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Rethinking the great divide: long-term structural history and the temporality of event

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Abstract: The archaeology of time, in its current form, is problematic. Some recent studies have considered either the ‘event’ or the ‘structure’ as pivotal to experiencing temporality, yet this is at odds with those more detailed and theoretically-explicit accounts of time, developed within related disciplines, which consider both as intrinsic and inseparable parts of this experience. Other archaeological studies regard event and structure as nested within a hierarchical scheme of interpretation. But these examples of time perspectivism, which are largely inspired by Braudel and the Annales School, lack any overall conception of temporality and divorce time from the social context within which it acquires meaning. Rather, the complexity of time, including the crucial relationship between memory and anticipation, is only grasped by a genealogical approach whereby interpretation is problem-orientated. This is to focus on particular questions about the origin, reproduction and transformation of individual institutions, practices and material culture.

INTRODUCTION

The archaeology of time, in its contemporary form, is largely dependent on a small if growing number of studies. Some have emphasised the multi-stranded nature of temporality and considered how its complexity can be best organised into manageable time-scales for the interpretation of the past (Bailey 1981, 1983, 1987, Gledhill & Rowlands 1982, Hodder 1987, Lewthwaite 1987, Bintliff 1991, 1999, 2004, Knapp 1992). Other studies have asked more basic questions as to ‘time’s pervasiveness as an inescapable dimension of all aspects of social experience and practice’ (Munn 1992: 93), offering insights into how it was understood by individual minds and collective mentalities (notable examples include Hodder 1990, Barrett 1994, Gosden

1994, Murray 1999, Karlsson 2001). These two approaches, when considered together, derive their inspiration from a wide range of sources in the humanities and social sciences; and as such, promote a more informed and explicit appreciation of temporality, shifting archaeology beyond its simple belief in time as a neutral chronological ‘container’ for the continuity or transformation of society. But despite this, these studies pay insufficient theoretical attention to the nature of time, commonly misunderstanding, or even ignoring, the way in which *temporality was woven* into the thinking and behaviour of past peoples. It is this which is of concern here.

The difficulties with fully comprehending temporality can be illustrated by those archaeological accounts which embrace the long-standing anthropological belief that ‘it is the rhythm of social life which is at the basis of the category of time’ (Durkheim 1965: 488). In adopting this premise they employ what are actually differing definitions of temporality, and a striking contrast, or the ‘great divide’ referred to in the paper title, is evident between two of the most influential of these studies. The focus of interest within *The Domestication of Europe* by Ian Hodder (1990), on the one hand, is the long-term development of conceptual structures and social institutions. This account not only adopts a timescale which extends beyond the lifetime of individuals, but importantly, considers temporality as equivalent to the long-term development of a ‘world view’. It is the latter which apparently defines what happens at a smaller-scale within the social system. This invocation of a ‘time of the structure’ clearly contrasts with the archaeological project envisaged in *Fragments from Antiquity* by John Barrett (1994). Here it is the short-term engagement of individuals with their immediate material surroundings and social relations which are considered as the key to interpreting the past. The implication of this approach is that long-term structures can not be grasped in their entirety, and that the temporality of ‘routine social practices, maintained within given social conditions’ (Barrett 1994: 28), or the ‘time of the event’, determines the existence of a social system, including those larger-scale entities and processes. These two publications, therefore, summon a categorical distinction between the ‘time of the event’ and the ‘time of the structure’ by effectively advocating that past society can only be meaningfully studied at one of these temporal scales.

But by assuming the priority of either the ‘time of the event’ or the ‘time of the structure’ they contrast with those more detailed and theoretically-explicit accounts of temporality, developed within related disciplines, which regard the two temporal scales as completely dependent upon each other (examples would include Sahlins 1985, Gell 1992, Munn 1992). It is this failure to grasp the complex inter-relationship of ‘event’ and ‘structure’ which is the starting-point of this paper. It will be suggested that both concepts are actually an intrinsic and inseparable part of social discourse. Attention will then turn to those archaeological accounts which consider event and structure as nested within a single interpretive scheme, with each of these time-scales signifying different processes and relationships. It will be argued that these examples of *time perspectivism* — which are largely inspired by the French Annaliste historian Fernand Braudel — not only lack an overall conception of temporality, but also divorce time from the very social context within which it acquires meaning. An alternative framework, which is at least partly dependent on the ‘history from below’ of Le Roy Ladurie and other third generation Annaliste scholars, is proposed. It is suggested that event and structure can only be conjoined within a *genealogical* approach, whereby interpretation is problem-orientated, focusing on particular questions about the origin, reproduction and transformation of individual institutions, practices and material culture.

