Time and Social Theory

Barbara Adam



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society. Time, timing, tempo, and temporality emerged as fundamental aspects of both nature and human social organisation. Temporality, rhythmicity, time as measure or parameter, the time aspects of organisation, were all found to be integral to social time generally and to our present reality. It has become apparent, however, that these neutral concepts have to be imbued with particular meanings if they are to be appropriate for the description of specific levels of our being and environment. Transcendence and relations of power have been suggested as possible concepts with which to enrich the neutral terms so that they may become meaningful expressions of human time generally and industrial time in particular. To recognise the significance of this extended view entails that we leave this more substantive conceptual focus and reflect more specifically on the implications of our findings for social theory.

Time for Social Theory: Points of Departure

In this treatise we have taken on board the challenging idea that a theory of time is a necessary pre-condition to social theory. To accomplish this task I have allowed our investigation to be guided by the theories, studies, and implicit utilisations of time in the social and natural sciences. Explored in these multiple expressions, time emerged as a fundamentally transdisciplinary subject and necessitated an understanding that is no longer containable within the traditional assumptions and categories of social science. We now need to reflect on the implications of these findings for social theory. This entails refocusing on some issues and reassessing a few of the classical social theory traditions in the light of our findings. It requires that we spell out the limitations of the classical practice of abstraction and dualistic theorising for an understanding of 'social time' and that we question the tradition of claiming time exclusively for the human realm by locating it in mind, language or the functional needs of social organisation. This involves us in a reevaluation of the dualistic conceptualisation of natural and social time and the closely related idea that all time is social time. It necessitates further that we explore the role of metaphors and focus explicitly on the social science convention of limiting the time-span of concern to a few hundred years.

Whilst there emerges a strong sense of a new direction for social theory the individual components do not yet fit together to form a cohesive whole. According to Gebser (1986: 375-6) an appreciation of the limits of existing approaches invariably precedes the slow and difficult process towards a new method of understanding. We must not be surprised, therefore, that our extensive reconceptualisation does not culminate in a polished new theory but merely a first step in that direction; it identifies points of departure and indicates the potential for future development.

Social time and natural time revisited

In order to adjust the meaning of social time in the light of this research, we need to remind ourselves of the traditional conceptualisations of natural and social time. Sorokin and Merton (1937) may be said to have provided the 'definitive' classic statement on the distinction between social and natural time. They associate the physical time of diurnal and seasonal cycles with clock time and define this time as 'purely quantitative, shorn of qualitative variation' (p. 621). 'All time systems', Sorokin and Merton suggest further, 'may be reduced to the need of providing means for synchronising and co-ordinating the activities and observations of the constituents of groups' (p. 627).

Whilst social theorists are no longer united in the belief that all time systems are reducible to the functional need of human synchronisation and co-ordination they seem to have little doubt about the validity of Sorokin and Merton's other key point that, unlike social time, the time of nature is that of the clock, a time characterised by invariance and quantity. Despite significant shifts in the understanding of social time, the assumptions about nature, natural time, and the subject matter of the natural sciences have remained largely unchanged. In other words, the development in the conceptualisation of social time has not been accompanied by one of natural time with the result that our understanding of natural time, as this exploration has shown, is grossly out of tune with contemporary natural science understanding. Even where the importance of the physical and biological aspects of time are appreciated for social life, they are not theorised or in any way related to that life (Bergmann 1983; Elias 1982a, b, 1984; Schöps 1980; Schutz and Luckmann 1973). Social time seems defined against 'an other' which appears to be no more than a convenient backcloth against which to describe and define a more complex understanding of social time. Everything social time is thought not to be (or not only to be) is classified as 'natural time'.

In contradistinction to social science analyses this research shows that most of what social scientists preserve exclusively for the human realm is generalised throughout nature. It demonstrates that the characteristics identified with natural time are in fact an exclusively human creation. Past, present, and future, historical time, the qualitative experience of time, the structuring of 'undifferentiated change' into episodes, all are established as integral time aspects of the subject matter of the natural sciences and clock time, the invariant measure, the closed circle, the perfect symmetry, and reversible time as our creations. This investigation thus establishes natural time as very different from

its social science conceptualisation. Furthermore, it shows that it matters what assumptions social scientists hold about natural time and the subject matter of the natural sciences in general as these not only affect the definition of social time but also the understanding of the nature of 'the social'. Since our traditional understanding of natural time emerged as inadequate and faulty we have to recognise that the analysis of social time is flawed by implication. However, the difficulty extends beyond the need to achieve a more appropriate understanding of natural time since the assumptions associated with this understanding are embedded in the more general theories that social scientists hold about nature.

A brief expansion of these general social science assumptions about nature will clarify this point. Nature as distinct from social life is understood to be quantifiable, simple, and subject to invariant relations and laws that hold beyond time and space (Giddens 1976; Lessnoff 1979; Ryan 1979). This view is accompanied by an understanding of natural time as coming in fixed, divisible units that can be measured whilst quality, complexity, and mediating knowledge are preserved exclusively for the conceptualisation of human social time. On the basis of a further, closely related idea it is proposed that nature may be understood objectively. Natural scientists, explain Elias (1982a, b) and Giddens (1976), stand in a subject-object relationship to their subject matter. Natural scientists, they suggest, are able to study objects directly and apply a causal framework of analysis whilst such direct causal links no longer suffice for the study of human society where that which is investigated has to be appreciated as unintended outcomes of intended actions and where the investigators interpret a pre-interpreted world. Unlike their colleagues in the natural sciences, social scientists, it is argued, stand in a subject-subject relation to their subject matter. In addition to the differences along the quantity-quality and object-subject dimensions nature is thought to be predictable because its regularities be they causal, statistical, or probabilistic - are timeless. The laws of nature are considered to be true in an absolute and timeless way, the laws of society historically developed. In contrast to nature, human societies are argued to be fundamentally historical. They are organised around values, goals, morals, ethics, and hopes, whilst simultaneously being influenced by tradition, habits, and legitimised meanings. These general social science assumptions, first formulated by leading proponents of the German Geisteswissenschaften (human sciences) such as Rickert and Dilthey, inform the social science understanding of social and natural time. Because it is postulated that the physical world is subject to laws, that natural processes entail no element of choice, purpose, or meaning, and that nature can be quantified and studied objectively it is suggested

