because in a substantial part of the philosophical literature the nature of action is discussed primarily in relation to a contrast with 'movements': the characteristics of the actor as a subject remain unexplored or implicit.¹⁴ The concept of agency as I advocate it

here, involving 'intervention' in a potentially malleable object-world, relates directly to the more generalised notion of *Praxis*. I shall later treat regularised acts as *situated practices*, and shall regard this concept as expressing a major mode of connection between action theory and structural analysis. Second, it is a necessary feature of action that, at any point in time, the agent 'could have acted otherwise': either positively in terms of attempted intervention in the process of 'events in the world', or negatively in terms of forbearance. The sense of 'could have done otherwise' is obviously a difficult and complex one. It is not important on this paper to attempt to elaborate a detailed justification of it. It is a mistake, however, to suppose that the concept of action can be fully elucidated in this respect outside of the context of *historically located modes of activity*.¹⁵

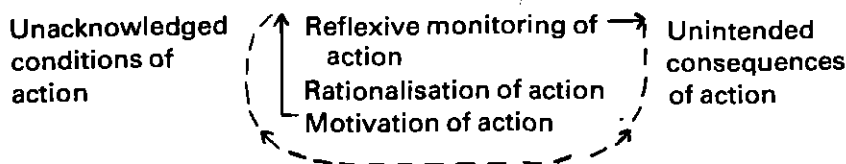


FIGURE 2.1

Figure 2.1 portrays what could be regarded as a 'stratification model' of action: a model whose implications however cannot be properly worked out separately from the discussion of the properties of structure that I shall provide in a subsequent section. The reflexive monitoring of conduct refers to the intentional or purposive character of human behaviour: it emphasises 'intentionality' as *process*. Such intentionality is a routine feature of human conduct, and does not imply that actors have definite goals consciously held in mind during the course of their activities. That the latter is unusual, in fact, is indicated in ordinary English usage by the distinction between meaning or intending to do something, and doing something 'purposefully', the latter implying an uncommon degree of mental application given to the pursuit of an aim.¹⁶ When lay actors inquire about each other's intentions in respect of particular acts, they abstract from a continuing process of routine monitoring whereby they relate their activity to one another and to the object-world. The distinctive feature about the reflexive monitoring of human actors, as compared to the behaviour of animals, is

what Garfinkel calls the accountability of human action. I take 'accountability' to mean that the accounts that actors are able to offer of their conduct draw upon the same stocks of knowledge as are drawn upon in the very production and reproduction of their action. As Harré expresses this, 'the very same social knowledge and skill is involved in the genesis of action and accounts . . . an individual's ability to do each depends upon his stock of social knowledge'.¹⁷ But we must make an important emendation to the point of view Harré appears to take. The 'giving of accounts' refers to the *discursive* capabilities and inclinations of actors, and does not exhaust the connections between 'stocks of knowledge' and action. The factor missing from Harré's characterisation is *practical consciousness*: tacit knowledge that is skilfully applied in the enactment of courses of conduct, but which the actor is not able to formulate discursively.

The reflexive monitoring of behaviour operates against the background of the rationalisation of action – by which I mean the capabilities of human agents to 'explain' why they act as they do by giving reasons for their conduct – and in the more 'inclusive' context of practical consciousness. Like 'intentions', 'reasons' only form discrete accounts in the context of queries, whether initiated by others, or as elements of a process of self-examination by the actor. It is very important to emphasise that the reflexive monitoring of action includes the monitoring of *the setting of interaction*, and not just the behaviour of the particular actors taken separately. This is shown by Garfinkel to be a basic feature of the ethno-methods involved in the day-to-day constitution of social interaction.¹⁸ The rationalisation of action, as a chronic feature of daily conduct, is a normal characteristic of the behaviour of competent social agents, and is indeed the main basis upon which their 'competence' is adjudged by others. This does not mean that reasons can be linked as directly with norms or conventions as some philosophers have claimed or implied. Reasons do not just include the citing of or the appeal to norms: to suppose that such is the case actually draws the philosophy of action back towards the Parsonian action frame of reference, since conduct then becomes driven by 'internalised' normative imperatives.¹⁹

The reasons actors supply discursively for their conduct in the course of practical queries, in the context of daily social life, stand in a relation of some tension to the rationalisation of action as actually embodied within the stream of conduct of the agent. The least interesting or consequential aspect of this concerns the possibilities

of deliberate dissimulation that exist: where an actor claims to have acted for reasons that he was not in fact guided by. More important are the grey areas of practical consciousness that exist in the relation between the rationalisation of action and actors' stocks of knowledge; and between the rationalisation of action and the unconscious. The stocks of knowledge, in Schutz's terms, or what I call the *mutual knowledge* employed by actors in the production of social encounters, are not usually known to those actors in an explicitly codified form; the practical character of such knowledge conforms to the Wittgensteinian formulation of knowing a rule. The accounts actors are able to provide of their reasons are bounded, or subject to various degrees of possible articulation, in respect of tacitly employed mutual knowledge.²⁰ The giving of reasons in day-to-day activity, which is closely associated with the moral accountability of action, is inevitably caught up in, and expressive of, the demands and the conflicts entailed within social encounters. But the articulation of accounts as reasons is also influenced by unconscious elements of motivation. This involves possibilities of rationalisation in the Freudian sense, as the dislocating effects of the unconscious upon conscious processes of rational accounting.

Motivational components of action, which I take to refer to the organisation of an actor's wants, straddle conscious and unconscious aspects of cognition and emotion. The whole weight of psychoanalytic theory suggests that motivation has an internal hierarchy of its own. I shall argue in a subsequent paper that a conception of the unconscious is essential to social theory, even if the resultant schema I shall develop departs in some ways from classical Freudian views. But the unconscious, of course, can only be explored in relation to the conscious: to the reflexive monitoring and rationalisation of conduct, grounded in practical consciousness. We have to guard against a reductive theory of institutions in respect of the unconscious: that is, against a theory which, in seeking to connect the forms of social life to unconscious processes, fails to allow sufficient play to autonomous social forces – Freud's own 'sociological' writings leave a lot to be desired in this respect.²¹ But we must also avoid a reductive theory of consciousness: that is, one which, in emphasising the role of the unconscious, is able to grasp the reflexive features of action only as a pale cast of unconscious processes which really determine them.

The philosophy of action, as developed by Anglo-Saxon authors, has skirted issues that are indicated at each side of Figure 2.1. So far

as the unconscious is concerned, this neglect expresses more than just an acceptance of Wittgenstein's suspicions about the logical status of psychoanalysis.²² Rather it is a consequence of a preoccupation with the relations between reasons and intentional conduct; most authors, if they refer to 'motives' at all, use the term as equivalent to reasons. A theory of motivation is crucial because it supplies the conceptual links between the rationalisation of action and the framework of convention as embodied in institutions (although I shall argue subsequently (see pp. 216–19) that large areas of social behaviour can be regarded as not directly motivated). But a theory of motivation also has to relate to the unacknowledged conditions of action: in respect of unconscious motives, operating or 'outside' the range of the self-understanding of the agent. The unconscious comprises only one set of such conditions, which have to be connected to those represented on the other side of the diagram: the unintended consequences of action.

If action philosophy has largely avoided questions of the unconscious, it has also displayed virtually *no interest in the unintended consequences of intentional conduct*.²³ This is certainly responsible in some part for the gulf that has separated the philosophy of action from institutional theories in social science. If functionalist writers have been unable to develop an adequate account of intentional conduct,²⁴ they have nevertheless been quite rightly concerned with the escape of activity from the scope of the purposes of the actor. The unintended consequences of action are of central importance to social theory in so far as they are systematically incorporated within the process of reproduction of institutions. I shall discuss the implications of this in some detail later. But it is worthwhile pointing out at this juncture that one such implication is that the unintended consequences of conduct relate directly to its unacknowledged conditions as specified by a theory of motivation. For in so far as such unintended consequences are involved in social reproduction, they become conditions of action also.²⁵ To follow this through further, however, we must turn to the concept of structure.

Time, structure, system

In social science, the term 'structure' appears in two main bodies of literature: that of functionalism, which is often in contemporary versions called 'structural-functionalism'; and the tradition of

thought that has embraced it most completely, structuralism. So far as the first of these is concerned, 'structure' normally appears in conjunction with 'function'. Spencer and other nineteenth-century authors who employed these terms did so often in the context of fairly bluntly-expressed schemes of biological analogies. To study the structure of society is like studying the anatomy of the organism; to study its functions is like studying the physiology of the organism. It is to show how the structure 'works'. Although more recent functionalist authors have become wary of employing direct or detailed biological parallels, the same sort of presumed relation between structure and function is readily apparent in their works. Structure is understood as referring to a 'pattern' of social relationships; function, to how such patterns actually operate as systems. Structure here is primarily a descriptive term, the main burden of explanation being carried by function. This is perhaps why the literature of structural-functionalism, both sympathetic and critical, has been overwhelmingly concerned with the concept of function, barely treating the notion of structure at all. It is in any case indicative of the degree to which the critics of functionalism have taken over the parameters of their opponent.