THE TEMPORALITY OF EVENT AND STRUCTURE

Essential to temporality is the complete interdependence of event and structure within any interpretive reality (Giddens 1984: 139-44, Sahlins 1985: vii-xviii, Shanks & Tilley 1987: 127-8, 135, Johnson 1989: 207-8). This is not to contend that the lifetime of an individual is somehow equivalent to the duration of specific social institutions and symbolic schema, but to consider an event, or what is a specific moment of human agency, as the actualisation of a structural pattern situated within a diachronic flow of time. In this sense, it is the ‘time of the structure’ which provides these happenings with the historical *preunderstandings* by which they achieve their efficacy and meaning. Without this context the single event means nothing in terms of the world. But at the same time, all structures are *eventful* in their constitution. Put simply, the meaning of any specific cultural scheme is only generated by embodied

practice, or within the 'time of the event', and it is for this reason that individuals or groups possess the ability to intervene and 'make a difference' in the development of long-term traditions. Therefore, to advocate the primacy of either the 'time of the event' or the 'time of the structure' is actually to under-theorise what is, in reality, a recursive and complex network of relationships. And to do so is to invoke either a reductionist or determinist understanding of social process.

The interplay of event and structure is aptly illustrated by anthropological accounts of preliterate non-Western ritual (notable examples include Leach 1961, Durkheim 1965, Lévi-Strauss 1966, Bloch 1977). These narratives discuss the importance of recreating a 'mythical time', the product of repeatedly punctuating existence with ceremonial acts or rites of passage which emphasise long-term continuity and stability. These events accordingly enliven, bring into existence, or even transform, key structuring principles including those 'collective representations which strikingly contradict ordinary, everyday notions about the world — representations, for instance, which imply that time goes round and round rather than on and on, or that time is wholly immobilized, past, present and future are identical, and nothing can ever change' (Gell 1992: 79). When these rites are repeatedly strung together, the idealised concepts of society, particularly those that invoke ancestry and genealogy, become purposeful entities with the power to determine the long-term development of communities. Hence, the past is not only swallowed up in the present-day 'sameness' of these events but also projected forward to create the contemporary values which orientate future social activity. But these world-restoring events 'are not just there and happen.....but have a meaning and happen because of that meaning' (Sahlins 1985: 153). Structural principles assume a logic, or what can be better described as a moral imperative, for the repetition of ceremonial acts or rites of passage — thus bringing the present world into line with the mythic past, providing appropriate psychological comfort to individuals making the journey between birth and death (Leach 1961: 125, Bloch & Parry 1982: 4). As a result, the uncertainties of biological duration and social reproduction are at least partly replaced by orderliness and predictability.

If the 'time of the event' and 'time of the structure' are so closely intertwined within social discourse it would follow that accounts which exclusively emphasise one or the other effectively distance themselves from an understanding of temporality. A

particular problem is their inability to grasp dynamic change or transformation. As already mentioned, both individuals and groups are in fact ‘moving objects’ within social interaction since they possess the ability to creatively reconsider conventional norms and historically break, bend or alter them through action (Giddens 1979: 88, 92, 267, 1984: 9, 14-6, Sahlins 1985: vii, Hodder 1987: 5). The ability to renegotiate is an important aspect of social discourse, even for those more traditional non-Western societies, described in the previous paragraph, where important structural transformations are so often closely associated with the principle of event-based continuity. Yet by divorcing event and structure we lose the very diachronic relationships by which these transformations occur. The historical particularism of Barrett (1994) is a milestone in archaeological interpretation, but it all too easily resembles a prehistory of synchronic moments, or ‘here-and-nows’, whereby structural traditions do not always reach out across space and time. This is understandable given the theoretical priorities of the publication, but it is nonetheless difficult to grasp the historical conditions that may have developed or accumulated over the centuries, whilst any notion of structural transformation or movement is lost amongst the ‘snapshots’ of abstracted synchronies. The elimination of temporality is more evident with Hodder’s (1990) emphasis upon long-term structural continuity. He makes significant generalisations about what is taken to be a stable social order by excluding the effects of temporality. What is postulated is again a synchronic moment, albeit at a very much extended timescale. But this framework is antithetical to the diachronic process which inevitably results from human creativity, awareness and purposeful action, arguing that it is possible to take a slice through time and separate the static essence of any system from its social dynamic.

