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The Blob.

Many social and cultural anthropologists hold a belief that they usually do not dare express in public lest it should be known that they are as arrogant as they really are. It is that, before anyone attempts any of the other social sciences; they should first take a degree in anthropology. The reason is that these other subordinate social sciences suffer from the delusion that they study what people are like; human nature, in other words. Anthropologists, on the other hand, believe they know there exist no such thing as people as such, only products of particular societies or cultures situated in particular places and at particular times (Geertz 1973:53).

This position, in its strong form, is silly but what is worst it leaves anthropology in an epistemological no-man's land. If it is not representatives of the natural species *homo sapiens* that anthropologists are talking about, what, on earth are they dealing with? Not surprisingly this has the effect that other scientists have simply ignored this kind of anthropological theory. However, I have sympathy with the motivation behind the outrageous position that has led some of my colleagues to make such claims. I know what is meant and I believe the proposition is based on important empirical and ethnographic considerations which all those who want to understand our species need to take into account.

In this lecture I try to rescue the facts and theories that have led anthropologists to make such melodramatic propositions by building a model where these can be integrated within a naturalist framework so that our work as anthropologists can be taken seriously and integrated with that from other disciplines. (Quine 1969).

The kind of grand anthropological claims I am referring to occur when such words as self, the I, agent, subject, person,

individual, individuals, identity, etc. are used. These terms all involve the attempt to describe what it is to be oneself and what is assumed to be the way others are understood to be, in this or that place. Indeed, we may already note here, that, the problematic distinction between self understanding and the representation of others is usually unexamined in most of the social science literature.

The lumping together of these different terms may well seem to be inappropriate, even sloppy, since many authors take great pain in distinguishing these words and offering extremely precise definitions. The problem, however comes, when we try to put together this massive literature, when, for example, we try to relate, Geertz's discussion of the Balinese "person" (1973), with Dumont's "individual" (1983), Mauss's "moi" (1938) and Rosaldo's "self (1984)¹. When I attempt such combination I have to admit that I am completely lost and so, you will have to excuse me if I refer to this entire indistinct galaxy, some part of which, or all of which, these terms seem to refer to, simply as the BLOB. This seems particularly justified since, in spite of this multiplicity of would-be distinct labels used by anthropologists, much the same claims have been made, whatever word is used.

Foremost among these claims is that the blob is fundamentally culturally and/or historically variable. This is what anthropologists mean when they say that there is no such thing as human nature, a proposition which poses the general epistemological problem I began with. If this is so, of course, the blob is totally variable, moulded by history and culture, then it is nothing at all, just an arbitrary category of our culture, one that groups under various ethnocentric labels things that have nothing *essentially* to do with each other. If so, the blob, under whatever labels it masquerades, cannot be a suitable subject for theoretical study.

¹ André Beteille expresses the same frustration. (Beteille 1991:251) }.

This problem, however, seems not to be taken very seriously by anthropologists in spite of their general predilection for radical cultural determinism. When they actually get down to specifics we usually find much less ambitious propositions. Thus, in the general arguments, it is not usually proposed that there as many blobs as there are cultural variations but rather that there are two kinds of blobs in the world. Sometimes this point is expressed generally as a contrast between the modern or western blob and the blob of the rest of mankind. This is, for example, what Durkheim argued in The Division of Labour in Society(1893) with his distinction between organic and mechanical solidarity.

Similarly Dumont (1982) stresses the same familiar dualist contrast of the individualism of the post reformation West, with the holism of the hierarchical rest. The same dichotomy is also found in the work of ethnographers or historians who, although they talk about particular places, argue that there, or then, the self the person, the subject, or what have you, is different from what we, the modern west, have here and/or now. Thus Wood (2008) argues that the very notion of self was absent in biblical times, Snell in the Iliad (1953), Marilyn Strathern argues that the New Guinea person is quite different to the Western one (1988), Kondo argues this for the Japanese self, McKim Marriot for India (1977), Geertz for Bali (1973), etc. The west seems simply used as the contrast to the specific situations discussed, but, in fact, it turns out that these very varied non-western non-modern places are very similar among themselves, places where interiority and individuality is devalued but where social relationships and group membership dominate. More recently a further twist has been added with some writers arguing that in post-modernity we have now arrived at a post-blob, post-modern, stage (Ewing 1990, Markus and Kitiyama 1991). This addition might be thought to lead to a tripartite division with pre blob, blob and post blob but in fact the proposed pre-modern blob and the post-modern blob look singularly alike in that they are both non-essentialist, distributed,

contextual and divided. Anthropological arguments about the blob can therefore be summarised as saying there is a great and absolute divide between the individualist west and the social relational rest.