In structuralism, by contrast, 'structure' appears in a more explanatory role, as linked to the notion of transformations. Structural analysis, whether applied to language, to myth, literature or art, or more generally to social relationships, is considered to penetrate below the level of surface appearances. The division between structure and function is replaced by one between code and message. At first sight, structure in this usage, and other concepts associated with it, seem to have little or nothing in common with the notions employed by functionalist authors. But as I have tried to demonstrate in the previous paper, although internally diverse traditions of thought, structuralism and functionalism do share certain overall themes and characteristics, a fact which in some part reflects the influence of Durkheim over each. Two common features are worth reiterating here: one is the initial commitment of each to a distinction between synchrony and diachrony, or statics and dynamics; the other is their mutual concern not only with 'structures' but with 'systems'. These are obviously in each case connected perspectives, because the methodological isolation of a synchronic dimension is the basis for the identification of the characteristics of structure/systems. The differentiation of syn-

chrony and diachrony is a basic element of structuralism and functionalism alike; but both have generated attempts to transcend it. So far as the latter is concerned, the most interesting and important of such attempts involves complementing the notion of function with a conception of dysfunction, thus treating social processes in terms of a tension between integration and disintegration. I have commented on the deficiencies of this view elsewhere.²⁶ Within structuralist thought, the attempt to overcome the synchronic/diachronic distinction has produced an emphasis upon structuration, or as Derrida puts it, 'the structuring of structure'. For reasons I have specified in the foregoing discussion of structuralism, such notions of structuration tend to remain 'internal' to designated components of structural relations.

I shall elaborate below a conception of structuration that is directly linked to the account of human agency mentioned previously. But first it is necessary to consider briefly the relation between structure and system. While both terms appear in the respective literatures of structuralism and functionalism, the distinction between them in each is an unstable one, so that the one tends to collapse into the other. Saussure used the term 'system' rather than 'structure', meaning by the former the set of dependencies between the elements of *langue*. The introduction of 'structure' by Hjelmslev and the Prague group did not so much create a complementary concept to that of system, as substitute the former for the latter. The subsequent history of structuralism suggests that one or other of the terms is redundant, since their usage overlaps so much: system often appears as a defining characteristic of structure.²⁷ In functionalism there seems at first sight to be a basis for distinguishing between structure and system, following the structure/function contrast. Structure could be taken to refer to 'patterns' of social relationships, system to the actual 'functioning' of such relationships. This is indeed a distinction that often is made in functionalist writings. But it is not surprising that it is not one which is clearly sustained, resting as it does upon a supposed parallel with a differentiation between anatomy and physiology in the study of the organism. The 'structure' of an organism exists 'independently' of its functioning in a certain specific sense: the parts of the body can be studied when the organism dies, that is, when it has stopped 'functioning'. But such is not the case with social systems, *which cease to be when they cease to function*: 'patterns' of social

relationships only exist in so far as the latter are organised as systems, reproduced over the course of time. Hence in functionalism also, the notions of structure and system tend to dissolve into one another.

The concept of structuration I wish to develop depends upon making distinctions between structure and system (without questioning that these have to be closely connected); but it also involves understanding each of the terms differently from the characteristic usages of both structuralism and functionalism.

I want to suggest that *structure*, *system* and *structuration*, appropriately conceptualised, are all necessary terms in social theory. To understand why a use can be found for each of these notions, we have to return to the theme of temporality I introduced earlier. In functionalism and structuralism alike, an attempt is made to exclude time (or more accurately, time-space intersections) from social theory, by the application of the synchrony/diachrony distinction. However, social systems are 'taken out of time' in differing fashion in the two types of theoretical tradition. In functionalism, and more generally in Anglo-Saxon sociology and anthropology, the attempt to bracket time is made in terms of 'taking a snapshot' of society, or 'freezing' it at an instant. The logical defects of such a view should be obvious, and it only retains whatever plausibility it has because of the implicit comparison that lies behind it. The anatomy of a body, or the girders of a building, the sort of imagery that is involved with this conception of structure, are perceptually 'present' in a sense which 'social structure' is not. Consequently, in this mode of thinking the synchrony/diachrony distinction is unstable. Time refuses to be eliminated. (For further considerations on this, see pp. 198-201 below.) The term 'social structure' thus tends to include two elements, not clearly distinguished from one another: the *patterning of interaction*, as implying relations between actors or groups; and the *continuity of interaction* in time. Thus Firth writes in *Elements of Social Organisation* that 'The idea of the structure of society . . . must be concerned with the ordered relations of parts to a whole, with the arrangement in which the elements of social life are linked together.' But then later he adds, talking of 'structural elements running through the whole of human behaviour', that these consist 'really in the *persistence or repetition* of behaviour', in the '*continuity in social life*'²⁸ (emphasis added).

What this comes down to is an implicit recognition of a syntagma-

tic dimension (patterning in time-space) and a paradigmatic dimension (continuity-producing, virtual order of elements) in social analysis – although no account is provided of how these interconnect. Now this differentiation (although with certain confusions, see pp. 24–8 above) is just that employed by Lévi-Strauss, and one might therefore suppose that Lévi-Strauss's conception of structure might be simply adopted in place of the idea of 'social structure' typically employed in functionalist versions of social science. And I do want to suggest a usage of 'structure' that is closer to that of Lévi-Strauss than to functionalism. But there are at least five limitations that compromise the usefulness of Lévi-Strauss's notion.

1. Lévi-Strauss holds that structure connotes a model constructed by the observer, and in his words 'has nothing to do with empirical reality'.²⁹ I do not want to accept this curious mixture of nominalism and rationalism that Lévi-Strauss appears to advocate. I shall argue that structure has a 'virtual existence', as instantiations or moments; but this is not the same as identifying structure merely with models invented by sociological or anthropological observers. Although I shall not defend the claim, I regard the concepts I formulate below as compatible with a realist epistemology.
2. Lévi-Strauss's structuralism lacks a concept of structure-as-structuration. Processes of structuration, in other words, are treated by Lévi-Strauss, in the mode suggested by his persistent allusion to musical scores, as combinatory forms produced by an external player (the unconscious, in Lévi-Strauss's sense). But a theory of structuration that is concerned with all types of social processes and modes of reproduction, while not disavowing unconscious mental operations, must allocate a central place to discursive and practical consciousness in the reproduction of social practices.
3. Lévi-Strauss's approach appears ambiguous in regarding structure as relations between a set of inferred elements or oppositions, and as rules of transformation that produce equivalences across sets. The same sort of ambiguity tends to appear in mathematical concepts of structure, which usually treat structure as a matrix of admissible transformations of a set. 'Structure' can be understood either as the matrix, or the laws of transformation, but usually tends to merge the two together. I shall not regard structure as referring in its most basic sense to the form of sets, but rather to the *rules (and resources)* that, in social reproduction, 'bind' time. Thus 'structure',

as applied below, is first of all treated as a generic term; but structures can be identified as sets or matrices of rule-resource properties.

4. The notion of structure applied by Lévi-Strauss is associated with the basic shortcomings I have identified in structuralist thought generally, in respect of semantic spacing as *Praxis*. I shall argue that, strictly speaking, there are no such things as 'rules of transformation'; *all social rules are transformational*, in the sense that structure is not manifested in empirical similarity of social items.³⁰

5. If structure exists (in time-space) only in its instances, it must include, it seems to me, reference to phenomena that are completely foreign to Lévi-Strauss's attempt to overcome formalism by emphasising form as the realisation of content: phenomena relating to *power*. I want to say that, in the senses in which I shall elaborate conceptions of domination and power, these concepts are logically presupposed by that of agency, and by the agency/structure connections characterised below.

As I shall employ it, 'structure' refers to 'structural property', or more exactly, to 'structuring property', structuring properties providing the 'binding' of time and space in social systems. I argue that these properties can be understood as rules and resources, recursively implicated in the reproduction of social systems. Structures exist paradigmatically, as an absent set of differences, temporally 'present' only in their instantiation, in the constituting moments of social systems. To regard structure as involving a 'virtual order' of differences, as I have already indicated, does not necessitate accepting Lévi-Strauss's view that structures are simply models posited by the observer. Rather, it implies recognising the existence of: (a) knowledge – as memory traces – of 'how things are to be done' (said, written), on the part of social actors; (b) social practices organised through the recursive mobilisation of that knowledge; (c) capabilities that the production of those practices presupposes.

'Structural analysis' in the social sciences involves examining the structuration of social systems. The connotation of 'visible pattern' which the term 'social structure' ordinarily has, as employed in Anglo-American sociology, is carried in my terminology by the notion of system: with the crucial proviso that social systems are patterned in time as well as space, through continuities of social reproduction. A social system is thus a 'structured totality'. Struc-

tures do not exist in time-space, except in the moments of the constitution of social systems. But we can analyse how 'deeply-layered' structures are in terms of the historical duration of the practices they recursively organise, and the spatial 'breadth' of those practices: how widespread they are across a range of interactions. The most deeply-layered practices constitutive of social systems in each of these senses are *institutions*.