These approaches to archaeological interpretation may partly reflect the traditional tendency within anthropology — a discipline which has recently exercised an unparalleled influence upon prehistorians — to deny the historic dynamic of social entities by concentrating on either the ‘time span of contemporary observation’ or those generalised structural principles which ‘transcend the particular circumstances of time and place’ (Bailey 1983: 171, see also Smith 1992: 24). By contrast, other archaeologists have over the last two decades turned to history for inspiration in creating an interpretive framework which appreciates the complex dialectic between event and structure (Gledhill and Rowlands 1982, Hodder 1987, Lewthwaite 1987,

Knapp 1992, Bintliff 1991, 1999, 2004). While not always explicitly stated, these contributions effectively claim that the alternative to the interpretive polarisation noted above is a nested scheme of timescales which accommodates both viewpoints. Such 'time perspectivism', as originally defined by the French historian Fernand Braudel and the Annales School, distinguishes between different layers or rhythms of the temporal continuum, of which the most influential was the Braudelian separation of the slowly changing *longue durée* of geographical time, the medium-term conjunctures of structural history, and the rapidly changing *événements* or the history of events (for excellent reviews see Clark 1985, Burke 1990, Bintliff 1991, Knapp 1992). This is an approach with a distinctive framework of understanding and the wider impact of time perspectivism within the humanities is illustrated by the development of similar if more elaborate schemes by scholars such as Althusser (Althusser & Balibar 1970, ch.4), Ricoeur (1984, 1985, 1988) and Ingold (1986: 168-9). But does this approach, which has been described as a 'landmark with inexhaustible potential' (Bintliff 1991: 8), actually possess the sophistication to conceptualise the complex dialectic of event and structure?

SOCIAL TIME AND BRAUDELIAN HISTORY

The seemingly all-embracing framework of Braudel's time perspectivism, in which temporality is broken down into distinctive scales of analysis, is certainly seductive. As an approach it appears well suited to taming the practical consequences of the past's extended chronological duration, and the 'traditions handed on by successions of human societies over long periods of time' (Clark 1994: 43). Because the reproduction of social life is seen to consist of intersecting planes of temporality there is the potential to neatly define, and then analytically limit, the apparently endless interplay of event and structure responsible for the development of society. The past of any specific era or region can therefore be considered by dividing it into its constitutive temporal rhythms. While these operate contemporaneously, or are always in contact with one another, they each create a different kind of history so that the larger-scale structural processes cannot be totally reduced to small-scale action, and similarly, the small-scale events are not completely determined by the larger-scale process (Fletcher 1992: 37). The emphasis, in other words, is on the differences

between timescales and it follows that each can be studied in distinctive ways so as to achieve forms of historical understanding appropriate to the specific variables and relationships that focus at each scale (Bintliff 1991: 6-10). The result is an analytical neatness whereby interpretation, and its definitions of temporality, proceeds according to a logic of scale, seemingly avoiding the reductionism or determinism of approaches which consider either the event or the structure as exclusively significant. Moreover, the process of transformation or 'system-change', surely what must be one of the most challenging aspects of archaeological interpretation, can accordingly be understood by employing a formulaic framework of either hierarchical causation or mutual feedback between the different temporal cycles (Bintliff 1991: 10-11).