that the past and future are irrelevant and that the B-series of time is therefore the appropriate conceptual tool for the natural sciences.

We can now appreciate that the task is not simply to adjust our understanding of natural time. An extension of focus that includes an understanding of the times of nature necessitates a change in the social sciences' fundamental assumptions about nature or, as Luhmann (1980: 32) puts it, a shift in the base assumptions of sociological theory. The evidence presented in this book supports my proposition that an improvement and widening of our understanding of social time without a radical change in the assumptions that underpin our present scientific knowledge is not enough. It makes clear that natural scientists no longer hold this nineteenth century view of nature. It demonstrates that the social sciences' practice of understanding of the physical and biological realm in contradistinction to the human social world is consistent with, and supportive of, the contemporary dualistic understanding of natural and social time. It affirms that these underlying assumptions are steeped in the Newtonian, mechanistic understanding of nature and natural time, an understanding where particles move in reversible time to invariable laws, within an absolute time that defines our uniqueness. It suggests that this Newtonian understanding is perfectly complemented by the basic assumptions of classical philosophy which had been adopted by social theorists for their various time classifications. The philosophical approach is dominated by Cartesian dualism which separates not just mind from body, but repetition from process, quality from quantity, form from content, subject from object, the individual from the collective, the A-series from the B-series, cyclical from linear time, and traditional from modern conceptualisations and structures of time. Barnes (1971: 545), commenting on the work of Lévi-Strauss, suggests that in order to 'escape from an amusing but ultimately sterile ballet of symbols in which history and anthropology, synchrony and diachrony, consciousness and unconsciousness, continuity and discontinuity, reversible and irreversible time dance endlessly round each other until the audience decides to go home, we have to break down the dichotomies, establish continua and feed in more facts.' When we do, the picture changes and the simplified dualities loose their meaning: thinking in opposites ceases to be a viable theoretical option. As we have seen in the first chapter, social scientists who seek to take account of time in their theories recognise the need and make a commitment to overcome dichotomies and dualisms. They do so, however, without letting go of the assumptions upon which dualisms are built. Thus, the best that can be achieved is a reconceptualisation of dualisms into genuine, mutually defining dualities (Giddens 1981, 1984; Hopkins 1982; Jaques 1982; Lauer 1981). Predictably, the new approaches do not solve the problem

but end up with new dichotomies and continue to pose irresolvable difficulties with respect to time, as I have demonstrated throughout this investigation. Recognising time as both condition and outcome, reversible and progressive, *Dasein* and *durée*, quality and quantity, resource and commodity merely shifts the focus from dichotomies to isolated pairs. It provides no means for a conceptualisation of the connections between multiple pairs, their continuity and discontinuity, or their mutual implication. Theories of dualities are impervious to ecological principles or to such ideas as resonance and implication.

We need to recognise further that most dualisms entail an implicit hierarchical evaluation which has remained untouched by the dualism-duality conversion. Dichotomies are usually not value-neutral and thus need to be appreciated as not only fundamentally inclusive of their counterpart but also ranked in order of importance and priority. As scientific classifications these polarities thus read objective over subjective, mind over matter, social over biological or physical time (or vice versa depending on who does the prioritising), modern over traditional time, and commodity over event-based time. Contemporary physicists such as Capra (1976) and Chew (1968) propose that the practice of making one aspect more important than others is no longer tenable and in need of re-evaluation. Capra (1982: 83-9) and Briggs and Peat (1985: 216-7) demonstrate the importance of the idea of 'bootstrapping' for an understanding where issues of fundamentality, priority, and importance are recognised to be relative, a property of the framework of observation.

The Newtonian-Cartesian understanding causes yet another difficulty. Elias insists that we need to understand time as an immense synthesis rather than an abstraction. However, the conceptual tools that are being used to understand this synthesis are, as we have seen, based on an understanding of reality that abstracts bits, particles, aspects, units, events, or periods in order to understand them. It is becoming obvious that the wrong conceptual tools are being used if we seek to grasp and theorise synthesis, qualitative rhythmicity, intensity, and acausal relationships with the aid of Newtonian and Cartesian assumptions. The complexity of social time cannot be understood by focusing on aspects in isolation if that focus excludes an awareness of the bearing of diurnal, seasonal, menstrual, and metabolic cycles; the variety of time structurings; the irreversible exchanges in relations of incomplete autonomy and dependence; the relationship we have to all those time aspects of existence; and the time we have created as an independent reality: all are implicated in any one aspect we focus on. We could think of the difference of approach in terms of focus and isolation. When we are focusing the rest of our visual field is not disappearing in the way it does when we are isolating and abstracting some part or event in order to

study it. It is the difference between an embedded understanding where both the thinker and the object of understanding remain an integral aspect of the totality, and one that severs those infinite connections. Our traditional understanding of social time and the convention of claiming for the human social realm what are qualities of all nature are linked to assumptions that separate society from nature and enforce choices on an either/or basis. A different picture emerges, however, once we put the Newtonian and Cartesian understanding aside and concentrate on the infinite connections and relations. With such a shift of focus and emphasis, existing assumptions and classifications begin to become meaningless.