It is fundamental to understand that, when I speak of structure as rules and resources, I do not imply that we can profitably study either rules or resources as aggregates of isolated precepts or capabilities. From Saussure to Wittgenstein to Searle the game of chess appears in the philosophical literature as a reference point for illustrating features of linguistic and social rules. But, as I shall suggest below – especially in the way in which they are employed by philosophical authors – such game analogies can be highly misleading. Rules tend to be regarded as isolated formulae, to be related to particular 'moves'. Nowhere in the philosophical literature, to my knowledge, are either the history of chess (which has its origins in warfare), or actual games of chess, made the focus of study. Such study would, however, be much more relevant than the usual analogies for elucidating the standpoint I wish to suggest, which regards rules as media and outcome of the reproduction of social systems. Rules can only be grasped in the context of the historical development of social totalities, as recursively implicated in practices. This point is important in a twofold sense. (a) *There is not a singular relation between 'an activity' and 'a rule'*, as is sometimes suggested or implied by appeal to statements like 'the rule governing the Queen's move' in chess. Activities or practices are brought into being in the context of overlapping and connected sets of rules, given coherence by their involvement in the constitution of social systems in the movement of time. (b) Rules cannot be exhaustively described or analysed in terms of their own content, as prescriptions, prohibitions, etc.: precisely because, apart from those circumstances where a relevant lexicon exists, *rules and practices only exist in conjunction with one another*.

Rules and resources

The connections between the three concepts in Figure 2.2 can be quickly stated at the outset. Social systems involve regularised

STRUCTURE	Rules and resources, organised as properties of social systems. Structure only exists as 'structural properties'.
SYSTEM	Reproduced relations between actors or collectivities, organised as regular social practices.
STRUCTURATION	Conditions governing the continuity or transformation of structures, and therefore the reproduction of systems.

FIGURE 2.2

relations of interdependence between individuals or groups, that typically can be best analysed as *recurrent social practices*. Social systems are systems of social interaction; as such they involve the situated activities of human subjects, and exist syntagmatically in the flow of time. Systems, in this terminology, have structures, or more accurately, have structural properties; they are not structures in themselves. Structures are necessarily (logically) properties of systems or collectivities, and *are characterised by the 'absence of a subject'*. To study the structuration of a social system is to study the ways in which that system, via the application of generative rules and resources, and in the context of unintended outcomes, is produced and reproduced in interaction.

Each of these notions demands further elaboration, however, beginning with rules and resources. The idea of 'rule' of course, has been much discussed in the recent philosophical literature, and it is important to enter some major qualifications as to its use.

1. I reject the distinction which is frequently made between 'constitutive' and 'regulative' rules (which can be traced back to Kant).³¹ All social rules have both constitutive and regulative (sanctioning) aspects to them. The sort of prescription which is usually offered as an instance of a regulative rule is, for example, 'don't take the goods of another'; as contrasted to something like the aforementioned 'rule governing the Queen's move' in chess. But the first enters into

the constitution of ideas of 'honesty', 'propriety', etc.; while the latter implies sanctions ('you mustn't/can't move the piece like that').

2. We have to be very careful about using the rules of games – like chess – as illustrative of the characteristics of social rules in general. Only certain features of 'knowing a rule' are best exemplified in this way, because games like chess have clearly fixed, formalised rules that are established in a lexicon, as well as because the rules of chess are not generally subject to chronic disputes of legitimacy, as social rules may be. To know a rule, as Wittgenstein says, is to 'know how to go on', to know how to play according to the rule. This is vital, because it connects rules and practices. Rules generate – or are the medium of the production and reproduction of – practices. A rule is thus not a generalisation of what people do, of regular practices. These considerations are important in respect of the arguments of those authors (such as Ziff) who have been inclined to discard the notion of rule in favour of that of dispositions.³² The usual basis of this view is the idea that rules are foreign to most areas of social life, which are not organised prescriptively. One version is given by Oakeshott, who writes that, in language and in practical social life:

No doubt . . . what is learnt (or some of it) can be formulated in rules and precepts; but in neither case do we . . . learn by learning rules and precepts . . . And not only may a command of language and behaviour be achieved without our becoming aware of the rules, but also, if we have acquired a knowledge of the rules, this sort of command of language and behaviour is impossible until we have forgotten them as rules and are no longer tempted to turn speech and action into the applications of rules to a situation.³³

This, however, identifies knowing rules with knowing how to formulate rules, which are two different things. 'To know how to go on' is not necessarily, or normally, to be able to formulate clearly what the rules are. A child who learns English as a first language, when he or she can speak the language, knows the rules of English usage, whether or not he or she can formulate any of them. Oakeshott's argument does not compromise the general usefulness of 'rule', although it does focus attention upon the Wittgensteinian emphasis on the practical character of rule-following.

3. Pursuing the implications of point 2, we may say that Wittgenstein's references to the rules of children's games are more illuminating in some key respects than discussions of games with fixed and determined rules like chess. He makes, in fact, virtually the same point as Oakeshott, when arguing that the rules involved in most forms of life resemble the former more than they do the latter: 'remember that in general we don't use language according to strict rules – it hasn't been taught us by means of strict rules, either'. In children's games, at least those which are practised by children's groups themselves, or transmitted informally from generation to generation, there is no lexicon of formal rules; and it may be an essential characteristic of the rules which do exist that they cannot be strictly defined. Such is the case, Wittgenstein argues, with most of the concepts employed in ordinary language. We cannot clearly delimit them in a lexical sense: 'not because we don't know their real definition, but because there is no real "definition" to them. To suppose that there must be would be like supposing that whenever children play with a ball they play a game according to strict rules.'³⁴ The point made in the previous paper (p. 43) with regard to ethno-semantics is worth repeating at this juncture. The operations of practical consciousness enmesh rules and the 'methodological' interpretation of rules in the continuity of practices.³⁵ Garfinkel's conception of the interpretative work which is always temporally involved in accountability is very important here. What Garfinkel calls 'ad hoc' considerations – the 'etcetera clause', 'let it pass', etc. [*sic*] – are chronically involved in the instantiation of rules, and are not separate from what those rules 'are'.

In emphasising the importance of resources as structural properties of social systems, I mean to stress the centrality of the concept of power to social theory. Like 'rule', power is not a description of a state of affairs, but a capability. I think it true to say that few of the major thinkers or traditions of thought in sociology have accorded power as focal a place in social theory as is warranted. Those who have recognised the essential importance of power, like Nietzsche and Weber, have usually done so only on the basis of a normative irrationalism which I want to repudiate (although I shall not give the grounds for this here). If there is no rational mode of adjudging 'ultimate value' claims, as Weber held, then the only recourse open is that of power or might: the strongest are able to make their values count by crushing others.³⁶ More common are those standpoints

which either treat power as secondary to the meaningful or normative character of social life, or ignore power altogether. Such is the case, for example, with the works of authors in traditions of phenomenology (Schutz) or Wittgensteinian social thought (Winch), just as much as with traditions to which they are opposed in other respects (the functionalism of Durkheim or Parsons). It is even true, in a certain, although a quite different, sense, of Marxism, in so far as Marx connected power directly to class interests, with the possible inference that when class divisions disappear, relations of power do also.

Among the many interpretations of power in social and political theory, two main perspectives appear. One is that power is best conceptualised as the capability of an actor to achieve his or her will, even at the expense of that of others who might resist him – the sort of definition employed by Weber³⁷ among many other authors. The second is that power should be seen as a property of the collectivity: Parsons's concept of power, for instance, belongs to this latter category.³⁸ I wish to claim, however, that neither of these modes of conceiving power is appropriate in isolation; and that we should connect them together as features of the duality of structure. I shall treat resources as the 'bases' or 'vehicles' of power, comprising structures of domination, drawn upon by parties to interaction and reproduced through the duality of structure. Power is generated by definite forms of domination in a parallel way to the involvement of rules with social practices: and, indeed, as an integral element or aspect of those practices. (For an extended discussion of power and domination, see pp. 88–94 below.)

The theory of structuration

The concept of structuration involves that of the *duality of structure*, which relates to the *fundamentally recursive character of social life*, and expresses the *mutual dependence of structure and agency*. By the duality of structure I mean that the structural properties of social systems are both the medium and the outcome of the practices that constitute those systems. The theory of structuration, thus formulated, rejects any differentiation of synchrony and diachrony or statics and dynamics. The identification of structure with constraint is also rejected: structure is both enabling and constraining, and it is

one of the specific tasks of social theory to study the conditions in the organisation of social systems that govern the interconnections between the two. According to this conception, the same structural characteristics participate in the subject (the actor) as in the object (society). Structure forms 'personality' and 'society' simultaneously – but in neither case exhaustively: because of the significance of unintended consequences of action, and because of unacknowledged conditions of action. Ernst Bloch says, *Homo semper tiro*: man is always a beginner.³⁹ We may agree, in the sense that every process of action is a production of something new, a fresh act; but at the same time all action exists in continuity with the past, which supplies the means of its initiation. *Structure thus is not to be conceptualised as a barrier to action, but as essentially involved in its production*: even in the most radical processes of social change which, like any others, occur in time. The most disruptive modes of social change, like the most rigidly stable forms, involve structuration. Hence there is no need, nor any room, for a conception of de-structuration such as that suggested by Gurvitch.⁴⁰ A notion of de-structuration is only necessary if we retain the idea that structure is simply equivalent to constraint, thereby counterposing structure and freedom (as Gurvitch does, and as Sartre does also).