If this approach is seen by some as a panacea for the alternative of over-simplifying temporality, then a number of writers also believe it possesses the ability to bring together what are opposing theoretical paradigms within archaeology. It was argued, in a review of the Annales School and its application to archaeology, that time perspectivism works 'precisely through its explicit combination of experienced life and externally analysed life' (Bintliff 1991: 4). This is a direct reference to the contrasting attitudes of post-processual and processual archaeology which so dominated archaeological thought, in at least the English-speaking world, during the late 1980s. It was proposed that the Braudelian methodology, which considers both long-term systems and the real world of the individual participant, could reconcile these strikingly different viewpoints on the past (Bintliff 1991: 26). The same observation was made by a North American prehistorian in a later contribution to the same volume, and it is worth quoting his informative comments at length:

'The great strength of the Annales school, at least as broadly construed, is in its quest to reconcile the paradigmatic (logico-scientific) within the narrative in the study of the past, without either reducing the one to the other or succumbing to unproductive and uncritical relativism and formless scepticism. Coherence, consistency, and lack of contradiction, as well as logical adequacy, are the measures that are used to judge historical concepts and constructs; these constructs, in turn, are assayed against the historical 'record' as tests of their validity and opportunities for their falsification. Again, *Annaliste* goals might be said to comprise both knowledge (for which truth claims can be made) and understanding (which, at least in part, includes lifelikeness), which itself may later be cast in paradigmatic, logico-scientific terms.' (Peebles 1991: 111)

It is perhaps an irony that an approach which analytically distinguishes between life as 'lived' and life as 'ideal', 'ideological' or 'symbolic' is seen as a suitable framework for such a theoretical rapprochement. Nevertheless, if such contentions are to be accepted then part of the reason for this apparent strength must lie with the observation that while the Annales School is accepted as a paradigm it deliberately lacks any theoretically explicit models (Althusser & Balibar 1970: 96, Furet 1983: 390-1, Bintliff 1991: 27, Bulliet 1992: 132, Fletcher 1992: 38-9, Sherratt 1992: 137). Its supporters claim it is best characterised by an absence of dogmatism (Peebles 1991: 111), although Braudel's often stated view that the individual is 'imprisoned within a destiny in which he himself has little hand', or that 'the long run always wins in the end' (Braudel 1972: 1244, see also Kinser 1981: 65-6, Clark 1985: 183-6, Burke 1990: 34-5), suggests the existence of some very distinctive 'rules' about human agency. It is because the approach is seen to be without a coherent and theoretically conceptualised body of thought about human society that it is claimed it can bridge the divide between processual and post-processual archaeology.

But what some consider a positive attribute can also be regarded as a fundamental weakness that unravels the logic of Braudelian history. The absence of a coherent and theoretically conceptualised body of thought is perhaps most apparent with its failure to adequately theorise how temporality is perceived or experienced by people. As already noted, the imposed scales of time are considered by the approach's advocates to be without any absolute value, as abstractions which relate to the concern of the researcher rather than the temporal rhythms implicit to the society in question. Yet this is a curious standpoint. While these scales would all be incorporated together as part of the forward-running linearity of experiential or *cognitive time* — what Durkheim (1965: 441) described as the undifferentiated flow of 'duration which I feel passing within me' — they would only become meaningful to society when represented as *ideological time*, by which is meant the particular images that specific communities develop about real-world temporality:

'Cognitive time is universal perceptual time. Ideologies, on the other hand, are ideas which are presented in contexts in which authority is being imposed in some way, usually in the course of ritual events such as initiation ceremonies, the installation of sacred rulers, the celebration of ancestors, and so on.' (Gell 1992, 79)

This is an important distinction, for these ideological concepts of time — such as the ‘cyclical duration’ and generational cycles observed by anthropologists amongst many societies (Barnes 1974, Howe 1981, Gell 1992: 16-7, ch. 4, Dietler & Herbich 1993: 252-4) — are the means by which temporality is routinely structured as part of any social reality. What, then, is the point of imposing the analytical scales of time perspectivism without first assessing whether they may have actually existed as recognisable categories to the societies in question, especially since preliterate non-Western communities clearly possess very different conceptions of ideological time? This is not to argue that past societies lacked an appreciation of the different times of the event, the individual lifetime or the longer-lasting institution: but rather, to emphasise that what is important are the specific means by which these concepts were articulated together *within* any particular social reality.

