Introduction: Time is a Fact of Life

'Time is a fact of life,' said a friend to me recently, 'so what is there to write about something as obvious as that? Are you not just complicating something that is fundamentally straightforward and simple?' After many years of research on this topic, responding to that challenge should have posed no problem. However, it did. Instead of getting easier, dealing with this common query had got increasingly more difficult as my study progressed. So I asked my friend to say a bit more about what he meant by his statement. He explained how time was an obvious fact of life because we sleep at night and get up in the morning. Shops are open at certain times of the day, work has starting and finishing times, and our day is structured according to this fact of life. I told him that his examples applied neither to all societies nor did they to our own society in the past. Before Western societies were structured to clock and calendar time, I argued, this 'fact of life' must have been fundamentally different. I also suggested that he had only talked about two out of an immense range of aspects of time. He had mentioned the time of the diurnal cycle and our social structuring of the day with the aid of clock time thus excluding, for example, our getting older or having different concerns at different ages. What is important to a 70-year-old may be quite outside the range of experiences for a young person. I could see some agreement among the other people around the table but my friend remained unimpressed. 'Yes', he said, 'so what? In all of these examples time is still a fact of life.' I had to agree with him and explained that I do not question time as a fact of life but take as problematic how social scientists understand time, and the way they incorporate it into their theories.

Many more aspects of time, I continued, form an integral part of our lives. Some have to do with synchronisation, ordering, sequencing or timing, others with control or measurement, and still others with the time aspects of machines and artefacts. All have a bearing on our lives not as

separate abstracted entities but as an interconnected whole. If we accept social science to be about studying, understanding and explaining that reality then we can expect social scientists to take account of time in this multiple and connected way, to know and acknowledge the many aspects of time in their relation and not on an either/or basis. He understood what I was saying but could not see the problem and certainly could not see how one could spend years studying what, to him, still seemed eminently obvious. He was not the only one who felt like this. The sentiments of my sociology colleagues were not far removed from those expressed by my friend. Everyone was still waiting to be convinced.

I went on to tell them that sociologists have studied a wide range of social time issues which include people's budgeting and organisation of time, activities they are engaged in regularly at certain times, the effect of retirement on the structuring of a person's life as well as on their family, the change in time experience after a person has been made redundant, the rhythms of social life, and the control of people's time. Anthropologists, on the other hand, place more emphasis on the different culture-based meanings and forms of time, whilst historians are predominantly concerned with the past. Most disciplines, I stipulated, seem to have their very own subject-specific focus on time. Looking at those studies as a collective whole, however, it becomes obvious that time has played an important part not only in people's lives but also in their thinking. It is integral to human beings contemplating their existence, their own finitude and the inescapability of death. To study time in this way, my friend conceded, sounded really exciting but he could see no reason for going beyond this existing body of work. 'What could there possibly be achieved in a book on time and theory', he asked, 'that cannot be accomplished through those studies, and that every thinking person does not know already anyway?', thus bringing the discussion back to his original statement that time is a fact of life.

Still no one else wanted to participate in this discussion. Everybody was waiting and the onus continued to be on me to make some progress. I had to stop moving on the spot with my explanation. I acknowledged once more the centrality of his insight but pointed to my emphasis on the complexity of time. I stressed how I did not understand time as '*a* fact of life' but as implicated in *every* aspect of our lives and imbued with a multitude of meanings. In our everyday life, I argued, time can mean a variety of things. We can have 'a good time at a party', be 'on time for work', 'lose time' due to illness, choose the 'right time' to plant potatoes and even 'live on borrowed time'. We can make time pass quickly or slowly, which is different from getting impatient because we have to wait or from feeling rushed because time is passing too fast. We need to distinguish between getting old and feeling old and between planning

one's day as a pensioner or as a university student. We move freely between those varied sorts of time without giving much thought to the matter, using the idea as if it were a unitary concept. We do not fuss over the differences, and it does not seem to concern us that the time of our imagination knows no boundaries, that the time of our thought is open-ended but has a beginning, and that our sentences our bounded by both a beginning and an end. Neither are we troubled that none of these times are comparable with, for example, the time associated with our finitude and certain but unknown death or our labour time which we exchange for money at the end of the week, the month, or the completion of a job. We seem to weave in and out of a wide variety of times without giving the matter much conscious consideration.

When social scientists investigate human social life, however, we can expect them to rise above the common-sense and the-taken-for-granted. We can presume that they are not only consciously aware of those various aspects of time but know them in relation to each other and account for them in their studies and theories. This very reasonable expectation, however, is not met. Not only does time seem to be a non-reflected aspect of social theory, it also lacks the multifacetedness displayed in thought, language, and the concomitant everyday life. Much like people in their everyday lives, social scientists take time largely for granted. Time is such an obvious factor in social science that it is almost invisible. To 'see' it and to recognise it in not just its dominant but also its many less visible forms has proved to be hard work.