The basis for such repeated exhortation, that we should not assume that what *we* know as the blob is applicable everywhere is real enough. It is a common experience of ethnographers who work in very different societies and cultural milieus, such as me to go no further, to be struck, and indeed even sometimes shocked, by how little value is given to individual motivations and how roles and group membership are the main, and often the only expressed, criteria of right conduct. This is also reflected in certain non modern, non western legal codes such as those on which Mauss based himself in his discussion of the concept of the person, or in the implications of rituals, such as those discussed by Marilyn Strathern which she uses as the basis of her analysis of the Melanesian individuals (Strathern: 1988). Such data does seem to produce a view of people as merely points in social systems while their internal states, their intentions, their absolute individuality and personal desires are irrelevant. This dichotomous contrast between the west and these “other” societies is often exaggerated (Beteille:1991, Leenhardt 1985 Parry 1989). However, there are very real and important differences between cultures which are worth discussing. Thus, it is not my intention to minimise the significance of the cultural argued for in the works I have been implicitly or explicitly referring to, but instead to ask whether the facts that have been noted have the fundamental implications for the “construction” of the blob that so many social scientists give it? I shall argue they do not but then, by integrating the work of anthropologists with that of other scientists, I shall place the anthropological ideas within a model that is not antagonistic, but compatible, with what other sciences can teach us

Two writers have already called into question the excesses of the relativist position in relation to the blob when it goes under the name of “self”. Melford Spiro in a devastating critique of authors such as McKim Marriott, Geertz and others demonstrates how the evidence used for such dramatic generalisations is selective (1993). As an example, he notes that reference to the devaluation of the self in Theravada Buddhism is not, as has been suggested, evidence of the absence of the notion in a country such as Burma, but rather, of its presence. In a somewhat similar vein Naomi Quinn (2006) criticizes recent post-modern writing in anthropology that suggests that the idea of the integrated self is outdated and/or wrong on the weak and trivial basis of the uncontroversial fact that people can hold contradictory ideals. Her point is that explicit reflexive self representation cannot be equated with the blob as it is lived and, putting the words in her mouth that I will use below, that we must distinguish cognition and meta-representation, that is public re-representations about cognition (Sperber 2000). (I am, however, much more hesitant than she is, given our present state of knowledge, in identifying various aspects of selfhood directly with different types of functional or anatomical areas of the brain.)

Spiro and Quinn make two convincing and important criticisms of the work of anthropologists: firstly, they are right that anthropological writing about the blob is often spectacularly imprecise and, secondly, it is true that claims made in this area are commonly of very uncertain epistemological status. I also entirely agree with Quinn’s implicit argument that the attempt at naturalising what is being talked about would help clear the fog.

The implication of the critiques by Spiro and Quinn is that anthropologists are wrong when they make the absolutist claim that the blob is simply a product of history and is totally culturally variable. Neither author, however, claim that culture and society do not have an influence, but the question how, and

how far this is so, cannot be advanced until the epistemological status of what is claimed is clarified. Thus, as both Spiro and Quinn recognise, it is not that anthropologists are talking about nothing in their discussions of self, person, agent, personality, identity, but that what it is they are talking about cannot be pinned down.

As Spiro and Quinn have done a good job in criticising much anthropological writing, this clears the way for a more positive attempt at replacing the anthropology within the wider theory they implicitly call for. What follows is the attempt to do this.