These schemes, therefore, detach temporality from the very social context in which event and structure acquire their specific meaning. While the pragmatic approach of those who follow Braudel is certainly understandable, it should be emphasised that by creating these temporal layers in the first place the researcher is forced to deal with them on terms which could be inappropriate and misleading. Indeed, the problems associated with the imposition of such artificially fixed temporal categories may account for the often quoted failure of Braudelian history to explore the interplay between the *longue durée*, *conjoncture* and *événement* (Hexter 1972: 533, Kinser 1981, 89, Boyd & Richerson 1985: 290, Fletcher 1992: 7, Knapp 1992: 1, Gosden 1994: 134-5) — for how can the articulation of these different time-scales be discussed when the very cycles fail to reference the collective or ideological representations of cognitive time by which societies created their own temporality? The problems of grafting such a methodological code on to the rhythm of social life was realised by Braudel himself, even if he failed to address the root of the dilemma. Despite his best efforts in *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Phillip II*, he was forced to conclude that ‘History becomes many stranded once more, bewilderingly complex and, who knows, in seeking to grasp all the different vibrations, waves of past time which ought ideally to accumulate like the divisions in the mechanism of a watch — the seconds, minutes, hours and days — perhaps we shall find the whole fabric slipping between our fingers’ (Braudel 1972: 893). If this highlights the lack of a satisfactory ‘fit’ between his different levels of

history, then the problems are exaggerated for the archaeologist, given that the *longue durée* can truly be chronologically lengthy, while *conjoncture* and *événement* often appear inseparable in the archaeological record.

The adherents of this approach also misunderstand the very character of cognitive or real-world time. Fundamental to this misconception is the assumption that the latter meaningfully exists *within* the concepts of event, structure, or indeed, any other scales of analysis. This is evident if the logic of Braudel's history is followed through. It has been noted how the imposed scales of temporality are seen to represent no more than convenient methodological divisions along a continuum rather than fundamentally different phenomena. Yet the apparent simplicity of this viewpoint is surely deceptive, for by considering these scales as analytically distinct means that in practice they assume a purposeful existence. If not, then how could their implied independence actually be justified? The short-term of the event, the medium-term of structural history, and the long-term of geographical time are accordingly equated to perceptually different processes or levels of social reality which, by definition, are associated with distinct types or grades of temporality, each possessing either a slower or faster rate of directional time. Time moving at different speeds was fully accepted by Braudel himself (Kinser 1981: 65-72, 99, Burke 1990, 39), with the geographical tempo of the *longue durée* 'representing a long-lasting rhythmical structure out of which derive the quicker pulses of cyclical history and the rapid episodes of everyday life' (Gosden 1994: 134). But this is nonsensical, for in reality there is only one form of cognitive time, and that is the lived 'present' within which individuals experience directional real-world temporality as both memories of the past and as future anticipations. It is this which enfolds 'the subject in a cocoon of implicitly accepted truths about the world, because it unites the past, the actuality and the becoming of the world in a seamless texture of interconnected experiences, a flux which carries the subject along with it' (Gell 1992: 289, see also Ingold 1993: 159). Hence, concepts such as 'event' and 'structure' do not possess their own sense of time for they are fused together in a complex network of mnemonic and anticipatory relations played-out within *present-day existence*. The distinctions between these concepts are not therefore intrinsic to the passage of time, and as such, the categories upon which time perspectivism relies are surely unhelpful.

It is important to appreciate what is meant by ‘present-day existence’. It should certainly not be confused with the ‘here-and-now’ for the present-day ‘has its own thickness and temporal spread’ (Gell 1992: 223), as illustrated by Husserl (1966) in his highly influential phenomenological writings on psychological time-consciousness. Noting how ‘now’ moments only become meaningful when conjoined with other ‘now’ moments, he distinguishes between ‘retention’, or a consciousness of the past which can either be reproduced or distorted in the present, and ‘protention’, or the anticipation of experience in a fantasied future present:

‘We thus perceive the present not as a knife-edge ‘now’ but as a temporally extended field within which trends emerge out of the patterns we discern in the successive updatings of perceptual beliefs relating to the proximate past, the next most proximate past, and the next, and so on. This trends (sic) is projected into the future in the form of protentions, ie. anticipations of the pattern of updating of current perceptual beliefs which will be necessitated in the proximate future, the next most proximate future, and the next, in a manner symmetric with the past, but in inverse temporal order.’ (Gell 1992: 225)