My initial interest, I explained further, was captured by a perceived mismatch between social theory and the social life within my own range of experience. I had noticed that when theorists focus on structure they present a world without change. When they focus on change, this is charted within a static framework which defines the boundaries of before and after. I found social scientists measuring people's experiences in clock time units without taking account of all the other aspects of time and with little discrimination between the measure and the quantity that is being measured. A social event, for example, might be defined in terms of the number of years, months, or days it lasted; yet the process itself may not relate to calendar time but seasons, a person's life cycle or a historical period. Furthermore, what seems timeless or eternal from a personal point of view may be seen as a major change from a historical perspective or as an insignificant shift from an evolutionary position.

There is a tendency in social theory for any one of these aspects to appear as absolute where a focus on time shows them to be relative. Theories and whole perspectives seem further to force choices with respect to time. Thus, the social world is explained in terms of either how it is, how it is changing, or how it ought to be; how it is structured or how

it is developing, timeless, or timeful. Functions are explained as frozen realities without time or temporality. Social science, I continued my 'defence', has a long tradition of explaining on an either/or basis and the focus on time forms no exception. Time is understood accordingly as either social or natural, as a measure or an experience, as cyclical or linear. It may be associated with the clock or the rhythms of nature, with ageing and entropy or with the timing, sequencing, and rhythmic organisation of activities. With few exceptions, social theorists conceptualise as single parts in isolation what bears on our lives simultaneously. They exlude in an absolute way what is not focused on, instead of implicating it in their understanding. 'Yes . . .', my friend replied very slowly and thoughtfully, 'I think I know what you are saying. It seems reasonable, but it has lost any feeling of reality for me.' By moving my explanation from examples of what people do to principles and structures of understanding, those thoughts had, despite their apparent sense, no longer any real meaning. Structures of thought carried no reality value for him. For me, on the other hand, they form a central part of the 'empirical' data of my research.

'But it is all so simple', he continued, 'why do you academics keep on complicating what is unproblematic and staightforward?' For the first time in this discussion I found myself no longer in a defensive position but in strong disagreement. Far from accepting that academics in general, and social scientists in particular, complicate the reality they seek to describe, understand, and explain, I have found the reverse to be the case. I have come to recognise that once we begin to observe and contemplate our social reality we find it to be immensely complex and we consequently set out to simplify it until we have reduced it to choices of single or paired aspects. We tend to eradicate complexity to a point where that reality becomes conceptually manageable. Worse still, the simplified aspects are then taken as the basis from which to understand and explain the whole. This is what people do in their daily lives in order to cope with an otherwise unmanageable complexity. It is a strategy for doing and getting on with life. I want to propose, however, that both an assumed and imposed simplicity is no longer a valid approach once we want to understand and conceptualise that reality as social scientists.

'But does it really matter? What difference does it make to our lives how social scientists understand time; whether they conceptualise time in this, that, or any other way?' How could I begin to respond to this innocently posed question? Little did he know that the answer to it has irresolvably separated idealists from empiricists for hundreds of years. Whilst I understand that division to be a mere artefact of the way of thinking that we have inherited from the classical Greek philosophers, my own answer did, nevertheless, locate me quite clearly within the

tradition of German idealist thinking. It does matter, I argued, because our concepts and theories, our seeing, and our action are all mutually implicating and fundamentally interconnected. It does make a difference to our lives whether we understand our social organisation by the clock and calendar as an inevitable fact of life, as a fact of history, or as something we have created and imposed on ourselves and maintain by our daily actions. It constitutes the difference between having choices and seeing one's social life as determined. It matters at a global level with respect to nuclear power, for example, whether our understanding is still tied to Newtonian machine technology or to that of the contemporary physics on the basis of which that power has been created. Choice and responsibility can only be taken for that human creation once our understanding is at least adequate, if not ahead of the knowledge that informs that technology. Without such a change in understanding we remain helpless and controlled by our own creation. Our conceptualisations of time and the way we utilise time in our social theories matter with regard to our social construction of the future, our relationship to death, our identity, our daily living, our participation in social life, and our interaction with all that we have created. I therefore do not think that an adequate understanding is an end in itself but have allowed myself to be fundamentally guided by my belief in the constitutive nature of our ways of understanding and our frameworks of meaning. In other words, I see my research of this 'fact of life' as a meaningful contribution to our present lives and to our future.

These comments provided an entry point for the sociology members of this small gathering. My responses, one colleague thought, identified my approach as part of the critical theory tradition in sociology and suggested a tendency toward historical rather than structural analysis. My emphasis on the constitutive nature of knowledge was consistent, she thought, with the critical theorists' concerns and their stress on the future as an explicit component of the analysis. Like them, I seemed to consider understanding as a precondition for action which in turn makes reconceptualisation as important a part of the intellectual enterprise as the accumulation of data. My focus on temporality, on the other hand, demonstrates my leaning toward a historical approach. With one easy sweep my research was classified back into the fold of existing social science traditions. Once I had found my perspective, this fellow sociologist suggested, my research would become manageable within the existing boundaries of the discipline. I agreed that this was possible but voiced my disquiet that such adaptation could only be achieved at the expense of a concern with the anomalies and paradoxes that my explicit focus on time had brought to the surface.