It is important to accentuate this last point, because some authors who have emphasised the contingency of social life have done so only at the cost of adopting an overly voluntaristic viewpoint. One such example, its interesting contributions notwithstanding, is Shackle's economics. Shackle argues against determinism in human economic activities, stressing their temporal and contingent character: but he is led by this to attach an excessive importance to what he calls 'decision' in human social life. The past is dead and 'determined', but the present is always open to the free initiative of human actors.⁴¹ Commendable as this perspective may be in some ways, it hardly allows us to grasp how the past makes itself felt in the present, even while the present may react back against the past. In this respect, Shackle's view seems to share a good deal in common with that elaborated by Sartre in *The Critique of Dialectical Reason* – indeed, it would not be too inaccurate to regard Shackle's work as a kind of Sartrean economic theory. For in spite of his accentuation of the importance of history to the understanding of the human condition, Sartre preserves a gulf between past and present, in the sense that while the past is 'given and necessary' the present is a

realm of free, spontaneous creation: in that sense he fails to escape from a dualism of 'materiality' and '*Praxis*'.

According to the notion of the duality of structure, rules and resources are drawn upon by actors in the production of interaction, but are thereby also reconstituted through such interaction. Structure is thus the mode in which the relation between moment and totality expresses itself in social reproduction. This relation is distinct from that involved in the relation of 'parts' and 'wholes' in the co-ordination of actors and groups in social systems as posited in functionalist theory. That is to say, the differences which constitute social systems reflect a dialectic of presences and absences in space and time. But these are only brought into being and reproduced via the virtual order of differences of structures, expressed in the duality of structure. The differences that constitute structures, and are constituted structurally, relate 'part' to 'whole' in the sense in which the utterance of a grammatical sentence presupposes the absent corpus of syntactical rules that constitute the language as a totality. The importance of this relation of moment and totality for social theory cannot be exaggerated, since it involves a dialectic of presence and absence which ties the most minor or trivial forms of social action to structural properties of the overall society (and, logically, to the development of mankind as a whole).

It is an essential emphasis of the ideas developed here that institutions do not just work 'behind the backs' of the social actors who produce and reproduce them. Every competent member of every society knows a great deal about the institutions of that society: such knowledge is not *incidental* to the operation of society, but is necessarily involved in it (see pp. 248-53 below). A common tendency of many otherwise divergent schools of sociological thought is to adopt the methodological tactic of beginning their analyses by discounting agents' reasons for their action (or what I prefer to call the rationalisation of action), in order to discover the 'real' stimuli to their activity, of which they are ignorant. Such a stance, however, is not only defective from the point of view of social theory, it is one with strongly-defined and potentially offensive political implications. It implies a *derogation of the lay actor*. If actors are regarded as cultural dopes or mere 'bearers of a mode of production', with no worthwhile understanding of their surroundings or the circumstances of their action, the way is immediately laid open for the supposition that their own views can be disregarded in

any practical programmes that might be inaugurated. This is not just a question of 'whose side (as social analysts) are we on?'⁴² – although there is no doubt that social incompetence is commonly attributed to people in lower socio-economic groupings by those in power-positions, or by their associated 'experts'.

It is not a coincidence that the forms of social theory which have made little or no conceptual space for agents' understanding of themselves, and of their social contexts, have tended greatly to exaggerate the impact of dominant symbol systems or ideologies upon those in subordinate classes: as in Parsons or Althusser. A good case can be made to the effect that only dominant class groups have ever been strongly committed to dominant ideologies.⁴³ This is not just because of the development of divergent 'sub-cultures' – for example, working-class culture as compared to bourgeois culture in nineteenth-century Britain – but also because *all social actors, no matter how lowly, have some degree of penetration of the social forms which oppress them.*⁴⁴ Where partially closed, localised cultures become largely unavailable, as is increasingly the case within advanced capitalism, scepticism about 'official' views of society often is expressed in various forms of 'distancing' – and in humour. Wit is deflationary. Humour is used socially both to attack and to defend against the influence of outside forces that cannot otherwise easily be coped with.

One must not overestimate the degree of conviction with which even those in dominant classes, or other positions of authority, accept ideological symbol-systems. But it is not implausible to suppose that, in some circumstances, and from some aspects, those in subordinate positions in a society *might have a greater penetration of the conditions of social reproduction than those who otherwise dominate them.* This is related to the *dialectic of control* in social systems that I shall analyse later (pp. 145–50, below). Those who in a largely unquestioning way accept certain dominant perspectives may be more imprisoned within them than others are, even though these perspectives help the former to sustain their position of dominance. The point at issue here has a definite similarity to Laing's thesis about schizophrenia: that notwithstanding the distorted nature of schizophrenic language and thought, in some respects the schizophrenic person 'sees through' features of day-to-day existence which the majority accept without demur.

These things having been said, we have to enter major qualifica-

tions about what is implied in the proposition that every competent actor has a wide-ranging, yet intimate and subtle, knowledge of the society of which he or she is a member. First, 'knowledge' has to be understood in terms of both practical and discursive consciousness: and even where there is substantial discursive penetration of institutional forms, this is not necessarily, nor normally, expressed in a propositional manner. Schutz in a sense makes this point when he calls typifications 'cookery book knowledge'; and contrasts cookery book knowledge to the sort of abstract, theoretical knowledge called for by the relevances of the social scientist.⁴⁵ But this does not distinguish satisfactorily between practical consciousness, which is knowledge embodied in what actors 'know how to do', and discourse, that is, what actors are able to 'talk about' and in what manner or guise they are able to talk about it.

Second, every individual actor is only one among others in a society: very many others, obviously, in the case of the contemporary industrialised societies. We have to recognise that what an actor knows as a competent – but historically and spatially located – member of society, 'shades off' in contexts that stretch beyond those of his or her day-to-day activity. Third, the parameters of practical and discursive consciousness are bounded in specifiable ways, that connect with the 'situated' character of actors' activities, but are not reducible to it. These can be identified from Figure 2.1: the unconscious conditions of action and the unintended consequences of action. All of these phenomena have to be related to problems of ideology, a task which I undertake in a following paper.

Structural properties of social systems

Social systems, by contrast to structure, exist in time–space, and are constituted by social practices. The concept of social system, understood in its broadest sense, refers to reproduced *interdependence of action*: in other words, to 'a relationship in which changes in one or more component parts initiate changes in other component parts, and these changes, in turn, produce changes in the parts in which the original changes occurred'.⁴⁶ The smallest type of social system is dyadic. We must beware, however, of the idea that dyadic systems show the workings of more inclusive social systems in miniature, such that the former can be used as a basis of theorising the

properties of the latter – the sort of procedure Parsons used in *The Social System*.⁴⁷ One of my reasons for adopting a distinction between *social integration* and *system integration* below is in order to recognise contrasts between various levels of the articulation of interaction.

The term 'system' cannot be left an unexamined one, any more than those of agency and structure. The concept of system has entered sociology from two main sources. On the one hand, the notion of system, whether going by that name or some other (for example, structure!) has always been an important element of functionalism where, as I have suggested before, it has rarely strayed far from organic analogies. The social system is conceived of in terms of parallels with physiological systems. The other source of provenance is from 'systems theory', which is not clearly distinguishable from 'information theory' or 'cybernetics', all of which have largely arisen outside the social sciences.

In an influential discussion, Bertalanffy distinguishes three aspects of systems theory. 'General system theory' is concerned with exploring similarities between totalities or wholes across the range of natural and social sciences. According to Bertalanffy, one of the main trends in modern thought in general involves the rediscovery of wholes as compared to aggregates, of autonomy as opposed to reduction.⁴⁸ Such a rediscovery, he admits, has received a direct impetus from developments in modern technology, which forms the second category, 'systems technology'. Systems technology does not just refer to computers, automated machines, etc., but also to the incorporation of human beings, or their activities, within designed control systems. Information theory and cybernetics were created mainly in association with such technological developments. Finally, there is 'systems philosophy', which is concerned with broad philosophical implications of systems theory. Bertalanffy himself regards systems philosophy as having a major importance in the modern context, seeing it as generating an appropriate philosophy to replace logical positivism: systems philosophy can provide a new basis for achieving the unity of science striven for by the logical positivists.⁴⁹

I shall have nothing to say about the third of these categories, which is not in my opinion of any particular interest. But the second is crucial: for, understood as a series of technological advances, systems theory has already had a great practical impact upon social life, an impact whose full implications will only be felt in the future.

Any theoretical appropriation of concepts from systems theory within the social sciences must hold firm against collapsing the first category into the second. Systems theory in the second sense is a potent ideological force in the contemporary world;⁵⁰ only by maintaining the distinction between first and second categories is it possible to submit systems technology to ideology-critique. But sustaining this possibility, I think, also involves resisting the sort of claims that Ertalanffy and others have made about the applicability of general systems theory to human conduct. The position I propose to adopt here is close to that elaborated by Richard Taylor: the reflexive monitoring of action among human actors cannot be adequately grasped in terms of principles of teleology applicable to mechanical systems.⁵¹ Purposive behaviour is usually treated by systems theorists in terms of feed-back.⁵² I shall accept below Buckley's argument that systems involving feed-back processes are worthwhile distinguishing from the system mechanisms usually given prominence within functionalism, which are of a 'lower' kind.⁵³ But I shall also want to differentiate feed-back system processes from a 'higher' order of reflexive self-regulation in social systems.