Hence, the awareness of the passage of cognitive time is not so much by way of a repetitive sequence of ‘here-and-nows’ as by a single extended present constantly sliding forward. Put another way, real-world time resides ‘between events that are happening now, have taken place in the past, or might possibly occur in the future’ (Adam 1990: 21): and because any present is being constantly created, existing only in a state of ceaseless ‘becoming’, temporality itself takes the form of coexisting memories and anticipations (Adam 1990: 24-34). This, then, is how cognitive time is internalised by individuals, and, as such, is a reality in which event and structure can be no more than analytical abstractions — inventions of academia for reasons of categorisation (Althusser & Balibar 1970: 96, Sahlins 1985: 26-7, Thomas 1996: 35) — for what is a more complex process.

My comments demonstrate that Braudel’s time perspectivism is more concerned with being historical than being temporal. Its starting-point is not a theoretically-informed understanding of how time becomes bound into any social system, as the categories which enable the writing of a ‘total history’. But is this a contrast which actually matters? Should archaeologists not simply accept that they have a unique perspective upon the past and are therefore fully justified in privileging such analytical scales, especially if past peoples were themselves aware of being enmeshed in temporal

narratives extending beyond their own lifecycles (as illustrated, for example, by Bradley 2002, Gosden & Lock 1998 or Olivier 1999)? I believe not, for by accepting such a viewpoint we misunderstand a fundamental concern, notably the manner by which social systems reproduce and transform themselves. As already argued, implicit to Braudel's Annaliste history is the belief that event and structure possess their own rhythms of cognitive temporality, and that real-time can only be understood within a hierarchical model of causality whereby events are nothing more than synchronic 'surface ripples or disturbances on the mass of long-term development below' (Braudel 1972: 22, see also Knapp 1992: 6). It can, of course, be argued that this repudiation of the short-term is not necessarily intrinsic to the approach and can be avoided when 'verbal messages, actions, and material signals are viewed as a hierarchy of independent, interacting message systems', each of which has its 'individual signal rate and a differing degree of inherent inertia' (see Fletcher 1992: 46-7). Yet this is to see structure and historical process as actually existing *outside* of agency. This is a mode of interpretation, based as it is on a series of abstract categories and inter-relationships, which does not recognise that social reproduction is grounded in the *performativity* of a group's members — that the generation of all shared social meaning actually depends upon the recurrence of similar phenomena, or events whose cultural 'sameness' is recognised, and this only occurs because of actions and individual recollections which together invoke a continuity with the past and a dynamic for the forward-projection of such meaning (Connerton 1989). It also fails to recognise that by disentangling structure from present-day discourse, and thus also from chance, uniqueness and unpredictability, you create narratives or stories which can only 'go' in certain logical ways. The reproduction and transformation of any social system is reduced, as a result, to an exercise in predictive modelling.

It could of course be argued that past societies, like the 'cold' societies of Levi-Strauss's writings, remained fairly stable or constant, their only perception of temporality equivalent to the lifecycle of persons or groups as they pass through the unchanging structure. As already noted, acts of ritual could be used to invoke the perception that 'everything passes, but everything remains the same' (Gell 1992: 343), thus actually cancelling out the need to study 'present-day existence'. The logic of this argument is clearly observable in many accounts of prehistoric society, especially those that create structural histories for various slices of the Neolithic and early