In none of the sciences, and not even the perspectives within them, for

example, were people talking about the same thing when they made use of the idea of time. They seemed to be talking about phenomena, things, processes, qualities, or a dimension, a category, and a concept, using the word unproblematically as if it had only one meaning. Some scientists talked about motion 'through time', others about change 'in time'. Some social scientists located time in the capacity for memory and intent along the axis of past, present, and future, others in the routine and repetitious nature of everyday life. Some insisted that all time is necessarily social time and related this to clocks and calendars whilst others asserted that power and control are the irreducible aspects of social time. To integrate the study of time within an existing perspective would mean that none of these transperspectival anomalies could be explored and discussed. Yet, I consider these inconsistencies and paradoxes as the major challenge and an opportunity not to be missed.

The general social science practice of separating change from structure, I suggested further, goes far beyond the dualism of diachronic and synchronic analyses. Structure and historical change appear as mutually exclusive theoretical choices but this is not the only problem. Where change is central to the analysis this process often seems to be based on a physical theory of billiard balls in motion and on the behaviour of dead matter. Alternatively, the diachronic analysis might be dealing with points 'in time' without temporal extension, temporality, or orientation towards the future. Life, growth, novelty, the possibility of self-knowledge, the temporal extension across physical boundaries inherent in consciousness, and the power which I have come to recognise as an integral part of all relations in which the abstract quantity of time is used or allocated; all these are mostly excluded. Furthermore, where one or even more of these aspects are included, they tend to be presented as serial, linear, progressive, or cumulative when in most situations these aspects would be present simultaneously.

To gain a clear understanding from those unconnected theoretical, perspective-based fragments requires that we grasp not merely one or two approaches to time but all of them. We need to get to know not just the single meanings of time as clock time, chronology, timing, commodity, measure, '*t*-coordinate', *Dasein* and *durée*, for example, but the relations between them. Not merely their identification within single social science traditions but knowledge of their meanings and differences in relation to each other has to be the task. To become aware of discipline- and perspective-specific times is an important but small part of the work that needs to be done. It requires that we leave the safe comfort of a perspective and embrace the threatening uncertainty within our own discipline and beyond. Social science comprises the whole spectrum of 'times' from the most physical, mechanical, and artefactual to the

experiential and cultural. This realisation, in conjunction with my conviction that we interact with and modify not only our social but also the physical, living, and artefactual world on a daily basis, convinced me of the importance of understanding the times of physics and biology in addition to those of the human sciences. We need to study the times inherent in those theories in order to establish the connections between them as well as their relation to the time of the clock. Clock time is, after all, the one aspect of time that all scientists utilise. It is employed as the measure for the events and processes under investigation.

It is one thing to try to understand the underlying and often unexamined assumptions of our own and other disciplines, I explained, it is yet another to forge the links between those assumptions. This, however, is necessary since it is only in their connection and relation to each other that they begin to resemble the seamlessly integrated aspects of our lives: the times of work and social encounters, and the times of our consciousness, our existence, and our tacitly known, lived experiences. To see together what is at present known in isolation requires a constant, conscious effort to keep our theoretical understanding in touch with and checked against the complexity of our ongoing experience in its historical, natural, and artefactual context; in other words, all those aspects that make up the totality of our everyday lives. This entails that we acknowledge the personal not only as valid, but as essential, and our theoretical understanding as inseparable from our biography and biology, our context, beliefs and values, our needs and our motives. We need to recognise our learning, seeing, and experiencing, as well as our thinking, doing, and judging as mutually implicating. To pretend otherwise is to falsify our work. In agreement with prominent twentieth-century physicists such as Bohm, Heisenberg and Prigogine, for example, I have therefore replaced the classical science ideal of objectivity with the recognition that the subject–object relationship in scientific activity is one of fundamental implication.

With such an emphasis on the personal plus context, the idea of truth also takes on a different meaning. No longer fixed, permanent and absolute it becomes understood as an ongoing process, socially constructed as well as constructing, and open to challenge. Doubt of that which we take to be natural and unproblematic, the acclaimed 'tool' of radical humanism in the arts and social sciences, needs to get extended to include ourselves, our own understanding and our base assumptions. This process of doubting and the resulting layers upon layers of reflection force our focus onto that which is normally disattended and help us to break through its taken-for-grantedness. It enables us to see the invisible. Once the process of breaking through the natural attitude has begun, it quickly becomes obvious that the enigma of time reflects our failure to

grasp the essential interconnections between its different aspects and we realise that the task is not to know one aspect well but to know all of them in their totality and in their dynamic relation. Understanding time thus does not only allow but forces an approach which transcends perspectives. This necessitates new ways of understanding and a different use of existing concepts. It demands a very specific approach to theory. Transdisciplinary exploration is only possible if we conceive of social theory as something one does and not as a hermeneutic or historical exercise of reinterpretation. In contradistinction to the history-of-ideas approach, for example, where the development of ideas is traced in its socio-economic and intellectual context, I see my approach to theory as entailing an exploration of inherent principles, assumptions, and key questions and their relation to the object of understanding. I isolate basic properties and processes of that which is not generally reflected upon and try to bring my findings in relation to each other in order that I may understand what, up until now, I had only tacitly known. Instead of seeking to render new and better interpretations of existing thoughts about past presents, I want to utilise thoughts for the extension and development of understandings of the present. An understanding through time cannot simply be added on to existing perspectives and theories of social science. It requires a reconceptualisation of not merely social time but the very nature of 'the social'. Despite the inevitable continuity with existing perpectives, it alters the method and the vision, the epistemology, and the ontology. Frequently it invalidates the traditions.