These thoughts lead us once more to a closely related, historically persistent idea, an early version of which was put forward by Durkheim (1915) in 'The Elementary Forms of Religious Life'. It simply states that all time is social time, meaning human social time. That this assertion, in its social science meaning, is no longer tenable has been amply demonstrated in this treatise. Yet it is worthwhile to look at this idea once more since it may help to shed light on the limitations of current approaches for a comprehensive time-based social science understanding. A summary of this idea may be expressed in the following way. Time is always social time because only humans regulate and organise their lives by time. Only they conceptualise time. Only they use, control, allocate, and sell their time. Only they lead an 'in time' existence and create their own histories and futures.

This research leaves no doubt that there are time aspects which pertain exclusively to human social contexts. But these, as we have seen, need to be distinguished from the more universal principles of time that are to be found throughout nature. Organisational aspects of time, for example, are found at the inorganic, organic, and the human social level, as well as in the design aspects of human artefacts. The organisational principles of time, in terms of sequence, duration, periodicity, rates of change, and synchronisation may be the same for all, but their meaning and expressive form change with the context. The same applies to an 'in time existence', which is led by simple organisms, plants, animals, and humans alike because it relates not exclusively to calendars but to being bounded by external rhythms. The difference here lies in how the being relates to that rhythm or, in the case of Western societies, whether the rhythm has been abstracted from the natural rhythms within which other beings organise their social existences. All beings, it has further become apparent, are their own past, present, and future. The difference lies in the degree to which they are aware of this fact and the way they relate to it. This research suggests that clock time, and the Newtonian timereversible t- coordinate, are the only time aspects that can be exclusively designated human social constructions. All other aspects, irrespective of

whether or not they are conceptualised, are also integral aspects of nature. Human time therefore needs to be understood to include the times of nature. In agreement with Mead (1959), we could view time as socially constituted in interaction since the symmetry-breaking process of interaction is one of the sources of time. But Mead's socially constituted time is very different from that of Bergmann, Elias, Durkheim, or Sorokin and Merton. In other words, the idea of time as socially constituted depends fundamentally on the meaning we impose on 'the social', whether we understand it as a prerogative of human social organisation or, following Mead, as a principle of nature.

The idea that time is not separable from the meaning of time, that it always symbolises something that is socially formulated, is a more complex one to untangle. Without getting drawn into the complex philosophical debates about the existence of reality outside language, it can be argued that in instances where language comes to be equated with reality we are no longer in a position to conceptualise a number of things. We are left without bases from which to account for meaning variance, to understand non-language-based nature, and to translate from one system of meaning to another (Giddens 1976: 17-18). Furthermore, it leaves no room for understanding novelty and creativity; and it denies to the rest of nature experience, meaning, and consciousness. In the light of contemporary scientific understandings of reality, Mead's (1959) conceptualisation, and the research presented here, we find that the tradition of equating time with its symbol is no longer tenable. There may be good reasons for such an exclusive stress on the symbol. It is possible, as Hägerstrand (1985: 8-12) points out, that social scientists have linked time so intimately to the symbol of time because this is quite simply the very form on which they have been focusing. More importantly nonsymbolic expressions of reality are traditionally understood to be outside the disciplinary boundaries of the human social sciences. These reasons may explain the convention but they cannot justify it. We can accept that for us to be able to talk and think about time necessitates our putting it into words. If this is all that is being expressed, it is not very much; if it equates reality with the symbol, it goes too far. There is no need to deny that all humans formulate meanings symbolically or that this is a fundamentally social process. There is an urgent need, however, to appreciate that time is an aspect of nature, and that nature encompasses the symbolic universe of human society. Once we recognise ourselves as bearers of all the multiple times of nature, and once we allow for nature to include symbolic expression, the gulf between the symbolic knower and nature as an external (unknowable) object can be dispensed with. The mutually exclusive dichotomies of nature and culture, subject and object become irrelevant.

From the evidence presented in the last four chapters we emerge as activity-matter, causal as well as non-local communication networks, biological clocks that beat in 'off-beat' to the rhythms of our earth, and as beings that grow and decay dynamically in interdependence with other systems of change-order. Recognising ourselves as having evolved, and thus being the times of nature, allows for the humanly constituted aspects of time to become one expression among the others. Biologists have dispelled the idea that only humans experience time or organise their lives by it. Waiting and timing in nature presuppose knowledge of time and temporality, irrespective of their being symbolised, conceptualised, reckoned, or measured. Yet, once time is constituted symbolically, it is no longer reducible to the communication of organisms or physical signals; it is no longer a mere sensory datum. For a person to have a past and to recognise and know it entails a representational, symbolically based imagination. Endowed with it, people do not merely undergo their presents and pasts but they shape and reshape them. Symbolic meaning thus makes the past infinitely flexible. With objectified meaning we can not only look back, reflect, and contemplate but we can reinterpret, restructure, alter, and modify the past irrespective of whether this is done in the light of new knowledge in the present, to suit the present, or for purposes of legitimation.