Functionalist authors have always accentuated the closeness of the connections between biology and sociology: the boldest and most comprehensive version of this still being Comte's hierarchy of the sciences. To question the naturalistic framework associated with this sort of position, and to refuse any special technical sense to the term 'function', as I do throughout this book, is not to deny that there may be significant continuities between the natural and social sciences. It is rather to reconceptualise the form those continuities might take (cf. pp. 257-9, below). In respect of problems discussed in this paper, the most relevant sources of connection between biological and social theory do not involve the functional analogies so strongly represented in the history of sociology, but rather concern recursive or *self-reproducing* systems. There are two related types of theory involved here. One is the theory of automata,⁵⁴ as modelled in the Turing machine. But this is not of as much interest to the conceptualisation of social reproduction as recent conceptions of cellular self-reproduction (autopoiesis) - although it is probably too early to say just how close the parallels with social theory might turn out to be. The chief point of connection is undoubtedly recursiveness, taken to characterise autopoietic organisation. Autopoietic organisation can be understood as relations

between the production of components which 'participate recursively in the same network of productions of components which produced these components'. . .⁵⁵ Varela proposes that the theoretical issues which have recently emerged in the cybernetics of autopoietic systems suggest a logical framework close to dialectics. The attempt of Russell and Whitehead to reduce the theory of numbers to set-theoretical format foundered upon the definition of the null set, or zero, as the class of all classes that are not members of themselves, which led to contradictory consequences. Russell and Whitehead thus prohibited self-referential expressions. But the phenomenon of self-indication is a logical property of theoretical characterisations of autopoietic organisation: which suggests that contradiction is also.⁵⁶ However this may be in biological systems, I shall want to argue in detail in a following paper that the self-regulating properties of social systems must be grasped via a theory of *system contradiction*.

Social integration and system integration

I have earlier argued that systems of social interaction, reproduced through the duality of structure in the context of bounded conditions of the rationalisation of action, are constituted through the interdependence of actors or groups. The notion of integration, as employed here, refers to the degree of interdependence of action, or 'systemness', that is involved in any mode of system reproduction. 'Integration' can be defined therefore as *regularised ties, interchanges or reciprocity of practices* between either actors or collectivities. 'Reciprocity of practices' has to be understood as involving regularised relations of relative autonomy and dependence between the parties concerned (see below, pp. 92-3). It is important to emphasise that, as employed here at any rate, *integration is not synonymous with 'cohesion', and certainly not with 'consensus'*.

The division between social and system integration, and that between conflict and contradiction, are introduced as a means of coping with basic characteristics of the differentiation of society (see Figure 2.3). We can define social integration as concerned with *systemness on the level of face-to-face interaction*; system integration

SOCIAL INTEGRATION	Reciprocity between actors (relations of autonomy/ dependence)
SYSTEM INTEGRATION	Reciprocity between groups or collectivities (relations of autonomy/dependence)

FIGURE 2.3

as concerned with *systemness on the level of relations between social systems or collectivities*.⁵⁷ This distinction is the nearest I shall come in this book to admitting the usefulness of a differentiation between 'micro-' and 'macro-sociological' studies. The special significance of face-to-face interaction, however, is not primarily that it involves small groups, or that it represents 'society in miniature'. We must be particularly wary of this last connotation, in fact, because it carries the implication that the more inclusive social system or society can be understood as the social relationship writ large. 'Face-to-face interaction' rather emphasises the significance of *space and presence* in social relations: in the immediacy of the life-world, social relations can be influenced by different factors from those involved with others who are spatially (and perhaps temporally) absent.

Systemness on the level of social integration typically occurs through the reflexive monitoring of action in conjunction with the rationalisation of conduct. I shall discuss later how this connects with normative sanctions and with the operations of power. But it is extremely important, for the point of view developed throughout this book, to emphasise that the systemness of social integration is *fundamental to the systemness of society as a whole*. System integration cannot be adequately conceptualised via the modalities of social integration; none the less the latter is always the chief prop of the former, *via the reproduction of institutions in the duality of structure*. I shall have a lot more to say about this below (pp. 210–22). The duality of structure relates the smallest item of day-to-day behaviour to attributes of far more inclusive social systems: when I utter a grammatical English sentence in a casual conversation, I contribute to the reproduction of the English language as a whole. This is an unintended consequence of my speaking the sentence, but one that is bound in directly to the recursive-

ness of the duality of structure. In this example social and system integration are the same process, and if all processes of system reproduction were of this nature, there would be no need to distinguish between social and system integration at all. But the unintended consequences of action stretch beyond the recursive effects of the duality of structure: this introduces the further series of influences that can be understood in terms of system integration, and it is to these that the differentiations in Figure 2.4 refer.

SYSTEM =	interdependence of action
conceived as	(1) homeostatic causal loops
	(2) self-regulation through feed-back
	(3) reflexive self-regulation

FIGURE 2.4

As employed by functionalist authors, the interdependence of system parts is usually interpreted as homeostasis.⁵⁸ Homeostasis may be regarded as involving the operation of causal loops, that is, 'circular' causal relations in which a change in one item initiates a sequence of events affecting others, that eventually return to affect the item that began the sequence, thus tending to restore it to its original state. The use of the term 'system' in functionalist writings, and its identification with homeostatic properties, makes it seem as if the idea of homeostasis exhausts the meaning of interdependence of action in system integration. But as critics of functionalism influenced by systems theory have pointed out, homeostasis is only one form or level of such interdependence: and one, borrowing from a physiological or mechanical model, where the forces involved operate most 'blindly'.⁵⁹ It is not the same as self-regulation through feed-back, and is a more 'primitive' process.

It seems evident enough that homeostatic causal processes are an important feature of the reproduction of social systems – although I hold that such processes cannot be adequately grasped using the language of functionalism. Homeostatic features of social systems may be distinguished from those which belong to a higher order, involving self-regulation through feed-back via the operation of selective 'information filtering'. In physical systems, the simplest type of feed-back scheme involves three elements: receptor, control apparatus and effector, through which messages pass. Feed-back

mechanisms may promote stasis: but, unlike homeostatic processes, they can also be directional, propelling controlled change. A fairly direct parallel can be drawn between such feed-back effects and processes involved in social systems. But reflexive self-regulation is a distinctively human phenomenon, with many important implications.

As a mode of illustrating the three levels of systemness, we may consider a so-called 'poverty cycle': for example, material deprivation → poor schooling → low-level employment → material deprivation. A poverty cycle forms a homeostatic loop if each of these factors participates in a reciprocal series of influences, without any one acting as a 'controlling filter' for the others. A homeostatic loop forms systemness of the following pattern:



We might discover such a loop if we trace out the influence of primary education upon the other elements mentioned above. If, however, we consider the influence of children's overall educational career upon the other factors, it might emerge that an examination taken on entry to secondary school is a crucial filter that exerts a controlling influence upon other elements in the cycle. (The validity of the particular example is not important.) In such a circumstance, the examinations can be regarded as the equivalent of an information control apparatus in a mechanical feed-back system. The feed-back effect here might govern a regularised process of directional change: such as a progressive transfer of children from working-class backgrounds into white-collar occupations, in conjunction with a relative expansion of the white-collar sector. Now let us suppose that, on the basis of studies of the community, school and work, the Ministry of Education applies knowledge of the poverty cycle to intervene in the operation of that cycle: in this case the reflexive monitoring of action rejoins the organisation of social systems, and becomes a guiding influence in it.

The expansion of attempts at reflexive self-regulation at the level of system integration is evidently one of the principal features of the contemporary world. Such a phenomenon underlies the two most pervasive types of social mobilisation in modern times: the 'legal-rational' social *organisation* and the secular *social movement*. But it is also highly important to recognise that attempts at reflexive

self-regulation also produce a further diffusion of feed-back processes, via the introduction of 'systems technology'. I have already stressed that reflexive self-regulation understood purely as technical control – as is so vigorously argued by Habermas – may become a potent ideological force.