1

Time in Social Theory: Destiny, Necessity, and Enigma

Time is our destiny because we live our lives unto death and in the knowledge of this inevitability. Time is our necessity because there can be no un-living, re-juvenating, or un-knowing. There can be no un-doing only 'making good', since moments past cannot be lived again. Time is not only a necessary aspect of change but also of stability, since the latter is nothing but an awareness that something has remained stable whilst its surrounding environment, and even the components within, have changed. In addition to change and stability, time is central to order since, as Moore (1963: 8) observed, without a temporal order there is no order at all. Time is both destiny and necessity for all human societies, even if their language does not have a separate concept for it. It is inextricably bound up with human reflexivity and the capacity for self-consciousness (Hegel 1967: 800, 1952: 558). For contemporary industrialised societies, however, time is fundamental in a further sense. The members of such societies use the concept of time not merely to synthesise aspects of mind, body, nature, and social life, but they also employ it on a world-wide basis as a standardised principle for measurement, co-ordination, regulation, and control. In these multiple forms time is a deeply taken-for-granted aspect of social life. It is everywhere yet it eludes us. It is so deeply implicated in our existence that it is almost invisible. This poses problems for understanding and analysis not only for the ordinary members of society but also for those members who see it as their professional task to provide theories about this reality. Despite this difficulty, however, the centrality of time for the subject matter of the social sciences remains and so does the need for that complexity of times to be reflected in our theories.

The question then arises how such an explicit representation of social time is to be achieved given that the nature of concepts is traditionally regarded as outside the competence of the social sciences' investigations.

'Normally neither historians nor sociologists', Luhmann (1982c: 299) points out, 'ask about the nature of time. If this question is posed directly and framed as one about essences, it cannot be adequately answered. On the other hand, there is a substantial danger that, if we leave this question unaddressed, we shall think about social history in crude and inadequate ways.' For Luhmann this applies not only for social history but for sociology generally, with all the perspectives it encompasses, since its subject matter consists of meaningful human experiences and actions. This includes that human beings are able to reflect on their actions and that they could have acted otherwise. Because of it, Luhmann (1982c: 290) argues, 'temporality too becomes a constitutive dimension of its subject matter. As a result, time can no longer be treated merely as a category underlying our knowledge of social life.' To him, the philosophical theory of time therefore becomes a necessary pre-condition to an adequate theory of social time. Not all theorists who accept the centrality of time for social theory, however, advocate this approach. The writings of Bergmann (1981a, 1983) and Jaques (1982) corroborate Luhmann's position whilst others like Elias (1982a, b, 1984) reject the idea that philosophy holds solutions for social science analyses. Giddens, who legitimated the concern with time in British social theory, holds yet another view on the question of how to deal with the enigma of time. Time is central to his theory of structuration and is implicated in his key concepts of routinisation, 'time-space distanciation', sedimentation, recursiveness of knowledge, commodified time, and the simultaneity of *Dasein*, *durée*, and *longue durée*. Unlike Luhmann, however, he does not pay attention to the nature of time itself. Giddens (1984: 35) makes 'no particular claim to elucidate this matter' before incorporating time into his theory. He is content to utilise and adapt for his own purposes the conceptualisations of time by theorists like Hägerstrand, Heidegger, Lévi-Strauss, Marx, Mead, and Schutz. In his theory of structuration he seeks to show how 'life passes in transformation' and how time is linked to both the contingency of *Dasein* and the possibility of becoming, both being implicated in the recursiveness of social life as constituted in social practices. Giddens (1979: 4–8) endeavours to connect the theory of action with that of institutions and intended actions with their unintended consequences. In his contemporary re-working of the conceptions of human being and doing, social reproduction and transformation, time therefore comes to be of central importance without ever being the explicit focus of his attention. Investigating contemporary approaches to time, we are thus faced with a substantial degree of consensus with respect to a recognition that time is central for social theory but little agreement about the legitimacy of a social science concern with time *per se*.

As destiny and necessity of human social life, time is recognised to be implicated in social theories in a multiple way. Theorists associate it with change, stability, order, control, and measurement or combinations of these. Little thought, however, is given to the relation between those theoretical dimensions of time, and opinions diverge on the question of whether or not an understanding or a theory of time is a necessary pre-condition to social theory. Yet it seems quite clear to me that progress can only be made if we seek to understand not one aspect of time or one perspective's approach to it but aim to grasp time in its multiple expressions. This entails that we allow time to become our explicit focus. Theorists recognise time as a problematic aspect of their work but disagree with respect to their understanding of the nature of the difficulty and how to deal with it. Luhmann (1980: 32–3) proposes that the question of time touches base assumptions in social theory and he sees this as one of the reasons why so little progress has been made. This important assertion seems to be reiterated by the observations of a number of theorists.