One major problem in social science writing is the lack of any serious attempt to distinguish levels in the phenomena to which the blob words seem to refer. It is true that some anthropological writers do make a weak attempt at distinguishing levels but these are soon forgotten. Thus Mauss begins his essay on the self and/or the person in the following way: “I [shall not] speak to you of psychology...it is plain...that there has never existed a human being who has not been aware, not only of his body, but also, at the same time of his individuality, both spiritual and physical, ...My subject is entirely different...the notion that men in different ages have formed of [the self].” (Mauss 1985: 3). Yet the essay continues as a discussion of his “first subject”. Similarly though the other way round, Antze and Lambek state in a book about culture and memory that autobiographical memory “and the “self” or “subject” mutually imply one another.” P.xxi. but we then find that they slide away from a discussion of the central issue by telling us that “our book is less about memory than about “memory”.....That is to say it is about how the very idea of memory” comes into play in society and culture...” p.xv (Antze and Lambek: 1996). This is presumably local ethno-psychological theories about whose value they do not commit

themselves. Mauss says that he will not talk of psychology but does, while Antze and Lambek declare they will but don't.

Distinguishing levels of the blob is very difficult but essential if we are to understand the relation of the blob to culture. Few things have more hindered dialogue between social and cognitive sciences than proper consideration of what level we are dealing with and of the significance of the relation between these levels.

What follows is, therefore, a rough attempt at distinguishing levels because it is a necessary preliminary for understanding how social science, and especially anthropological, discussions concerning the blob can be integrated with what we know from other disciplines. Interestingly, distinguishing levels also produces a kind of natural history of our species in that what I call: the lower levels are characterised by features that we may assume are inherited from our very remote pre-mammalian ancestors since these are shared with other distant living species, while others, here qualified as higher, are unique specialisations of our species. The integration of anthropological considerations within the wider framework outlined here thus also suggests a facilitation of the integration of social science work within evolutionary theory (Seeley and Sturm 2006 p. 321ff.)

This preliminary attempt at distinguishing levels is based on the work of a number of scholars in cognitive science who tend to use one of the names of the blob: the self. Relying on these authors is, however, a tricky enterprise since they are not all in agreement either. Fortunately, for the simple purposes of the present exercise, it is possible to by-pass the disagreements by concentrating on what most are agreed on. What is crucial is that there indeed *are* very different levels to the blob with the deepest levels shared by all living things and the highest levels creating the possibility of a narrative reflexive autobiography. It is essential, however to remember that all the levels one might choose to distinguish are simply points in what is a continuum,

which means that they are all related to each other even though some may be more directly culturally affected while others are not. All those involved in the discussions are agreed that somewhere in that progression language and reflexivity, meta-cognition or meta-representation, comes into play (e.g. Neisser 1988, Damasio 1999).

The list of levels noted below “will do” for the purpose at hand and will not probably cause relevant problems for my argument although the issues are greatly simplified and the terms used very loosely.

First of all we can distinguish a level that has often been labelled the “core self” **(Slide 1)**. Some aspects of this are very general indeed. These involve two things 1) a sense of ownership and location of one’s body, 2) a sense that one is author of one’s own actions (David *et al.* 2008, Voegeley et al 2003). This type of selfhood must be shared by all animate creatures since, as Dennett puts it, even a lobster who relishes claws, must know not to eat his own (Dennett 1991:429). (I suspect that even the most dedicated cultural relativist is unlikely to argue that this level varies from one human group to another.) It should be noted that the word “sense”, as I have applied it to this level, is used here in a particularly thin way, implying no reflexive awareness whatsoever. However it must also be stressed that, even at this level, we are dealing with quite complex cognition as Descartes discussion of phantom limbs long ago emphasised, and also as is shown experimentally by more recent experiments, such as those with the rubber hand where a subject can be made to feel sensations in a model arm (Botvinick and Cohen: 1998).