Kinget (1975: 43) speaks of a 'living past' and sees our assumptions about it demonstrated in the practice of psychotherapy which is premised on trust in the possibility of reshaping the past in the present. Looked at in this way, time may be viewed as having evolved as an aspect of (Meadian) sociality in the universe. The way humans - as a species or as members of specific societies, groups, and families symbolise time and relate to it, may then be understood as a specific explicated form of something that is uniquely implicated in all of nature. This understanding was first articulated by Mead shortly before his death. Mead began to formulate what contemporary natural scientists have substantiated for us: the mutual implication of sociality and temporality and its applicability to all of nature. In other words, contemporary natural scientists have provided the substantive evidence for Mead's theory that nature fundamentally includes human social life, and that natural and social time are therefore not mutually exclusive but implicating.

The exclusion of non-symbolic expressions from social science analysis has not only resulted in a highly problematic conceptualisation of nature and natural time but it has also meant the omission of artefacts and technology from social science. As Carlstein (1982: 8-9) points out, 'social scientists have commonly refused to see 'dead things' as social or have left them aside for the natural scientists. Social scientists have also commonly

refused to look upon artefacts as social in the sense that they impinge on how individuals interact with each other. These 'dead things' are, at best, seen as symbols and are not considered to be genuine ingredients in social situations and processes.' Yet, with respect to time, it is difficult to see how we can understand society without the time aspects of those 'dead things', those created artefacts and machines that shape our lives and our understanding of reality. There can be no longer any doubt that our conceptualisations of time are deeply influenced by them. Furthermore, our artefacts have become mediators and filters through which we not only live our lives with others in our environment but understand and symbolise that life and ourselves. They have become metaphors. As such they deserve our most careful attention.

Knowing through metaphors

There is strong evidence to suggest that we are self-conscious by virtue of mediation, that we recognise ourselves through an external or externalised 'other'. It is likely that animals, as sentient and mortal creatures that share the world of humans, are one of the earliest sources for questions about the nature of human being. As bases of self-understanding they suggested answers that were consequently formulated in language, expressed in paintings, and encoded in sacred rituals. Animals are both familiar and distinct, and their powers - comparable but never the same as those of humans - a source of quality. Berger (1980: 5) designates that relationship metaphoric since, 'within this relationship what the two terms - man and animal - shared in common revealed what differentiated them. And vice versa.' In our contemporary Western world animals are no longer a dominant metaphor for self-recognition. In the age of machines natural metaphors are, to a large extent, replaced by our own creations.

Every new phase of technological development, it seems, has served as a tool for self-understanding and led to new conceptualisations of reality. During the seventeenth and eighteenth century the clock constituted the prime metaphor. The universe was understood as a giant clockwork and its inhabitants were conceptualised as functioning to its principles. During the nineteenth century the principles of steam technology were embraced as additional sources for self-understanding. The imagery involved people 'letting off steam' and the need for 'safety-valves' to avoid dangerous social explosions. Emotions and social interactions were likened to a steam engine functioning under pressure with a need for the steam to escape in order to avoid disaster. During the last twenty years the computer has been elevated to the position of dominant metaphor. Its

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principles are used for the conceptualisation of mind and for all operations that involve the transfer of information.

The process from the invention of a new artefact to its use as a metaphor seems to follow a pattern.

Each technological innovation offers a new kind of human experience. At first, it is entirely strange, and difficult to grasp; but we quickly find in it sufficient familiar features to act as points of reference, and we then explore it, savour it, come to terms with it, and assimilate it into the pattern of our everyday life. We learn to live with it. Once it is established in this way, it can be the basis of a metaphorical transfer: we then see previously familiar things in terms of this novelty. We have acquired a new perceptual tool. (Edge 1973: 35)

Through metaphors we evoke the inner connections between things but that is not all. We have a tendency to reify metaphors to a point where we loose sight of the human authorship. Frequently the distinction between the metaphor, its source, and its name gets blurred or lost. Reified, metaphors lose their usefulness as a conceptual tool for social science. It is therefore important for us to keep a clear distinction between the tool and that which we grasp with its aid.

Since metaphors play such a central role in our theories it is pertinent for us to learn to 'see' what has thus far been invisible: the design principles of artefacts that guide and structure our understanding. Only once we become fully aware of them can we use the metaphors to our full advantage. The Newtonian machine technology has emerged as a particularly unsuitable metaphor for an understanding where time is allowed to become a prominent feature of social analysis, and much of the discussion in the previous chapters has shown the severe limitations of the machine-clock metaphor. In this last chapter I want to focus briefly on the differences between the technology of lenses and the post-Newtonian technology of holograms so that we may appreciate their respective principles and recognise their existing and potential role for social theory. The purpose of this brief excursus to holography is therefore not to seek the implications for a conceptualisation of social time but to explore the potential for a social theory that takes account of time.

Holography has shifted understanding from causal, sequential, linear connection chains to interference patterns and from mechanical interaction, organisation, and transmission of information of individual parts to mutual implication. Whilst the lens remains a powerful metaphor for an analysis of isolated parts, holography allows an understanding of the sort of interconnectedness and mutual implication we have encountered in Chapters 2–6. The hologram is therefore proving an excellent metaphor

for a whole, encoded and implicated in the 'parts', since the information it stores is not located in the individual parts but in their interference pattern. Any one part of a hologram contains, implies, and resonates information of the whole. The focus here is not on individual particles in motion, crossing time and space in succession, but on all of the information gathered up simultaneously. In contradistinction to Newtonian mechanics and geometric optics where the part is different from the whole in an absolute way and where the emphasis is on substance, holography focuses on information gathered from the whole of the object under investigation. It has dispensed with the absolute distinction of wholes and parts. Three aspects of the hologram metaphor are thus initially important for understanding in social science: its non-sequentiality, its individual-whole relationship, and its multiperspective focus.