Giddens, for example, notes repeatedly (1979, 1981, 1984) that in functionalist theories time is identified with change and sequence whilst stability and order are conceived as timeless. Maintaining this distinction between synchrony and diachrony, statics and dynamics, process and order, leads to a repression of time in social theory. 'To speak of social stability *cannot*', Giddens (1979: 199) insists, 'involve abstracting from time since stability means continuity over time. A stable order is one in which there is a close similarity between how things are now and how they used to be in the past.' The very notion of pattern or structure is in fact nonsensical viewed from the vantage point of functionalist analysis which understands these as timeless snapshots of interaction. 'The flaw in this', Giddens (1979: 202) argues, 'is exactly the same as that involved in the presumption of "static stability": such a snapshot would not in fact reveal a pattern at all, because *any patterns of interaction that exist are situated in time*; only when examined over time do they form "patterns" at all.' He proposes further that social systems are different from material structures, since the former only exist as systems through their continued reproduction over time (1981: 17, 1984: xxi).

Similarly fundamental issues are identified by Schöps (1980), Bergmann (1981) and others. They locate the social scientists' problem with time in the nature of quantitative social research and, more generally, in positivist social science. The search for invariant repetition and pattern in conjunction with a time that is conceptualised as a neutral quantity and used as a universal measure is taken by them as the problematic aspect of sciences dealing with human time.

> The explanation offered by contemporary European culture – which, during the last two centuries, has increasingly marginalised other explanations – is that which constructs a uniform, abstract, unilinear law of time applying to all events, and according to which all 'times' can be compared and regulated. This law maintains that the Great Plough and the famine belong to the same calculus, a calculus which is indifferent to both. It also maintains that human consciousness is an event, set in time, like any other. Thus, an explanation whose task is to 'explain' the time of consciousness, treats that consciousness as if it were as passive as a geological stratum. If modern man has often become a victim of his own postivism, the process starts here with the denial or abolition of the time created by the event of consciousness. (Berger 1984: 9–10)

These writers argue that the problem lies with the kind of time that is being used exclusively. In contradistinction to the popular view they do not see time excluded from positivist science. Bergmann (1981a: 12) explains how the multiplicity of social time cannot be encompassed by positivist social science since complexity is crowded out by an emphasis on the measurement of motion, the establishement of causal relationships and the conceptualisation of an absolute parameter of time within which events take place. Jaques (1982: 163) presents a corresponding argument when he points out the discrepancy between the multidimensional complex time that characterises social life and the one-dimensional time of social analyses and research. This, he suggests, has little to do with the popular notion of the previous decade which saw time as needing to be brought back in to a spatial and physicalist social science.

Time, however, does not merely touch the base assumption of positivist social scientists. Elias (1984: x–xl) shows that theorists in the Kantian tradition do not fare any better. They too conceive of time as an invariable structure. But, unlike the former who see time as an aspect of external reality the latter view it as an a priori intuition, a pre-condition to experience. We can therefore agree with Luhmann's (1978: 96) assertion that sociologists put time theory on too small a basis.

> It is considered only with respect to the concept of duration or the mere sequence of events. No attention is paid to the difference between the past and the future which is essential for all temporality. Therewith, the specific internal problematic of time – i.e. the constitution of the present through the difference between two time horizons, past and future - remains unnoticed. Whatever time has to offer, in every present, as a space for orientation and arrangement for the constitution of social relations, thus disappears from view. (Luhmann 1978: 96)

This implies that studies of how we use time and how we organise social life by it must be flawed until social scientists have better understood the

nature and function of time. We must therefore make explicit what forms a largely implicit aspect of our theories. We must be aware, however, that we can grasp time in its complexity only if we seek the relations between time, temporality, tempo and timing, between clock time, chronology, social time and time-consciousness, between motion, process, change, continuity and the temporal modalitites of past, present and future, between time as resource, as ordering principle and as becoming of the possible, or between any combination of these. We need to stand back and get a wider perspective on the matter. We need to see together what at present are isolated incommensurable bits. This will lead us to new insights and take social theory into a new direction. It may help to make time less of an enigma. Time may even cease to be an irresolvable problem for social theory.

The diversity of contemporary approaches

Time has occupied sociologists ever since sociology became developed as a separate discipline. Durkheim, Sorokin, Merton, Mead, Schutz and many others have set out to delineate the social nature of time. This social science work on time is characterised by a pattern where a diversity of pioneering thought is followed by papers and treatises that bring these disparate thoughts together into a coherent whole and utilise that understanding for novel time studies. The work of Durkheim (1915), Spengler (1926), Sorokin (1964), Mead (1959), Schutz (1971), and Gurvitch (1963) serve as examples for the pioneering thoughts; that of Sorokin and Merton (1937), Coser and Coser (1963), Moore (1963), Zerubavel (1979, 1981, 1985), and Bergmann (1981a, 1983) for bringing those thoughts together. Yet, despite this substantial body of work, time has also been identified as the missing or neglected dimension in social theory and research. Tiryakian (1970), Lüscher (1974), Martins (1974), and Heinemann and Ludes (1978), for example, focus on change, process, order, and structure when they argue that time is the lacuna, the forgotten dimension of social theory, and that it is not appropriately taken account of in social science analyses. Others suggest that the problem has nothing to do with a lack of studies and writing on time but with the lack of cohesion. Bergmann (1981a, 1983), Lauer (1981), and Schöps (1980) demonstrate that much work has been done which remains isolated from the main body of sociology, lacks coherent theorisation, and resists integration into existing perspectives. Despite this diversity of opinions, however, there is agreement among contemporary theorists who have given attention to time on three interrelated points: that time has neither been adequately understood nor satisfactorily dealt with