I have argued that *institutions* may be regarded as practices which are deeply sedimented in time-space: that is, which are enduring and inclusive 'laterally' in the sense that they are widespread among the members of a community or society. At this point I want to introduce a distinction that I shall refer to quite often subsequently in this book, between *institutional analysis* and the analysis of *strategic conduct*. This does not correspond to the differentiation between social and system integration, because I intend it to be methodological rather than substantive. The point of the distinction is to indicate two principal ways in which the study of system properties may be approached in the social sciences: each of which is separated out, however, only by a methodological *epoché*. To examine the constitution of social systems as strategic conduct is to study the mode in which actors draw upon structural elements – rules and resources – in their social relations. 'Structure' here appears as actors' mobilisation of discursive and practical consciousness in social encounters. Institutional analysis, on the other hand, places an *epoché* upon strategic conduct, treating rules and resources as chronically reproduced features of social systems.⁶⁰ It is quite essential to see that this is only a methodological bracketing: these are not two sides of a dualism, they express a duality, the duality of structure. No such bracketing appears in naturalistic sociologies, which tend to equate social causation and structural constraint as synonymous notions. A classic example is Durkheim's *Suicide*, in which suicidal conduct is treated as caused by factors such as 'weak social integration' (in combination with psychological causes). Durkheim's account lacks any mode of understanding suicidal behaviour, and the social interaction in which it is meshed, as reflexively monitored conduct.⁶¹

Contrast the character of Durkheim's sociology with that of Goffman. Goffman implicitly brackets institutional analysis in order to concentrate upon social interaction as strategic conduct. Much of Goffman's work may be read as investigating the tacit stocks of knowledge that are employed by lay actors in the production of social encounters. Goffman analyses 'knowledge' in the

Wittgensteinian sense of 'knowing rules'; the feeling of sharp illumination that the reader often experiences in reading Goffman derives from his making explicit what, once he has pointed them out, we recognise to be ingredients of practical consciousness, normally employed in an unacknowledged way in social life. On the other hand, Goffman's sociology, like Wittgensteinian philosophy, has not developed an account of institutions, of history or structural transformation. Institutions appear as unexplained parameters within which actors organise their practical activities.⁶² This is therefore in the end more than a methodological 'bracketing': it reflects the *dualism* of action and structure that has been noted earlier. Being limited in this sense, Goffman's sociology also ignores the possibility of recognising the dialectic of presence/absence that connects action to the properties of the totality: for this involves the need to generate an *institutional theory of everyday life*.

The duality of structure in interaction

Let us now give more concrete form to the duality of structure in interaction, following on from what has been outlined above.

What I call here the 'modalities' of structuration represent the central dimensions of the duality of structure in the constitution of interaction. The modalities of structuration are drawn upon by actors in the production of interaction, but at the same time are the media of the reproduction of the structural components of systems of interaction. When institutional analysis is bracketed, the modalities are treated as stocks of knowledge and resources employed by actors in the constitution of interaction as a skilled and knowledgeable accomplishment, within bounded conditions of the rationalisation of action. Where strategic conduct is placed under an *epoché*, the modalities represent rules and resources considered as institutional features of systems of social interaction. The level of modality thus provides the coupling elements whereby the bracketing of strategic or institutional analysis is dissolved in favour of an acknowledgement of their interrelation.

The classification given in Figure 2.5 does not represent a typology of interaction or structures, but a portrayal of dimensions that are combined in differing ways in social practices. The communication of meaning in interaction does not take place separately

INTERACTION	communication	power	sanction
(MODALITY)	interpretative scheme	facility	norm
STRUCTURE	signification	domination	legitimation

FIGURE 2.5

from the operation of relations of power, or outside the context of normative sanctions.⁶³ All social practices involve these three elements. It is important however to bear in mind what has been said previously in respect of rules: no social practice expresses, or can be explicated in terms of, a single rule or type of resource. Rather, practices are situated within intersecting sets of rules and resources that ultimately express features of the totality.

The distinction between interpretative schemes, as concerning the communication of meaning, and norms, as concerning the sanctioning of conduct, can be clarified by considering Winch's discussion of rule-following in his *Idea of a Social Science*. According to Winch, 'rule-following' conduct can be identified with 'meaningful action'. The criterion of behaviour which is rule-following is to be found in whether one can ask of that behaviour if there is a 'right' and 'wrong' way of doing it.⁶⁴ Now this conflates two senses of rule-following or, rather, *two aspects of rules that are implicated in the production of social practices*; that relating to the *constitution of meaning*, and that relating to *sanctions* involved in social conduct. There are right and wrong ways of using words in a language, a matter which concerns those aspects of rules involved in the constitution of meaning; and there are right and wrong modes of conduct in respect of the normative sanctions implicated in interaction. Although it is important to separate them out conceptually, these two senses of right and wrong always intersect in the actual constitution of social practices. Thus 'correct' language use is always sanctioned; while the relevance of sanctions to conduct other than speech is inevitably connected with the identification of that conduct on the plane of meaning. The first sense, to adapt an example discussed by MacIntyre,⁶⁵ is that in which an expression like 'going for a walk' is used rightly or wrongly in relation to a particular activity: that is, what is to *count* as 'going for a walk' in the language as practised in day-to-day life. The second is the sense in which

'going for a walk' is involved with norms of 'correct', 'desirable' or 'appropriate' conduct: going for a stroll along the pavement in this aspect differs from wandering along the middle of the road in disregard of the conventions or laws governing traffic behaviour (and personal safety). The point of distinguishing these two senses of 'rule' (and rejecting the idea that these are two *types* of rule, constitutive and regulative) implicated in social practices, is precisely in order to be able to examine their interconnection. The identification of acts, in other words, interlaces in important ways with normative considerations (and vice versa). This is most obvious and most formally codified in law where, as regards sanctions that are applied, a great deal hinges on distinctions between 'murder', 'manslaughter', etc.

It is not enough just to stress the need in social theory to relate the constitution and communication of meaning to normative sanctions; each of these has in turn to be linked to power transactions. This is so in the twofold sense indicated by the term duality of structure. Power is expressed in the capabilities of actors to make certain 'accounts count' and to enact or resist sanctioning processes; but these capabilities draw upon modes of domination structured into social systems.

By 'interpretative schemes', I mean standardised elements of stocks of knowledge, applied by actors in the production of interaction. Interpretative schemes form the core of the mutual knowledge whereby an accountable universe of meaning is sustained through and in processes of interaction. Accountability, in Garfinkel's sense, depends upon the mastery of ethno-methods involved in language use, and it is essential to grasp the point, made by Garfinkel and in rather different form by Habermas, that such mastery cannot be adequately understood as 'monological'. This involves more than the proposition (made by Habermas) that a satisfactory approach to semantics cannot be derived from Chomsky's syntactics: it points to features of the relation between language and the 'context of use' that are of essential importance to social theory. In the production of meaning in interaction, context cannot be treated as merely the 'environment' or 'background' of the use of language. *The context of interaction is in some degree shaped and organised as an integral part of that interaction as a communicative encounter.* The reflexive monitoring of conduct in interaction involves the routine drawing upon of physical, social and

temporal context in the sustaining of accountability; but the drawing upon of context at the same time recreates these elements as contextual relevances. The 'mutual knowledge' thus employed and reconstituted in social encounters can be regarded as the medium whereby the interweaving of locutionary and illocutionary elements of language is ordered.

As with other aspects of context, the communication of meaning in processes of interaction does not just 'occur' over time. Actors sustain the meaning of what they say and do through routinely incorporating 'what went before' and anticipations of 'what will come next' into the present of an encounter.⁶⁶ Indexical features of interaction thus imply *différance* in Derrida's sense. But the language-use is also grounded in other, referential features of context, which border on 'what cannot be said'. Ziff's analysis of context is important here.⁶⁷ Some linguists have argued that language can in principle be separated from all features of context, because such features can themselves be expressed in language: a view which converges with some of the central notions of structuralism. This would entail that the uptake of an utterance such as 'The pen on the desk is made of gold', as used and understood in an everyday context of communication, could be analysed into a statement or set of statements describing the contextual elements mutually known by the participants, and necessary to the indexical properties of the utterance. Hence, it is claimed, for 'the pen on the desk', we could substitute 'the only pen on the desk in the back room of number 2A Millington Road, Cambridge at 11.30 on 9 May 1978'. However, the claim is not, in fact, a defensible one. The substitute sentence does not actually verbalise the contextual characteristics used to produce the mutual understanding of the original utterance and its referential features. None of the participants in the interaction, to understand the utterance, need to know such facts as the address of the house they are in, or the time or the date at which the utterance was made. Also, as Ziff points out, it would be a mistake to presume that, even if the first sentence, as involved in the everyday practical use of language, could be replaced by the terms of the second, there would be a gain in precision of meaning; there would not.

The foregoing considerations do not, of course, cover the problems that would have to be confronted if one were to attempt to work out a semantic theory adequate for the social sciences. It is important to repeat, however, that the approach to the production

of meaning in interaction suggested here attributes equal consequence to each of the senses in which 'meaning' is used in ordinary English usage: what an actor means to say/do, and what the meaning of his utterance/act is. This is of some considerable significance in the light of the tendency of theories of meaning to have a reductive character: to try to reduce meaning either to what speakers mean or intend to say, or conversely to suppose that what speakers mean to say is irrelevant to the elucidation of the nature of meaning. The division in some part separates those who have been primarily concerned with utterances, or act-identifications, on the one hand, as compared on the other hand to those who have been preoccupied with the interpretation of texts. Some authors in the first category (for example, Grice) have attempted to elaborate a theory of meaning in terms of communicative intent; some in the second category (critics of the 'intentional fallacy') have sought to eschew reference to communicative intent altogether as relevant to the characterisation of meaning. In contrast to each of these, I regard the meanings of communicative acts – that is, acts in which one element of the reflexive monitoring of conduct includes the intent to communicate with another – as in principle distinguishable from other meanings that may be attributed to those acts. The latter derive from, and are sustained in, the differences expressed in the practices of language-games; but such practices, as the active accomplishment of human subjects, are organised through and in the reflexive monitoring of conduct. The interplay of meaning as communicative intent, and meaning as *différance*, represents the duality of structure in the production of meaning.