In order to appreciate the difference between the metaphors we need to explore the principles that underpin their respective designs. With lensphotography an image is created on the plate in such a way that each point on the object corresponds to a single point on the image on the plate. The object stands in a 1:1 relation to the image. In case of the plate being broken, the broken-off part would be missing from the image. 'By thus bringing the correspondence of specified features of object and image into such sharp relief,' writes Bohm (1983: 144), 'the lens greatly strengthened man's awareness of the various parts of the object and of the relationship between these parts. In this way, it furthered the tendency to think in terms of analysis and synthesis.' In holography, laser light beams are fired in phase before being split and sent along different paths. A reference beam goes to the plate directly while the other beam picks up the reflections from the entire object. It illuminates the object 'in the round' and from all aspects. Once the light beams are reunited on the plate they are no longer in phase but interfere with each other and thus produce an interference pattern on the plate. This pattern in no way resembles the object but has its features encoded. In contradistinction to the photographic plate each region of the holographic plate carries the encoded information of the whole. If part of the holographic plate gets damaged, no part of the image gets lost. Briggs and Peat (1985: 271) explain the difference. 'The pattern is not in 1:1 correspondence with the object because the phase information from each region of the object is recorded throughout the holographic plate. Thus, if a portion of the plate is lost, the total image is retained.' Because the memory is distributed over the whole of the holographic plate, each part contains the whole Gestalt. From the encoded pattern a three-dimensional image can then be recreated by shining the reference beam onto the plate and viewing it from the other side. The object is thus recognised in its totality

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rather than having its individual features matched piece by piece. The principle of splitting light-waves that are in phase, thus creating both a reference beam and another beam carrying multiperspectivist information, appears to be very similar to the process by which we recognise ageing, growing, and change of any kind since one way to know change is by reference to something relatively unchanging, or something that changes more slowly. If all processes occurred 'in phase' we could not know them in relation to each other. We would have no basis from which to recognise change.

Derived from the Greek 'holo' which means whole and 'gram' which means to write, a hologram 'writes the whole' (Bohm 1983: 145). This encoding of the totality in every tiniest aspect of itself represents a departure from all previous Western, science-based understandings of the relationship of parts to wholes. Here the sum can neither be said to be more than the part nor can it be argued to determine the part as in the case of organic holism. The language of causal determinism is misplaced in a holism where the connections are simultaneous and where everything implies everything else. Simultaneity, mutual implication, and complexity, the time aspects that pose such insoluble difficulty for traditional social theory, appear manageable for a theory based on holographic principles. Holographic principles are therefore eminently more suitable than the technology of clocks and lenses for an understanding in which time is allowed to play a central part. Understanding through opposites, abstraction, analysis, and synthesis seem no longer to be the only options for social theory.

Whilst holography is more suited to an understanding that takes account of the multiplicity of times than any of the mechanically based metaphors, it must be noted that it too is dominated by our sense of sight, thus emphasising stability and spatiality. Its principles, however, apply to all wave phenomena from light and water to sound and electromagnetic energy. Contemporary holography therefore provides merely the first visually based step in the direction of this particular way of understanding. The potential of the holographic principles are explored, studied, and conceptualised in physics, biology, neurophysiology, acoustics, and in brain and consciousness research, to name just a few areas. Only social science, it seems, has so far ignored the theoretical potential of this metaphor. This book is not the place to begin this task in earnest. To grasp the full implications for social theory is beyond the capability of one person; it needs the effort of many theorists. At the present, merely the potential is apparent for a time-sensitive, truly contemporary social theory. In the absence of such a post-Newtonian framework of meaning the 'level-approach' emerges as superior to that of classical Cartesian dualisms and Newtonian mechanics.

From this research, all the times we have encountered so far emerge as implicated in our contemporary social time. We are time and this fact unites us with all other rhythmically organised beings. Together with plants and animals we are aware of time and experience it. As human beings we have a relationship to time and we reckon time. As members of Western industrial societies we create time as a resource, as a tool, and as an abstract exchange value. We thus express what is separated in academic disciplines: the times of the different realms of being. A conceptualisation in terms of levels seems therefore well suited to explain and theorise the multitude of times entailed in contemporary life. To think of these times as expressions of different levels of our being avoids the need to discuss one aspect at the expense of all others. It means that we do not need to chose on an either/or basis. It encourages us to see connections and not to lose sight of the multiplicity while we concentrate on any one of those multiple expressions.

Despite these important advantages, however, there are difficulties associated with the conceptualisation of social time in terms of levels. These relate to our tendency to reify the levels, to conceptualise them hierarchically, and to postulate clear cut-off points between them. The three, as we shall see, are closely interconnected. Beginning with the problem of reification, we must recognise that we do not live, as Schutz and Luckmann (1974: 47) suggest, 'in all those dimensions simultaneously', and that the levels do not, as Elias (1982b: 1000) proposes, stand in relation to each other. It is our understanding in terms of levels that is in need of being connected and related. Dasein (and nature in general) can be conceptualised in terms of levels because we are oscillating molecules and rhythmically organised beings with identities as well as beings that constitute, know, measure, and create time. A second difficulty relates to our understanding each 'higher' level expression of time as containing the one 'below' which means that we inadvertently create a hierarchy from simplicity to complexity, from the earlier to the later development, and from the lower to the higher number. This may be an immensely useful way to conceptualise both the continuities and irreducible differences of the times relevant to the physical, biological, and human social realm but our traditional usage gets in the way when we want to explain resonance and mutual implication; when we want to express the idea that any new order changes not only the meaning of that which precedes it but the old order itself. Level, as descriptive metaphor for the multiple times of our existence, thus needs to be applied in a way that does not suppose any fundamental mode of description. It needs to

allow for everything to be connected and implicated without a claim of pre-eminence of any one. I refer the reader back to the idea of bootstrapping, where physicists insist not merely that none of the properties of any part of the web of interconnections are elementary but accept no fundamental entities whatsoever: no fundamental laws, equations, or principles. Physicists, like the phenomenologists before them, insist that reality is not revealed to us in some pure form; that we do not observe nature per se but nature exposed to our method of questioning. The 'observed' hierarchy needs therefore to be recognised as part of the framework of observation and as soon as it gets in the way of conceptualising mutually implicating connections we need to discard it and replace it with a non-hierarchical conceptual framework.