in social theory; that time is a key element of social life and must therefore be equally central to social theory; and that all time is social time. On the basis of that agreement we shall begin this exploration by focusing not on studies of social time but on the way time enters social theory. In other words, we examine the way social theorists conceptualise time in both its taken-for-granted and explicated form.

A first look presents us with an array of theories and a multitude of ideas with little to unite them. None of the writers has the same focus. Everyone asks different questions. No two theorists have the same view on what it means to make time central to social theory. To Jaques (1982) it means studying the form of time. He seeks a theoretical understanding of time and a clarification of its dimensions. He provides a conceptualisation and social theory of time which is based mainly on philosophical and psychoanalytical knowledge. He develops an axial scheme which he applies to the study and measurement of social and psychological phenomena. For Elias (1982a, b, 1984) it entails an investigation of the nature and history of time reckoning and reflections on its implications for social science; for Hopkins (1982) an exploration of the subjective experience of time in conjunction with the time of institutions, and for Schöps (1980) a study of the effect of time on social structure. For Hohn (1984) it involves a historical exploration of time-consciousness, social time, and processes of change. He establishes an inextricable link between the time-consciousness, cosmology, and mode of production of Western societies of different epochs. To Young (1987) it means utilising biological theories for the analysis of contemporary society, its rhythms and their changes. A ray of hope appears when we realise that both Bergmann (1981a) and Lauer (1981) construct typologies as conceptual tools for social theory. That optimism, however, is premature. Neither the content of their theories nor its application bear any resemblance to each other. For Giddens and Luhmann the aim to make time central forms an integral aspect of their theories. As a key issue that permeates their work it is a by-product of their writing rather than a centralised preoccupation resulting in a treatise on social time. For Giddens the issue of time is so intimately tied to his theory of structuration that one could almost think that the problem of time for social theory had simply been the lack of a theory of structuration. Through that theory we can account for people's location in time-space, for the continued maintenance and reproduction of institutions, and for the difference between traditional and modern societies with their respective 'time-distantiations'. Through the conceptualisations of *durée*, *Dasein*, and *longue durée* we can allow for a variety of time-scales and modes of being in every human practice and event. We can accommodate the multiple nature of time-consciousness and understand the commodification of time and its attendant

relations of power. The breadth of Giddens' appproach to time appears all-embracing until we explore Luhmann's writings on the matter, find them equally wide-ranging and notice that he is focusing on entirely different issues. Luhmann establishes distinctions between chronology, time, and temporality and he theorises contemporary world-time. He makes us aware of the historisation of time. He conceptualises time as constituted at every level of existence and provides a time theory that unifies the social theory perspectives of systems and action.

On the basis of this diversity it is hard to believe that these theorists have made the same 'phenomenon' central to their work. Between them they associate time with death, ageing, growth, and history, with order, structure, synchronisation, and control. They view time as a sense, a measure, a category, a parameter, and an idea. They define it as an a priori intuition for the conceptual organisation of experience (Jaques 1982), a social construction with multiple aspects and dimensions (Lauer 1981), an ordering principle and force for selection and prioritising (Schöps 1980), the difference between the past and future and its social interpretation (Luhmann 1982b), a process by which consciousness is formed (Hopkins 1982), and a tool for co-ordination, orientation and control (Elias 1984). Some coherence emerges around the explanations of time by Bergmann (1981a), Elias (1984), and Hohn (1984) who emphasise its symbolic nature. The consistency does not, however, reach to the nature of the symbol which is conceptualised by them respectively as an abstraction, a synthesis, and a construction, from and for experience. Not only are we faced with an incompatible array of definitions but we also have to cope with incommensurable ideas about the source of our experience and concept of time. The rhythms of nature or society, information processing, the capacity for memory and expectation, sociality, language, and social synchronisation are all identified as the bases upon which our knowledge of time is built. There is no warning for the unsuspecting researcher. There are no signposts for orientation in this maze of conceptual chaos. The theories are constructed around a common aim and focus but those who seek enlightenment from this body of thought are left with a sizeable problem: how to make sense of the diversity, and how to relate the isolated bits and conceptualise them into a coherent meaningful whole. On the basis of this heterogeneous body of thought (Adam 1987: 43–111) we need to find a way to do justice to time's coherence in nature and social life.