Norms and practices

In turning from interpretative schemes to norms, it is perhaps worthwhile emphasising again that the differentiation between the two is an analytical, not a substantive one: the conventions whereby the communication of meaning in interaction is achieved have normative aspects, as do all structural elements of interaction. This is in fact indicated by the double sense of 'accountability' in ordinary language. The giving of 'accounts' of conduct is intimately tied in to being 'accountable' for them, as the normative component of the rationalisation of action.⁶⁸

The normative character of social practices can be anchored in

what Parsons calls the 'double contingency' of social interaction.⁶⁹ In other words, the reactions of each party to a process of interaction depend upon the contingent responses of the other or others: the response of the other(s) is thus a potential sanction upon the acts of the first and vice versa. The double contingency of interaction connects, however, not only to the normative institutionalisation of conduct, as Parsons argues, but to the actualisation of power. Normative sanctions are a generic type of resource drawn upon in power relations.

The normative constitution of interaction may be treated as the actualisation of *rights* and the enactment of *obligations*. The double contingency of interaction, however, entails that *the symmetry between these may be factually broken in actual social conduct*. This is one crucial area in which the contingency of 'double contingency' tends to evaporate from Parsons's action frame of reference: for him the normative institutionalisation of reciprocal sets of expectations (structured as roles) controls the activities of actors in processes of interaction. From the point of view of the theory of structuration developed here, however, the norms implicated in systems of social interaction have at every moment to be sustained and reproduced in the flow of social encounters. What from the structural point of view – where strategic conduct is bracketed – appears as a normatively co-ordinated legitimate order, in which rights and obligations are merely two aspects of norms, from the point of view of strategic conduct represents *claims*, whose realisation is contingent upon the successful mobilisation of obligations through the medium of the responses of other actors.

The operation of sanctions through the double contingency of interaction is essentially distinct from the consequences which ensue from 'technical prescriptions', in which the tie between an act and its sanction is of a 'mechanical' kind. That is to say, in prescriptions such as 'avoid drinking contaminated water', the sanction – the risk of being poisoned – involves consequences that have the form of natural events. Durkheim acknowledged this distinction in separating what he called 'utilitarian' from 'moral' sanctions. But the way in which he formulated the distinction, treating moral sanctions as the very prototype of social relations, prevented him from theorising a quite basic sense in which norms can be regarded, in a 'utilitarian' manner by agents – a manner that has to be related conceptually to the contingent character of the realisation of nor-

mative claims. There is a range of possible 'shadings' between acceptance of a normative obligation as a moral commitment, the type case for Durkheim, and conformity based on the acknowledgement of sanctions that apply to the transgression of normative prescriptions. In other words, the fact that the normative features of social life involve the double contingency of social interaction does not necessarily relegate a 'utilitarian' mode of orientation towards sanctions to non-social causal consequences of behaviour. An actor may 'calculate the risks' involved in the enactment of a given form of social conduct, in respect of the likelihood of the sanctions involved being actually applied, and may be prepared to submit to them as a price to be paid for achieving a particular end. The theoretical significance of this seemingly obvious point for problems of legitimation and conformity is considerable – in two respects. One is that it draws the theory of legitimation away from the 'internalised value-norm-moral consensus' theorem that has been the hallmark of the 'normative functionalism' of Durkheim and Parsons.⁷⁰ The second is that it directs attention to the *negotiated* character of sanctions, relating the production of meaning to the production of a normative order. 'Calculative' attitudes towards norms can extend through to processes of 'presentation of self', 'bargaining', etc., in which actors who either conform or transgress normative prescriptions may negotiate in some degree what conformity or transgression *are* in the context of their conduct, by means of that conduct, thereby also affecting the sanctions to which it is subject.

A classification of sanctions can be based upon the elements mobilised to produce the sanctioning effect, the latter to be effective always in some sense impinging upon actors' wants (conscious or unconscious) – even in the case of sanctions which involve the use of force. It follows however from what has been said previously, that it would be a mistake to suppose that sanctions only exist when actors overtly try to bring each other 'into line' in some particular fashion. The operation of sanctions, or 'sanctioning', is a chronic feature of all social encounters, however pervasive or subtle the mutual processes of adjustment in interaction may be. This applies, of course, to the production of meaning in a basic sense. The stocks of knowledge drawn upon in linguistic communication, including syntactical rules, have a strong 'obligating' quality, and could not operate outside a normative context any more than any other

structural features of systems of interaction. Conformity to linguistic rules is basically secured as a means and an outcome of the everyday use of language itself, in which the main normative commitments are simply those of the sustaining of 'accountability' in Garfinkel's sense.

Power: relations of autonomy and dependence

As in the case of the other modalities of structuration, power can be related to interaction in a dual sense: *as involved institutionally in processes of interaction, and as used to accomplish outcomes in strategic conduct*. Even the most casual social encounter instances elements of the totality as a structure of domination; but such structural properties are at the same time drawn upon, and reproduced through, the activities of participants in systems of interaction. I have argued elsewhere that the concept of action is *logically tied* to that of power, where the latter notion is understood as transformative capacity.⁷¹ This has usually only been obliquely recognised in the philosophy of action, in which it is common to talk of action in terms of 'can' or 'able to', or 'powers'. The literature concerned to analyse human agency in terms of 'powers', however, rarely if ever intersects with sociological discussions of relations of power in interaction. The relation between the concepts of action and power, on the level of strategic conduct, can be set out as follows. Action involves intervention in events in the world, thus producing definite outcomes, with intended action being one category of an agent's doings or his refraining. *Power as transformative capacity can then be taken to refer to agents' capabilities of reaching such outcomes.*⁷²

Even a casual survey of the massive literature concerned with the concept of power and its implementation in social science indicates that the study of power reflects the same dualism of action and structure that I have diagnosed in approaches to social theory generally. One notion of power, found in Hobbes, in Weber in somewhat different form, and more recently in the writings of Dahl, treats power as a phenomenon of willed or intended action.⁷³ Here power is defined in terms of the capacity or likelihood of actors to achieve desired or intended outcomes. According to other authors, on the other hand – including such otherwise diverse figures as

Arendt, Parsons and Poulantzas – power is specifically a property of the social community, a medium whereby common interests or class interests are realised. These are effectively two versions of how power structures are constituted, and two versions of ‘domination’ (each of which *may* link the notion of power logically to that of conflict, but neither of which necessarily does so). The first tends to treat domination as *a network of decision-making*, operating against an unexamined institutional backdrop; the second regards domination as itself an institutional phenomenon, either disregarding power as relating to the active accomplishments of actors, or treating it as in some way determined by institutions.

As is well known, there have been various attempts to reconcile these two approaches, on the basis of exposing the limitations of the ‘power as decision-making’ approach.⁷⁴ The capability of actors to secure desired outcomes in interaction with others, according to Bachrach and Baratz, is only ‘one face’ of power; power has another face, which is that of the ‘mobilisation of bias’ built into institutions. The second is a sphere of ‘non-decision-making’; of implicitly accepted and undisputed practices.

However the idea of ‘non-decision-making’ is only a partial and inadequate way of analysing how power is structured into institutions, and is framed in terms of the action approach that is supposedly subjected to critique. Non-decision-making is still basically regarded as a property of agents, rather than of social institutions.

Perhaps the best critical appraisal of these issues is that by Lukes.⁷⁵ Power, according to him, is more than merely schizoid; it does not just have two faces, but three. There is one key part of Lukes’s argument which I shall reject at the outset: he says, following Gallie,⁷⁶ that power is an ‘essentially contested’ concept and ‘ineradicably evaluative’. I think this view is either mistaken or unenlightening. It is mistaken if the implication is that some notions in the social sciences are *essentially* contested, while others are not, such that we could draw up an (uncontested?) list of essentially contested concepts, separate from others. The chronic contestation or disputation of concepts and theories in the social sciences is in some part due to the fact that these concepts and theories are caught up in what they are about, namely social life itself: a line of thought I shall develop in the concluding paper in this volume. The notion of power certainly tends to provoke particularly deep-seated controversies. But a range of other terms that also figure in an impor-

tant way in this book – class, ideology, interests, etc. – are equally potent in this respect; and I would want to claim not just that a few especially contentious concepts such as these, but the whole conceptual apparatus of social theory is in some sense ‘ineradicably evaluative’. These things do not, of course, necessarily compromise Lukes’s suggestion that the three faces of power he analyses may be more or less closely related to differing political positions; however I want to contend that it is not in fact useful to distinguish three dimensions of power, as Lukes attempts to do.