Bronze Age (eg. Renfrew 1973, Shennan 1982, Thorpe & Richards 1984). While I would certainly not contend that societies are incapable of possessing such idealised concepts of timelessness, or deny that ritual can indeed be seen as a machine for the abolition of time, it should be remembered that real-world time ‘happens’ regardless of whether a society believes or not in its own ahistorical constitution. For the latter is no more than an ideological representation of cognitive temporality, and as such, is only meaningfully incorporated into strategies of social reproduction as part of present-day existence. Therefore, timelessness is not a result of some abstract notion of collective remembrance — as ‘structure’ autonomously gives rise to ‘events’ which in turn submerge back into the grand historical narrative — but is dependent upon a specific network of reciprocal relationships as retention and protention, or memory and anticipation, combine within any temporally extended present. And since the retention of current consciousness is always subject to distortion, diminution or even complete ‘system-change’ as it is projected into the future as protentions, society possesses the ability to transform itself (Sahlins 1985: vii, Gell 1992: 224). This is to acknowledge ‘the potential import and meaningfulness of our individual lives, the promise that our personal actions and struggles can budge (or even redirect) the apparent indifference and inertia of external reality’ (Gould 1999: ix). In this way, no present is the same, regardless of a society’s belief in its own timelessness.

L’HISTOIRE PROBLÈME AND GENEALOGY

While the time perspectivism of Fernand Braudel has found a small number of eager champions within archaeology some have also embraced one of the most influential of the third generation of Annaliste scholars, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie (Bintliff 1991, 14-5, 1999, 2004, Knapp 1992, 85). He played an important role in developing l’histoire-problème, an approach initially pioneered by Febvre, one of the founding fathers of the Annales School, which aimed to grasp the process by which particular social structures emerged by working backwards in time through the detailed political and economic evidence, and identifying those ‘traumatic events’ or ‘creative events’ which acted as a catalyst for their development (Le Roy Ladurie 1972: 115). Given this preoccupation with social structure, or what Le Roy Ladurie (1981: 4) himself described as ‘the layers of rock beneath our feet’, it may be thought that here we have

an approach which is well-suited to the aspirations of many archaeologists. Moreover, a stated aim was to drill through these layers of rock, to deal with ‘the activities, the struggles, and the thoughts of the people themselves’ (Le Roy Ladurie 1974: 8), accordingly restoring ‘the event, however unique, to its proper place within a kind of history which is nevertheless committed to being systematic’ (Le Roy Ladurie 1979: 116). It may be the case that, as with Braudel’s time perspectivism, there is a marked discrepancy between the stated goals and what was actually achieved (Clark 1985: 186, Burke 1990, 83), yet his work does, in principle, focus upon present-day existence and understand it as an instrument for social innovation, modification or stability. At the same time, events are unfurled in time in an attempt to uncover the biography of chronologically enduring social patterns or structures. This, then, could be an informative perspective for it alludes to those important *relationships*, discussed above, between things past, present and future. It not only assumes that a central problem of interpretation is how a social system became ‘stretched’ across wide spans of space and time, but argues that this can only be appreciated by pursuing connections between a lived present and its practical realisation through time.

The approach is based on interactive causality. By considering events as ‘intersections that break patterns, and as such are central to understanding and explaining change’ (Knapp 1992: 6), the short-term is credited with the ability to interact and affect historical process. However, if this represents a commendable retreat from the determinism of hierarchical causation, whereby the long-term determined all at a lower level of existence, it did not detract from the belief that ‘total history’ was achievable: that by adopting different scales of temporality it is possible to reconstruct the whole physical, intellectual and moral universe of distinctive periods of history. Hence, of continuing importance was the time perspectivism of earlier approaches, the assumption that different types of cognitive temporality — principally the short-term of *l’histoire événementielle* and the long-term of structural history — could be differentiated from one another, studied separately, and then rejoined to form a ‘structure-event-structure’ model of causation. But paradoxically, if the distinction between event and structure is in fact logically unwarranted — and I have already argued that these concepts are analytically inseparable, lacking explanatory potency as independent terms — then the writings of Le Roy Ladurie and other third generation Annaliste historians hint at this. The long-term of these accounts reads, at times,

suspiciously like a chain of events upon which the historian has simply imposed a shared theme, or what is then described as the 'structure'. The social distinctions which are the cornerstone of 'The case of the Chouan Uprising' (Le Roy Ladurie 1979), for example, are clearly only manifest through the occurrence and reoccurrence of events, whose meanings were widely recognised by the communities that populate the study — in this case, they include practical experiences of land tenure, electioneering, acts of voting, or just the verbal discourse, or airing of grievances, which are an influential part of daily life. In this text, in other words, there is a sense in which 'structure' and 'event' are inseparable parts of a constantly sliding forward present. And if there is no distinction between 'event' and 'structure', there can be no interactive causality between these concepts, and if the latter does not exist, how is it possible to achieve 'total history'? Without models of causality it is impossible to weave the endless interplay of events into a meaningful and coherent narrative. Indeed, without a belief in structural history how can analysis establish its own point of departure and that very necessary finishing-line?