The recognition that our observations are framed by our questions and theoretical assumptions applies equally to 'level' approaches that postulate clear 'cut-off' lines and conceptualise levels analogous to physical, tiered structures. Korzybski's (1924) three 'time binding levels', Lovejoy's (1960) four 'levels of being', and Fraser's (1982, 1981b) six 'time levels of existence' are examples of theories of discontinuous levels. Thus, Korzybski characterises the human, animal, and vegetable realms in terms of their synthesis-forming capacity as time-, space-, and energybinding, respectively, whilst the physicist Fraser proposes six stable, integrative time levels of nature: three for the physical universe, one for life forms, and two for the human realm. Not the number of levels or their content are at issue here since these might be varied according to the degree of the analysis' generality but their static developmental stages where the level 'below' is denied aspects that characterise the level 'above'. In other words, whilst theories of time levels are theoretically of interest and echoed in many subsequent social science conceptualisations - including those of Sorokin (1964) and Elias (1982a, b, 1984), for example - they deny to non-human nature what we have found to be central: the importance of past, present, and future extension; of history, creativity, temporality, time experience, and time norms. If time differences are conceptualised with reference to stable, integrative levels then this prevents any understanding in terms of resonance and feedback loops. With discrete, unidirectional levels, consciousness cannot be shown to resonate throughout all of nature; and what we think of as 'human time' stays falsely imprisoned at that level. I have not yet found a satisfactory way of coping simultaneously with hierarchical nesting and implication, with enfoldment and resonance. In the meantime, however, a cautiously applied conceptualisation in terms of levels is to be preferred to an understanding of social time where mutually exclusive choices have to be made.

I have contended repeatedly that it matters how we understand, for

example, the invention of clocks or the standardisation of world time in relation to what preceded them. Conceptualised as successors they replace; as additions they leave everything else intact. The findings of this exploration, however, cannot be encompassed by either of these solutions since each new development appears to affect what exists already. Let us take clock time as an example.

Once this created time is related to as a resource to be used, allocated, controlled, spent, or sold it affects our relationship to death, the timing of our activities, our institutions, our technology, our understanding of reality, and our practices of work, leisure, and even sleep. Our environment, too, and even our bodies, are different because of it. It is open to our daring how far we extend this principle to all of nature. There certainly does not seem to be any one obvious point after which it could be argued to no longer apply. Taken to its full extreme it would mean that we understand self-reflective consciousness, language, clock time, and the atom-bomb, for example, as part of nature, and every aspect of our present world as different from what this world was before their evolution and invention. Such an understanding, it seems to me, is in the spirit of Mead's approach in 'The Philosophy of the Present' where he presents his alternative to scientific positivism and Cartesian dualism. It appears closely related to Mead's conceptualisation of the past, present, and future, of temporality, and of his principle of sociality. To show the links and make this connection more visible it will be helpful to outline Mead's position once more but this time with a special focus on the issue under discussion, namely, that the novel is never a mere addition but changes the whole.

Mead creates a sense of levels, but his levels appear fluid without clear edges or cut-off points. His principle of sociality, as the 'capacity of being several things at once' (1959: 49), and as the process of adjustment that occurs at the conjunction and interpenetration of old and new, is also understood as both the source and essence of consciousness. Mead sees the genesis of an organism's ability to be in different perspectives and times at once in the capacity of interpenetration. A sense of level emerges when Mead conceptualises this consciousness in its 'lowest' form as a kind of plant and animal 'feeling' in conjunction with purposive action, and in its 'highest' form as human ideation (1959: 140-75). We can see here how Mead understands consciousness as a continuum grounded in emergence and the principle of sociality, displaying different charactersistics in plants, animals, and humans. In similar fashion he conceptualises a progression of meaning from the physical world of signals via an ever-widening gap which, in turn, allows for interpretation and translation between those signals, right 'up' to the human world of symbols. To Mead everything has its own organism-, species-, and levelspecific time framework. Humans are not exempt from this and, on the basis of this understanding, he allows for no overarching universal time standard since beings can only know from within their perspective. The fact that a world-wide community has created a particular abstracted time and uses it as a universal measure and absolute framework for dating, he suggests, does not make it any less part of the perspective of that community. Mead clearly argues for an environment-, level-, and perspective-specific time for all beings and the fluidity of his 'levels' can therefore only be appreciated in conjunction with his writings on the ontological status of the past, present, and future (1959: 1-67). To Mead the past is irrevocable to the extent that events cannot be undone, thoughts not unthought, and knowledge not unknown. In this irreversible form, he contends, the past is unknowable since the intervening knowledge continuously changes the meaning of that past and relentlessly recreates and reformulates it into a new and different past. He argues this on the basis of the proposition that only emergence in the present has reality status. He does not accord the past and future such a status because they are real only with respect to their relation to the present. In Mead's thought the past changes with respect to our experiencing it in the present and the meaning we give to it. In contradistinction to the past, he conceptualises the reality of the present as changing with each emergence. When Mead (1959: 65) writes that 'emergent life changes the character of the world just as emergent velocities change the character of masses', his analysis is consistent with contemporary approaches in physics and biology and with the findings of this exploration: it recognises that each emergence irreversibly affects everything else. At this point, however, we encounter in Mead's work the same unresolved limitations I described above with reference to the conceptualisation of hierarchically nested time levels. The difficulty occurs when we seek to bring together Mead's idea of irreducible, unidirectional, inclusive levels with his theory of sociality and his proposals that the emergent does not merely change the meaning of all past and future, but all of present reality and its possible futures.