Closer investigation shows that over and above these irreconcilable differences there are some shared concerns and common assumptions about social theory. Once we shift our attention from the issue of time itself to the theoretical implications arising from the theorists' focus on time, there emerge common threads that criss-cross between these studies

to create a web of tenuous connections. These threads relate to a rejection of classical dualisms and disciplinary isolation as well as an acceptance of philosophers' deliberations on the topic of time. They are tied to the recognition that historicity and the symbolisation of time require analysis. They signify a general conviction that all time is social time and agreement that contemporary Western time needs to be understood in its historically developed uniqueness. They show a general commitment to the view that a better understanding of time not only brings to the surface problems and shortcomings in social science analysis but that it will also improve contemporary social theory. This common ground can be utilised as a basic structure for our exploration and for this initial survey of contemporary and classical thoughts on time.

Dualisms and disciplinary isolation rejected

Dualisms are deeply anchored in the structure of our thought and they permeate social theory. As synchrony and diachrony, structure and change, individual and society, nature and nurture, quantity and quality, objectivity and subjectivity, order and control they haunt our theories and our analyses. A focus on time brings those dualisms into high relief and shows them to be untenable. It is not either winter or December, or hibernation time for the tortoise, or one o'clock, or time for Christmas dinner. It is planetary time, biological time, clock and calendar time, natural and social time all at once. Most theorists writing on time therefore find it necessary to confront the tradition of thinking in opposites and to seek ways to transcend it. Duality rather than dualism becomes a favoured option.

Giddens leaves none of the traditional social science dichotomies untouched. His work therefore serves as a prime example for this dualism–duality conversion. Giddens proposes to achieve this mutation with the theory of structuration and his central focus on human practice located in time-space. He makes connections and shows the mutual implication of synchronic and diachronic analyses, change and structure, of human doing, institutional reproduction and social transformation. For others the shift from dualism to duality means that there is no longer a need to choose between the timeless and the temporal, between system and action, form or content. A conceptualisation in terms of duality allows for the timeless form of time to be formed, maintained, and recreated in human practice. This formed and constituted time may then be viewed as both product of and medium for interactions of people in and with their natural and social environments. Alternatively it may be associated with consciousness since time, as Hopkins (1982: 28–9) points

out, 'not only forms part of consciousness, it is the process by which consciousness develops and forms'. What appears like a dualism of external and internal experience and consciousness of time is shown by her to be a duality of mutual dependence where the created, external and shared aspects of time re-enter consciousness as constitutive features and vice versa. Jaques (1982) identifies two time dimensions along which the experience of process, change, object constancy, and permanence is organised conceptually: the time axes of succession and intent. He too suggests that the perception of permanence and change is not a matter of choice but they mutually define each other like figure and ground. Our understanding, he argues, oscillates between them. As we focus on one, the other recedes. Thus, his two time dimensions are not two different types of time but relate to the way we order our experience of time passing and of the time of purpose and will. Both in turn depend on experience and knowledge of the past. Jaques proposes that neither the clock time of succession nor *Kairos* the time of intent are sufficient on their own for the understanding and explanation of the human world of hope and intent. His axes of succession and intent therefore stand in a necessary relation to each other, a relation where the latter always incorporates the former but never the other way around.

Whilst the message is the same, Young's (1988) focus is different yet again. He structures his analysis around the concepts of cyclical and linear time which he conceptualises as mutually implicating ways of understanding two sorts of change. No either/or distinction can be made, insists Young (1988: 14). 'The two dimensions are best conceived as two often but not always complementary ways of looking at the same thing, two alternative conceptualizations of the same phenomenon which do not exclude each other.' In a historical analysis of Western time-consciousness Hohn (1984) escapes the dichotomy of traditional and modern society by proposing not a duality but clusters of characteristics. In his analysis, modes of work, cosmology, and conceptualisations of time are established as mutually constituting. Instead of dualisms he focuses on a spectrum of change-continua. He finds either/or choices useless for the description of the slow historical change from natural rhythms to *Takt* (metronomic beat), a development that has also been identified by Young (1988) in his analysis of *The Metronomic Society*. The transcendence of the restrictions of classical dualistic analyses is also of central importance to Elias (1982a, b, 1984). Not duality or clusters, however, but synthesis is the key concept with which he manages to overcome that pervasive tradition of thought. He proposes that clock time is a highly sophisticated social construction for the co-ordination of the body, the person, society, and nature. Not society or nature, not even human beings and nature but humans in nature and as an integral part of

it are to Elias the basis from which to begin the analysis. He shows that we use time not merely as a measure but as a tool for social interaction. We utilise it for orientation, regulation, control, co-ordination, synchonisation, and for the comparison of social and natural events. Elias suggests that this symbol helps us to structure what is in continuous flow. It allows us to refer to specific points in the continuity of existence in individual lives, social processes, or natural events. By emphasising the synthesising power of the symbolic representation of time Elias transcends the dualisms of nature–culture, individual–society, and natural–social time without recourse to the conversion of dualisms into dualities. As a symbol at the highest level of synthesis, he argues, time brings aspects of the universe, the natural and social environment, and our personal lives into an ordered relationship. It synthesises what we tend to separate and dichotomise in our social analyses. Elias's approach to time therefore underlines my proposition that an explicit focus on time invalidates the social theory traditions; that it requires us to reassess our assumptions and to find a way through uncharted ground.

Elias extends his attempt to reunite what scientists have tended to separate and compartmentalise to the division of knowledge into academic disciplines. Time, dating, and time reckoning, he argues, cannot be understood on the base assumption of a divided world.