Above this level is one often labelled the “minimal self”. **(Slide 2)** This involves the sense of continuity in time. Many animals from crows to chimpanzees have this sense of their own continuity and that they, like us, attribute a similar continuity in time to their con-specifics (Hauser et al. 1995). This sense of

continuity in time is essential for the use of any type of longer term memory and seems essential for more advanced cognition such as the ability of self recognition, demonstrated, for example, in recognising one self in a mirror. Animals such as chimpanzees and gorillas can do this. Interestingly this sense of continuity of oneself and others is particularly developed in social species. (Emery and Clayton 2004). Here again, when we are dealing with this level, the word sense is used in a thin way. It does, however, imply the ability to “time travel” that is to use information about the past for present behaviour which involves being in the past in imagination, and the ability to plan future behaviour which requires being in the future in imagination. Nonetheless, it implies no reflexive awareness of the mental state that one is in. It involves the short term memory necessary to organise episodes, usually referred to as episodic memory (Conway 2001) and it involves the retention of some such episodic memories without these being woven into a coherent story, at least one which is recoverable in consciousness.

Conscious access requires a higher stage which I call here, following a number of authors, “the narrative self” (Dennett 1992, Humphrey and Dennett 1989) **(Slide 3)**. In some earlier writing autobiographical memory was practically synonymous with the self but this is clearly misleading if we remember levels such as those indicated by the terms “core self” and “minimal self” and so the term “narrative self” was created to both maintain and limit the scope of the link. The narrative self and autobiographical memory imply each other (Tulving 1985). All humans create, at least after the age of three or four, such an autobiography though it remains an open question whether this is also done by other animals (Gallup 1970). The narrative self significantly involves reflexive interaction with others so that the self can become, in Mead’s words “an object to one’s self in virtue of one’s social relation to other individuals” (Mead 1962:172 cited in Zahavi ND).

Before we go further I want to stress a point to which I shall return and which will become central for my argument. The distinction between levels proposed here is not discontinuous and these are not fully separable. We are dealing with a continuum **(SLIDE 4)**.

A difficult questions about autobiographical memory and the narrative self revolve around the questions whether it need be conscious, how far it requires language, and how far it can be equated with the stories that people *actually* tell about themselves (Nelson 2003) (Bloch 1998).

Some authors, such as Dennett and Ricoeur (1985), have argued that this level necessarily implies consciousness, language and the ability to tell stories about oneself, in other words explicitly expressed autobiographical memory. The difficulty with the notion of the “narrative self” comes precisely from this lumping together of different elements. Does the autobiography of autobiographical memory need be conscious or merely consciously accessible? Do autobiographical memory and the “narrative self” require language and, if not, is there not a non-linguistic narrative self, to be distinguished from a linguistic level? How far are we dealing with cognition or meta-cognition, with representations or meta-representations? In other words is having an autobiography the same thing as being aware that one has an autobiography? Is talking about one’s autobiographical past the same as having and using such an autobiographical memory? A capacity, which, it is most likely, we share with non-linguistic anthropoids.

These difficulties have been highlighted by the philosopher Galen Strawson in his discussion of the notion of the “narrative self” (Strawson 2005). He argues that within his own culture (English culture since like most philosophers it is the only one he considers) there are some people who are into creating conscious autobiographical narratives about themselves, these he calls “diachronics” and others, like himself, who are just not

interested in doing this. It is not their rhetorical style. He calls these latter people, somewhat unfortunately, “episodics”.

Strawson convinces me that one should indeed separate those with who merely manifest an “episodic self”, which does not involve a conscious and explicit expression of the kind of autobiography that one would talk about in natural circumstances, from those who manifest a “diachronic” self who have a strong sense of having a narrative autobiographical self or an “I that is a mental presence now, was there in the past, and will be there in the future” and who, most likely, go on about it (Strawson 1999:109).

Strawson talks of two different types of people but this is so at the phenomenological level only. However, I would argue that, in terms of the constitution of the blob, both lots, in spite of different outward behaviour, have a narrative self. Only some people, Strawson’s diachronics, have an extra. They engage in a particular form of activity which involves creating a meta-representational diachronic narrative self by talking about their feelings, their inner states and their autobiography.

If that is so Strawson is suggesting an answer to the questions which I argued are muddled together. The stories that some people tell about themselves or about the nature of selves in their cultures are a quite different matter to whether they have a narrative self or no. Everybody has a narrative self. Some people go in for meta-representing this. **(Slide 5)** Others do not or do so much less so, because, as Zahavi puts it “we should not make the mistake of confusing the reflective, narrative grasp of a life with the pre-reflective experiences that make up that life prior to the experiences being organised into a narrative” (Zahavi ND). It follows from the sharp distinction I make between meta-representational activity and the narrative self that the latter does not require language.