Bearing in mind the conceptual difficulties and limitations of the level approach, we can see that an understanding through levels achieves a number of things. It emphasises the complexity of time and imposes order on the multiple expressions. It prevents us from focusing on one or two aspects of time at the expense of others. In addition to the more obviously social components, it establishes the centrality of the physical, living, technological, and artefactual aspects of social time. It stresses and affirms connections and relationships. It brings to the surface both the continuities and the irreducible aspects of social time. It helps us to avoid confusing the time aspects of our social life with those of nature and

machines. It enables us to see the connection between transcendence and the human creations, between the creation of time and its control, and between the reification of clock time and relations of power. In the absence of more appropriate theoretical frameworks the level approach appears a useful conceptual tool and preferable to an understanding based on stages of succession and mutually exclusive or inclusive dualities.

Simultaneity and extended time-spans

We now need to extend the level-based understanding of social time by incorporating an awareness of the simultaneity of multiple time-spans. This research shows that theoretically relevant rhythms span the spectrum from neural to cosmic ones, from the imperceptibly fast to the unimaginably slow. These time-spans seem to be paralleled by a division of labour in the sciences with quantum physics at one end of the scale, astronomy at the other, and the social sciences and history occupying the middle ground. Each discipline thus seems not only to have its own bounded sphere of competence but a concomitant subject-specific timescale. In contradistinction to the status quo, this exploration demonstrates that the discipline specific boundaries to the human time-scale are major limiting factors to our understanding since the entire range of rhythms have a bearing on human social time. It impresses on us the need to extend the time-scale not only to the micro and macro dimensions, but also to both the past and the future. It suggests further that the multiple time-spans have to be conceptualised simultaneously.

Giddens's work moves us closer towards this goal, even though his time-scale of analysis does not transgress the middle range of traditional social science. It presents a strong case for the need to recognise that durée, Dasein, and longue durée, his three planes of temporality, bear on any one moment of structuration simultaneously. The social science focus on any one, Giddens (1981: 19-20) argues, must therefore always imply the others. To him these time planes of daily life, life-time and history are bound by the structural practices of social systems and this may well be one of his reasons for remaining firmly located in the middle-range time-scale of the social science tradition. But could we not regard science and technology as social structural practices? If this were considered reasonable, then even by Giddens's own criteria the time-span of social science analyses would need to be enlarged to an evolutionary scale. Such an extension would not conflict with his antipathy towards evolutionary approaches in social science since he is objecting to the inherent

determinism and not the magnitude of the time-scale. Giddens's (1981: 21-3, 1984; 228-44) arguments against evolutionism provide no grounds against either a conceptualisation of the influence of our evolved biological being on present social existence or an extension of our timescale of understanding. Thus, when I stress the importance of extending the time-scale in order to include evolutionary considerations and beyond, it is not the apparent determinist mechanisms of change I want to stress as important but those silent, sedimented aspects of our sociobiological being that have come to be taken for granted. I am suggesting that the time of our body is not exhausted by our finitude but carries within it our entire evolutionary history. To accept the importance of our evolutionary past for the present is no different in principle from accepting that our history forms an ineradicable part of our social being. This study shows the significance of the evolutionary aspects of social life and questions the validity of their systematic exclusion from social analyses. Contemporary thinkers from a wide range of fields arrived at an understanding that recognises the implication of our past in the present; in other words, that our personal and social history forms an ineradicable part of us. I can find no good reason why we should exlude our biological and cosmic past from the acceptance of this general principle. In death experiences, as we have seen, these connections are revealed and the established boundaries of scientific understanding challenged.

There is yet another reason for extending the traditional time-scale of social science. If biologists recognise that their time-scale of understanding needs to be vastly extended so that they may conceptualise whole networks of feedback loops and symphonies of rhythms, then time-scales of an even greater magnitude ought to be encompassed by the science that seeks to understand a species that has created artefacts that outlast it for thousands of years. We need theories that are adequate to our scientific, technological world with its vast past and future extension. When global telecommunication, nuclear technology, and space travel form an integral part of reality, we can no longer act, research, think, and theorise as if we were still part of a pre-industrial world or the prenuclear reality of the founding fathers of our discipline. This is not merely a restatement of the moral point presented earlier where I argued that the time-scale of concern and responsibility ought to be equal to the life-time of our creations and their effects but an argument about social science analyses. I am proposing that we need to take on board the timescales of our technologies if our theories are to become adequate to their subject matter: contemporary industrialised, science-based technological society. Giddens's concept of time-space distanciation might prove useful here despite its association with the storage capacity of information

which makes the present application of the concept primarily past, rather than past and future orientated. There seems to be no reason why the concept of time-space distanciation, with its link to power, could not be exploited to theorise influences on the long-term future. Such an extension would allow us to understand the present as present past and present future, where each change affects the whole.