These problems can be overcome if it is accepted that an understanding of how social systems are 'stretched' across wide spans of space and time will not be achieved by some grand narrative, but through writing what has recently been described as *genealogies*, or histories of the individual entities which constitute a social system (Gosden 1994: 140, Thomas 1996: 38-9, 96). Genealogies would, like l'histoire-problème itself, trace the descent of particular institutions, practices and material culture through the network of social realities, or lived presents, within which they were created, reproduced and transformed. But unlike these later Annaliste histories, their 'descent' would not be understood within a framework of causality, whereby a dialectical, but ultimately abstract, interplay between event and structure is simply assumed to have existed: rather, it will be asked what generative rules and resources were actually responsible for the 'flow' of continuous conduct. This is to conceive the past as chains of ordered presents along which the complex network of mnemonic and anticipatory relations are played-out as part of specific social practices. The individual links of these chains ultimately derive from our chronological, or at least sequential, understanding of the archaeological record, with its particular contexts, layers and horizons often equating to individual action. But because these occurrences would, in reality, be conscious manifestations of both memory and anticipation, they also

possess their own ‘thickness’ or temporal spread. When these ‘presents’ are placed in their sequential order it may be possible to connect together the mnemonic and anticipatory relations of individual acts, and subsequently, create a ‘timeline’ and social biography. It may even be possible to chart this back to an event, or tear in history, which acted as a catalyst for particular developments. This, then, is to accept the eventfulness of the archaeological record, but unlike the knife-edge ‘here-and-now’ noted above, it adopts a more temporally extended enquiry, examining those interconnections or relationships spread out between specific ‘now’ moments and into the social memory of successive generations. Hence, it embraces an awareness that real-time is the very agent which provides social strategies with their context, meaning, and historical potency.

This accepts that interpretation should be problem-orientated, focusing on particular questions about the origin, reproduction and transformation of individual institutions, practices and material culture. Implications follow, of which the most obvious is the simple fact that, as a result, ‘only a part of the vast dark world’, which is the past, “lights up” before us at any given time’ (Thomas 1996: 96). If this implies that the past must be multi-stranded, it also means that many of these strands would no doubt compete with each other, or even be contradictory: for as Gosden (1994: 140) notes, whilst drawing the obvious comparison with family history, ‘Family members start with certain assumptions about which people to include in the tree.....If different starting assumptions were used, other genealogies could be constructed’. Similarly, the archaeological project could result in interpretive heterogeneity or historical plurality, and if this appears to represent an alarming retreat from holism, then it should be considered as an agenda which does no more than accept that past societies, just like their present-day counterparts, were not a ‘perfectly woven and all-enmeshing web’ (Archer 1988, 2). For, in essence, the ‘starting assumptions’ of its actors would have also been different, varying according to their exact spatial and temporal placement or position within any social system. Indeed, this reality accounts for the mistaken belief, by those who invoke time perspectivism, that ‘structure’ must exist outside agency, because if it did not, how would one explain the fact that ‘In the practice of the lived moment all the abstractions and constraints and systems cannot possibly be present except in the simplest of terms and most provisional of ways’ (Hodder 1999: 131)? But, of course, these ‘abstractions and constraints and systems’

are rarely, if ever, present all at once, for if they were there would be little unpredictability in social reproduction. Therefore, to create ‘competing’ genealogies is simply to realise that ‘structure’ — so long regarded as the synchronic principles which generate social life — has no reality outside present-day existence, and because none of these presents are the same, social reproduction itself possesses no historical fixity. In this way, there is no such thing as a ‘stable’ society, or indeed, no conceptual opposition between synchronic and diachronic temporality, because any system, as it unfolds through time, will not only be reproduced, but also constantly distorted or modified, endlessly producing novel terms of understanding for those experiencing each new moment of existence.

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