The difference between Strawson's two types of people is thus much less fundamental than the differences in levels that I have been discussing so far. Indeed the fact that diachronics go in for meta-representations of themselves may be considered as a quite different matter than the constitution of the blob. Explicit manifestations are public acts and as such are determined by the social and cultural context in which they occur. Thus, at the level of discourse, Strawson's diachronics and episodics will appear very different in that they will sometimes talk about different things and possibly sometimes act in different ways but this does not mean that they belong to *quasi* different species, in fact the difference is little more than one of rhetorical style.

And this is where I return to anthropology. At the beginning of this lecture I recounted how many anthropologists seem to argue that there are two different kinds of people in the world. What I believe they were talking about was something much less fundamental. They are distinguishing between the people who Strawson call diachronics and those he calls episodics. This is a difference which I rephrased as between these people who have got into the habit of talking about their inner states and those who don't. This is an interesting difference but it does not mean that mankind is divided into two *quasi* species as is implied in the works I criticise. A surface difference is taken as a difference in substance. What such a mistake leads to is well illustrated by Unni Wikan in her criticism of Geertz depiction of the Balinese self (Wikan: 1990).

In those societies where, for historical/cultural reasons, it is acceptable, even encouraged, to talk about internal states of mind, individual motivations and autobiography there are many diachronics and these will often take centre stage. It should be noted however that, as they do this, they are not exposing their selves, their individuality, their personhood, their agency, to the harsh light of day. They are doing something quite different,

they are telling stories about themselves to others, which should not be mistaken for the complex business of being oneself among others. What they are doing when they are being diachronics, and this is the implicit point of Quinn's criticism of post modernists, is *interpreting* those few aspects of their blob that are easily available to their consciousness, and then re-representing them as best they can, in other words meta-representing them. This makes clear the error of the direct "representational" reading that anthropologists have made of such meta-representational activity, which has led them to consider discourse about the self and others to *be* what it is a representation *of*.

In societies where, in most contexts, such meta-representational talk about one's internal states and motivations is thought inappropriate or even immoral, discourse will obviously not normally be psychologically oriented but will be much more about the rules of behaviour that should be followed in groups, roles, rights and duties and exchange systems. This is my experience among the more remote Malagasy groups I have studied.² It does not seem to me that such emphasis means we find there an alternative self, different from the self of the west where the rhetorical emphasis is on individuality and interiority. It is simply that anthropologists, missing their familiar meta-discourse about the blob, when they are in societies where the glorifying of diachronics does not take place, therefore concentrate on the discourse about relations and morality, which, in any case, is found in all societies. The anthropologists, quite misleadingly, make this into a compatible, if alternative, blob, a kind of substitute concept of the person, or the individual, or the self or the agent, while in fact it is nothing of the sort. There is thus no basis for a contrast between two types of blob.

² Though it is important to note also that such talk about internal states can easily be generated as it can in England, thus showing that it exists in some contexts. This I have described in a number of recent publications (Bloch 2005).

This is all the more so as, most likely, we are dealing with a statistical difference not a categorical one. If the people of modern Britain are, as Strawson argues, divided between phenomenological diachronics and episodics it is likely that the relative proportions are affected by the culture of Britain not merely by individual dispositions. If that is the case, it is also likely that in other cultures, these proportions will be different. In my experience talk about internal states and individual motivations *does* occur in Malagasy villages, although rarely. The individualist, self reflexive blob cultures of the west, are merely those where a lot of people go in a lot for diachronic narratives while the “others” are ones where people are rarely tempted to go in for meta-representation of their internal feelings³.

3

This is particularly important in making us realise the fundamental difference in the ways we know others and ourselves. We only have empirical access to the blob of others through their explicit discourse and outward behaviour. Although we may, consciously or unconsciously guess at what might lie below, for most practical purposes we don't need to go beyond outward manifestations for interaction and these are of a different character to being myself and, anyway, greatly simplified. On the other hand, although we may also imagine ourselves as seen through the eyes of others, this will only be a minor part of our blob, most levels of which, as I have argued are below the level of consciousness.