Lukes accepts that the non-decision-making approach marks an advance over the decision-making one (or what he calls the ‘pluralist’ view). The former of these, as contrasted to the latter, is two-dimensional because it does not simply concentrate upon the enactment of decisions, but also points to ways in which issues are suppressed from being ‘decisionable’ at all. As Lukes says, quite rightly, the specific limitation of the two-dimensional view is that it is still too closely linked to the standpoint which it opposes. ‘The basis of the [social] system’, Lukes points out, ‘is not sustained simply by a series of individually chosen acts, but also, most importantly, by the socially structured and culturally patterned behaviour of groups, and practices of institutions ...’⁷⁷ Consequently in place of the two-dimensional view, Lukes introduces his three-dimensional concept. The three-dimensional view invokes the notion of interests: in conjunction with it, Lukes redefines power as the capability of one actor or party to influence another in a manner contrary to that other’s interests. Now this does not seem to work. Or at least intuitively there seems no reason to suppose that power is only exercised where A affects B in a way contrary to B’s interests – as compared to where A affects B in a way that is irrelevant to B’s interests, or more importantly where A affects B in a way that accords with B’s interests.⁷⁸ The second of these could only be excluded as a case of power if B always behaved in his own interests, regardless of anyone else’s intervention; but people are not always inclined to act in accordance with their interests. I should want to say, as against Lukes, that the concept of interest, like that of conflict, has nothing logically to do with that of power; although substantively, in the actual enactment of social life, the phenomena to which they refer have a great deal to do with one another. But in any case appeal to interests is an odd twist in the argument, because adding the idea of interests to the ‘one’- and ‘two-dimensional’

views, which is essentially Lukes's strategy, does not in fact address the problem of how to incorporate 'socially structured conduct' within a general treatment of power; for Lukes does not suggest that interests are a group or structural phenomenon rather than one to do with individual actors. Rather than adding on another 'dimension' to the decision-making and non-decision-making approaches, we need to do what Lukes advocates, but does not in fact accomplish; this implies attempting to overcome the traditional division between 'voluntaristic' and 'structural' notions of power.

Lukes has, however, attacked the problem directly in a subsequent publication.⁷⁹ Power in social theory, he argues, as I do, is centrally involved with human agency; a person or party who wields power *could* 'have acted otherwise', and the person or party over whom power is wielded, the concept implies, *would* have acted otherwise if power had not been exercised. 'In speaking thus, one assumes that, although the agents operate within structurally determined limits, they none the less have a certain relative autonomy and could have acted differently.'⁸⁰ In representing structure as placing limitations or constraints upon the activities of agents, however, Lukes tends to repeat the dualism of agency and structure that I have spoken of in earlier papers. Hence he talks of 'where structural determinism ends and power begins',⁸¹ and is unable satisfactorily to deal with structure as implicated in power relations, and power relations as implicated in structure.

This can only be achieved, I think, if it is recognised that power must be treated in the context of the duality of structure: if the resources which the existence of domination implies and the exercise of power draws upon, are seen to be at the same time structural components of social systems. The exercise of power is not a type of act; rather power is instantiated in action, as a regular and routine phenomenon. It is mistaken moreover to treat power *itself* as a resource as many theorists of power do. Resources are the media through which power is exercised, and structures of domination reproduced, as indicated in Figure 2.6.

The notion of resources, as structural components of social systems, figures as a key one in the treatment of power within the theory of structuration. The concept of power both as transformative capacity (the characteristic view held by those treating power in terms of the conduct of agents), and as domination (the main focus of those concentrating upon power as a structural quality), depends

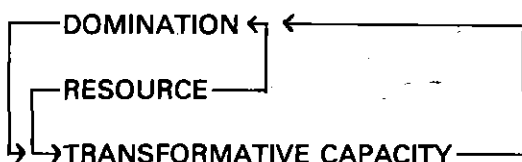


FIGURE 2.6

upon the utilisation of resources. I regard each view as implying the other, however. Resources are the media whereby transformative capacity is employed as power in the routine course of social interaction; but they are at the same time structural elements of social systems as systems, reconstituted through their utilisation in social interaction. This is therefore the correlate, in respect of power, of the duality of structure in respect of the communication of meaning and of normative sanctions: resources are not just additional elements to these, but include the means whereby the meaningful and the normative content of interaction is actualised. 'Power' intervenes conceptually between the broader notions of transformative capacity on the one side, and of domination on the other: power is a relational concept, but only operates as such through the utilisation of transformative capacity as generated by structures of domination.

To repeat what has been said before, understood as transformative capacity, power is intrinsically related to human agency. The 'could have done otherwise' of action is a necessary element of the theory of power. As I have tried to indicate elsewhere,⁸² the concept of agency cannot be defined through that of intention, as is presumed in so much of the literature to do with the philosophy of action; the notion of agency, as I employ it, I take to be logically prior to a subject/object differentiation. The same holds for the concept of power. The notion of power has no inherent connection with intention or 'will', as it has in Weber's and many other formulations. It might at first seem somewhat odd to hold that an agent can exercise power without intending to do so, or even wanting to do so: for I wish to claim that the notion of power has no logical tie to motivation or wanting either. But it is not at all idiosyncratic: if it sounds so, it is perhaps because many discussions of the concept of power have taken place in a political context, where 'decisions' are clearly articulated in relation to ends that

actors pursue. As with the sphere of agency more generally, those aspects of power encompassed by intentional actions, or within the reflexive monitoring of conduct, have a particular form; a range of notions such as 'compliance', 'bargaining', etc., apply only within such a context.

Although in the sense of transformative capacity power is implied in the very notion of action, I shall henceforth employ the term 'power' as a sub-category of 'transformative capacity', to refer to interaction where transformative capacity *is harnessed to actors' attempts to get others to comply with their wants*. Power, in this relational sense, concerns the capability of actors to secure outcomes where the realisation of these outcomes depends upon the agency of others. The use of power in interaction thus can be understood in terms of the facilities that participants bring to and mobilise as elements of the production of that interaction, thereby influencing its course. Social systems are constituted as regularised practices: power within social systems can thus be treated *as involving reproduced relations of autonomy and dependence in social interaction*.⁸³ Power relations therefore are always *two-way*, even if the power of one actor or party in a social relation is minimal compared to another. Power relations are relations of autonomy and dependence, but even the most autonomous agent is in some degree dependent, and the most dependent actor or party in a relationship retains some autonomy.

Structures of domination involve *asymmetries of resources employed* in the sustaining of power relations in and between systems of interaction.



FIGURE 2.7

In all institutionalised forms of social interaction, as I shall indicate in the following paper, there are two major resources which can be distinguished; we can add to these two main categories of sanction, as indicated in Figure 2.7. Authorisation and allocation

may be associated with either or both types of sanctions: or as it may be better expressed, two *modes of sanctioning*. Obviously there is no clear-cut division between the types of sanctions, and they may be combined in varying ways. The distinction is essentially one between positive and negative sanctions, or rewards and punishments; but the threatened withholding of a promised reward can be a punitive gesture, and conversely the possibility of avoidance of or release from coercive measures can serve as an inducement.

It is important to emphasise that power should not be defined in terms of conflict, since the widely-employed Weberian definition of power, referred to earlier, has sometimes been read to imply that power and conflict are necessarily linked: as if power only exists, or is only exercised, when the resistance of others has to be overcome. It seems clear enough that this is not what Weber intended; however that may be, the formulation offered here carries no implication of this sort at all. The use of power, of course, often does stimulate conflict, or occurs in the context of struggle. This is not because of any kind of inevitable connection between power and conflict, but because of the substantive relations that often exist between power, conflict and interests. Interests I shall regard as founded in wants, regardless of whether an actor is conscious of those wants (that is, actors or groups may have interests of which they are unaware). Power and conflict, like power and the realisation of interests, are frequently, but nevertheless contingently, associated with one another. (For further discussion of the concept of interests, see pp. 188-90 below.)

Methodological individualism: a brief excursus

In conclusion, it might be useful to comment briefly about the bearing of the ideas advanced in this paper upon the debate over methodological individualism in social theory. There is, of course, no unitary view that can be identified as 'methodological individualism': the phrase has been used to cover a variety of different ideas. One version appears prominently in Weber's works, but I shall briefly consider here the formulation offered by Popper, who has been among the foremost advocates of such a view in modern times. Popper has described his standpoint succinctly as follows: 'all social phenomena, and especially the functioning of all social institutions, should always be understood as resulting from the decisions, ac-

tions, attitudes, etc. of human individuals . . . we should never be satisfied by an explanation in terms of so-called "collectives".⁸⁴ There are three key terms in this assertion that need some explanation: *individuals*, *collectives*, and what is implied in institutions *resulting* from decisions, etc. So far as the first of these is concerned, Popper's statement reflects a characteristic tendency in the literature of methodological individualism (pro and con) to assume that the term 'individual' stands in need of no explication. It might be thought a truism to hold that societies only consist of individuals – one reading that might be made of Popper's claim.⁸⁵ But it is only a truism (that is true in a trivial or uninteresting sense) if we understand 'individual' to mean something like 'human organism'. If 'individual', however, means 'agent' in the sense I have employed in this paper, the situation is quite different. The first part of Popper's statement then reflects the inadequacies of action theory that I have analysed above. Institutions do indeed 'result' from human agency: but they are the outcome of action only in so far as they are also involved recursively as the medium of its production. In the sense of 'institution' therefore, the 'collective' is bound to the very phenomenon of action.

The position adopted here can be summarised as follows:

1. Social systems are produced as transactions between agents, and can be analysed as such on the level of strategic conduct. This is 'methodological' in the sense that institutional analysis is bracketed, although structural elements necessarily enter into the characterisation of action, as modalities drawn upon to produce interaction.
2. Institutional analysis, on the other hand, brackets action, concentrating upon modalities as the media of the reproduction of social systems. But this is also purely a methodological bracketing, which is no more defensible than the first if we neglect the essential importance of the conception of the duality of structure.⁸⁶