To emphasise time-space distantiation, the past and future extension and its constitution in the present is, however, not enough. We also need to engage with the natural scientists' understanding of physical reality and grasp the principles entailed in contemporary technologies in order that our creations may cease to control our destinies. Computers and nuclear power are technologies that operate in time-frames outside the capacity of our conscious experience. Nanoseconds, life-times of particles and the life-time of radioactivity can be calculated mathematically but they cannot be known experientially. Yet these technologies are used on a national and global basis. They actually and potentially affect humanity as a whole but our conventional conceptual tools are not adequate to the task of understanding their implication. As Rifkin (1987: 15) correctly points out, 'when many of the decision-making activities of society take place below the threshold of human consciousness, social time, as measured by the clock, becomes irrelevant.' To grasp the mathematical abstraction which affects our lives so deeply requires different theories. It demands post-Newtonian and Cartesian frameworks of meaning. It entails that we begin to understand the principles that underpin our theories and that we recognise the relativity of our frameworks of observation. It necessitates that we shed our reifying tendencies, that we learn to look at the structures of our own thinking and to treat them like empirical data. Furthermore, our contemporary technological, science-based world requires theories that unify and relate what has been separated for over three hundred years. A brief return to the division of cyclical and linear time will help to illustrate the point.

It is a central tenet of this treatise that cycles and lines are artefacts of observation and that their separation into independent entities is intimately tied to Newtonian scientific understanding. Oscillations, rhythmicity, and cycles of recurrence have been shown not to exist in isolation but as unidirectional outcomes of the divisions of cells, combinations of molecules, chemical interactions, social transactions, and relationships of incomplete interdependence between beings, their environments, and other beings. Even the most repetitive action entails asymmetry and direction both within it and in the relation to its environment. Washing-up, the ultimate monotonous activity, serves as a good example. As a directional activity it has a beginning and an end. Its

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hot water cools. Dirty dishes get clean and the water dirty. The repetition of movements cleans different articles and, although the sequence of the action may always be repeated in the same order - glasses, cutlery, plates, pots - the action in its repetition can never be the same. Everything involved in it has irrevocably changed in the intervening period. Whether we understand such an activity as primarily linear or cyclical does not depend merely on the aspect that has been isolated for observation, but also on the time distance from which the observation takes place. The action could be viewed as linear whilst the act may be considered as cyclical. Observation of the activity over a period might reveal it as cyclical whilst a historical perspective is likely to show up its directional linear changes. Whether we are dealing with habits, routine actions or rituals and myths, reality is constituted as stability through change through their performance. We therefore need to recognise the separation of linearity and cyclicality as relative to the focus and the framework of observation and not locate it with Leach (1968: 125) in logically distinct experiences. Curvature, folding back upon itself, completing cycles but never returning to exactly the same starting point, these are principles of nature; and absolute perfection, the closing of the circle rather than the continuity of cycles, the human endeavour; whilst the separation of cycles from lines, repetition from transformation, history from evolution, and nature from society is an expression of classical science and post-Enlightenment thinking. Only when the distinction between natural cycles, the perfected circles, and the conceptual separation of repetition and change have been made explicit, however, is it possible to relate natural time to social time; chronology, calendar, and clock time to both the rhythms of nature and relations of power; the resource to the experience; and the commodity to the measure. This way of understanding is also necessary before Giddens's (1979: 31) statement that 'life passes in transformation' becomes compatible with his preoccupation with routine; and before we can establish a relation between his (1981: 51) insistence that 'the transformative capacity of human action lies at the heart of power', and his (1981: 134) argument that the 'clock is the very expression of commodified time'. None of these statements, however, can be related in a meaningful way to the idea of 'reversible time'.

1983: 37-41). Thus, it can be argued that only in conjunction with the recognition of its *idealised* basis in Newtonian physics, and the consequent conceptualisations of reality in terms of it, does 'reversible time' become a meaningful theoretical tool. If physicists have calculated that it takes that long for just one cubic centimetre of air to repeat itself in the same composition, then the idea of repetition of the same should most certainly be considered meaningless for a human social activity or event. This applies even more so to 'reversible time'. There can be no un-living, un-knowing, un-thinking or un-doing. We cannot grow younger, and it is quite clearly impossible to separate a cooked apple pie back into its ingredients of whole apples, sugar, water, butter, and flour. When physicists regard the mere repetition of the same virtually impossible within the existence of our earth, then surely it is safe for social theorists to discard the concept of 'reversible time' as inapproriate for the explanation of the social world.

At the end of this study, time is still a fact of life but it has emerged as a multi-layered, complex fact of life; multiple in its forms and levels of expressions. As time, timing, tempo, and temporality we can recognise some of the complexities of that which is ultimately indivisible. As measure, sense, boundary, resource, and commodity we may know some of the functions which time fulfils in our lives. Through entropy, ageing, and growth we may grasp time as irreversible and directional. Through its rhythmicity life becomes predictable. Thus, the focus on time helps us to see the invisible. It makes our seeing and understanding transparent and shows that the physical reality of our creations underpins our theories. It reveals that technology and artefacts not only shape our lives but our knowledge; that the dead things which are so conscientiously excluded from social analyses are not only implicated in our daily existence but constitute our social theories. They therefore need to be moved to the centre stage of social theory. We need to allow the implications of contemporary living to penetrate the depth of our understanding, to connect the complexity of our being to the meanings we impose on it, and to recognise our existing social theories as relics of a bygone age. The focus on time helps us to identify points of departure. As such it is no longer a luxury; it has become both a necessity and our destiny.

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