This difference between knowledge of ourselves and others is important not just theoretically but also methodologically as it is relevant to the way we can use the work of anthropologists in the general enterprise in which I am engaged. Anthropologists inevitably can only study others. They are thus tempted to use the representations we use when dealing with others as though they were simply the “person” in this or that place.

I have used Strawson's distinction between episodics and diachronics to show that anthropology's two kinds of people are nothing of the sort. Much of what anthropologists have been talking about is about meta-representations and not therefore directly relevant to the constitution of the blob. Now that we have got away from meta-representation we find with relief that human beings exist after all!

However, an unfortunate conclusion could be drawn from the above. It might appear at this point that what I have argued is that meta-representations of the blob are cultural and that the blob itself is natural. This might be a modification to their theory that some culturalists or anti-culturalists might not have too much difficulty in accepting. They could then say: let the different disciplines get on with their own thing, the anthropologist talk about meta-representations and the cognitive scientists talk about the fundamental blob. This would be totally misleading.

Anthropologists' unintentional focus on meta-representations has simply meant that they have avoided considering what they thought was their central purpose: the study of the social, cultural and historical character of the blob. That job remains to be done or, rather, begun. This I attempt to approach schematically in the last part of this lecture.

First of all it is important to remember the most significant fact that the levels of the blob I have distinguished so far are merely heuristic indications of points in what is a continuum from the

core self to the narrative self (Squire:1992)⁴. **(Slide 4)** None of the levels are separate and all interact. Thus the narrative self is continuous with the primate wide requirements of the minimal self and the minimal self is continuous with the living kind wide requirements of the core self. Similarly the narrative self will be continuous with the minimal self which will itself will be affected by the core self. We are psychologically and physically one.

But there is also another aspect to the continuum of the blob. As soon as we are moving to the higher levels we are also moving from the internal and private level of such factors as the awareness of ownership of one's body and its location; towards the public, and therefore inevitably social, expressions of the narrative self.

This gradual move from the private to the public and above all its internal continuity is particularly important if we are to understand how the cultural/historical affects the blob. We might be tempted to assume that the private is untouched by the cultural while the public, caught up in social discourse, is entirely cultural. This would be misleading because it would forget the *continuity* of the blob through its various levels. The blob is a process. It is not a matter of a binary contrast but one of more or less. In other words, like icebergs the blob is 90% submerged but the exposed part has no real independent existence without the submerged part and vice versa.

But to the internal continuity of the blob must be added another continuity: that between blobs. This I have not considered so far.

It is by means of the continual exchange between individuals that the cultural and, therefore, the historical character of the blob comes about. This has been so well discussed recently that

⁴ Squire shows that the old distinction between declarative and non declarative memory is not neurologically based. }

I therefore take as read (Sperber 1985 Dawkins 1976 Dennett 1995 Tomassello 1999).

Thus the analogy with icebergs can also mislead because, unlike icebergs, the exposed parts of the different blobs are not fully distinct one from another. They are organically united with each other. We are a social species and, as is the case for other social species, the fully isolated Cartesian individual cannot be anything than a doubtful thought experiment. It is through this continual complex social exchange between individuals, which characterises our species, that history/culture becomes part of the process that is the blob. This is so because this interchange, in the case of humans, is part of a process which involves not only the interaction of presently living public parts of blobs but also the indirect inter-creation of the public parts of living blobs with the once public parts of dead blobs, in some cases public parts of blobs dead long ago.

The blob is not just *situated* in this process it is itself moulded and modified by it to a significant degree. That the social and cultural character to a certain extent creates the blob has been stressed again and again in both the social science and the cognitive science literature, as it was in the remarks from Mead I quoted above. The social and communicative aspect of humans has meant that the boundary of the individual organism in a species such as our own is blurred in that we go in and out of each others bodies, not only because of the physiological processes of birth and sex but also through the neuro-psychological processes of the synchronisation of minds that occurs in social exchange. (Humphrey (2007; Bloch 2007).

(Slide 6)

This process of inter-creation and historical creation is of course what social scientists and especially social and cultural anthropologists have been traditionally emphasising. It is essential to any theory of the blob. The exposed parts of different blobs are to a varying extent continuous with each

other and this is not just at the narrative self levels but also for some aspects of lower levels evoked by the term the minimal self, since simpler but essential forms of joint action and therefore interchange also exist. The merging of public parts of blobs is never complete since differentiation of one's blob from that of others is as necessary for the social process as is the interpenetration of different blobs.

However, it is striking that those authors, whether social or cognitive scientists who have discussed this interpenetration through exchange, when they are focussing on the topic, seem to forget the simultaneously relevant internal multi level character of the blob.

This leads me to my very simple conclusion about the blob. The blob is simultaneously caught up in two quite different continuities both of which link at either of their poles what are essentially alien elements. One continuum links up, and to a certain extent merges, different but nonetheless distinct blobs, different people linked by social ties, in other words. The other continuum links the totally sub conscious core with the potentially re-represented narrative level. As is the case of the social link, elements that are essentially different are partially united into a not fully integrated, or integratable, whole.

Thinking of either of these continuities is bad enough but we have to think of them together! If we do not, the difficult phenomenon we have to try to understand drains away with the bath water and we are left with concepts that cannot be related to anything in nature. The error of those psychologists, that such social scientists as Durkheim criticised, is that they forgot the continuous social historical continuum and thus make the mistakes that most first year anthropology students have explained to them again and again (without it being mentioned that the targets of their strictures have for the most part long disappeared from the scene). The error of the anthropologists I

have criticised is that they forget the simultaneous internal continuum.

In some ways the model that I have been building up during the course of this lecture can be seen as a reconciliation of the kind of ideas that have characterised anthropological writing on the blob with that which has been produced by cognitive science. This is so in so far as I have attempted to make room for the kinds of observations that have come from both sides within a unified system.

Talking of reconciliation might be suitable for a valedictory lecture but it also obscures the fundamental criticism of my own discipline that I have been making. Let me state it brutally. Social scientists, for all sorts of reasons, have believed, even glorified, in ignoring the biological, neurological and psychological aspects in their models. On the whole, they have only looked at meta-representations of the blob and, occasionally, at the narrative level. They then have either pretended that these levels *were* the blob or they have argued that these levels were clearly distinct from other levels, thereby implicitly importing the kind of nature/culture dichotomy that, in another register, they denounce.

Such solutions are just ways of avoiding the central difficulty of thinking about our species, a difficulty which makes anthropology so difficult and so exiting. Anthropological representations of the human blob have to be compatible with the multiplicity of empirically inseparable processes within which we exists. All living things are caught in two processes phylogeny and ontogeny⁵. When we are dealing with our species

⁵ Our models must, therefore, talk of living things whose specificity, explicitly or implicitly, is comprehensible as the product of the process of natural selection. This is done I suggested here in that I have suggested something of the

we have to add a third process: that of history. This I have included and revised in the discussion of cultural interaction.

Only a model of the blob which can, even if does not, handle the combination of these three processes, will do. Social and cultural anthropologists often express the fear that the introduction of cognitive or biological considerations will lead to reductionism. This danger exists, but ironically blatant misleading cases of reductionism are much more common in the work of those who argue for the independence of the cultural process and forget the internal continuities. When this is done, as is the case with the work of the social scientists I have been implicitly criticising, we run the risk of producing misleading theoretical formulations that greatly exaggerate the ontological significance of cultural variation. Even more dangerously we move what we want to understand into a hazy land, where nothing can be situated in nature, and where mysterious words, such as those which I have merged together to create the blob, proliferate, without anyone being able to explain how they relate to each other. This, of course, is inevitable when we are in the never-never land of culture without minds. Such a situation makes science impossible and even misleads the ethnographer, who, in the difficult process of interpretation, loses all guide lines.

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evolutionary history of the blob. These living things must be able to be produced and develop, grow from single cells to the mature phenomena we claim they are. I have not been able to touch on this here but I have used cognitive science literature which has begun to explore that side of things extensively. (e.g. the studies in Moore and Lemmon: 2001)

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