> It is one of the difficulties with which we have to grapple when reflecting on time, that time does not fit neatly into one of the conceptual compartments which we still use as an unquestioned means for the classification of objects of this kind. (Elias 1984: xv; transl. B. Adam and E. King)

This view is echoed by Giddens, Luhmann, Bergmann, Schöps, Jaques and Lauer who find it necessary to go beyond the boundaries of their disciplines to philosophy, psychology, geography, history, and even biology to do justice to their respective analyses. No one, however, expresses more strongly than Young (1988) the belief that we need to transgress the boundaries of our discipline because the study of time is a topic quite unlike any other academic subject.

> Increasingly biologists will need to become sociologists and psychologists, as sociologists will need to become biologists and psychologists, and psychologists the other two, all with as much interchange as possible with historians and philosophers; and for any of the students to ignore physics, the queen of the sciences, would be to ignore the field in which the largest advance has been made so far in the conceptualisation of time. All the disciplines, and new hybrids between them, will be required to join in the coming unification of the human and natural sciences in the next century. (Young 1988: 246)

Such a requirement, it seems to me, is difficult to meet as long as we do not first attend to the perspective-based divisions that demarcate our

positions within social science. Even a superficial glance at the different approaches to time allows us to identify these by their key concepts as marxist, functionalist, interactionist, and phenomenological, for example. Thus, in Giddens and Hohn's (1984) analyses we find time associated with reproduction, theorised as abstract exchange value and resource, identified with the concept of commodification and explicated on the basis of control and, in Hohn's case, alienation. Mead's (1959) emphasis on interaction and sociality results in a focus on the directionality and irreversibility of time, its creation in the present through emergence, and the difference between the past and future. His is a constitutive and constituted time where repetition fundamentally involves variation and creation. Luhmann's approach straddles the bias of Mead and the different emphasis of Schutz whose analysis focuses on the consciousness–society conjuncture. Reflection and memory, intent and projects, multiple realities, time horizons, and episodes are therefore the time aspects Schutz (1971) affirms. Hopkins (1982) as well as Giddens and Luhmann centrally utilise these aspects of time for their respective analyses. In contradistinction to Giddens I have not found functionalist approaches to exclude time or to identify it with change only. Order, organisation, synchronisation, change between fixed points, rates of change, repetition, regulation, duration, sequence, timing, parameter, and measure, are all time aspects that are widely utilised in analyses within that perspective. Moore's (1963) excellent *Man, Time and Society* is organised around this cluster of time concepts and so are the studies of Lauer (1980) and Schöps (1980). Whilst the recognition of these perspective biases is interesting, the divisions are of no avail to our task of developing an approach to time that allows for both the multiplicity of aspects and the relations between them, to feature centrally in our work.

We can summarise, therefore, that despite the expressed aim to transcend dualisms and the recognition that the focus on time plays havoc with disciplinary boundaries, these established traditions have a habit of re-emerging, be it in new guises. All theorists concerned with time make distinctions and these can be located in the writings of classical philosophers. Through them the nineteenth century categorisations and dualisms are reintroduced in theories that were created to overcome that limiting framework of analysis. Since, however, these distinctions give us the best initial access to contemporary and classical social science material on time, we need to focus on some of these before exploring the most widely agreed idea that time is always social time. Knowledge of these classical categorisations will help us to grasp better the limitations of the nineteenth-century way of thinking, understanding, and conceptualising.

Making distinctions philosophy's way

Making distinctions is endemic to the theoretical enterprise since understanding means relating: it depends on relating the object of our enquiry to that which it is not, to its opposite, to that which it resembles and to that which is different. It allows us to find explanations for observed social phenomena and it helps us to delineate their particular characteristics. It is therefore not surprising that theories abound in distinctions and comparisons. To elucidate the nature of social time social theorists contrast it with natural time. To understand contemporary Western time they differentiate it from the times of 'traditional' societies of today and earlier historical periods. In order to explicate the qualitative time of experience they define it in contradistinction to the quantitative measure of clocks and calendars. At the root of all these social science distinctions we find the thoughts and time theories of non-social science thinkers. We invariably encounter the writings of St. Augustine and the time theories of the philosophers Bergson, Heidegger, Husserl, Kant, and McTaggart with their respective concepts of *durée, Dasein*, time horizons, a priori intuitions and the A- and B-series of time. These conceptualisations are therefore important for understanding social theories of time.

McTaggart (1927) developed the distinction between the A- and B-series of time as a logical argument against the reality of time. Whilst social scientists are not interested in questions of logic they found his distinction a useful tool for the explanation of social time. McTaggart identifies two ways of conceiving or talking about time: objectively, by differentiating between earlier and later states; subjectively, by implicating the observer in the analysis. He suggests that events are conceptualised *in* time where the relation between them is defined in a permanent and absolute way. In other words, if event X happened before event Y, then X will always be earlier than Y. Thus, Caesar died before Queen Victoria, people are young before they grow old, and the shiny state of the car precedes the rusty one. Such temporal relations, he argues, may be expressed in terms of timelessly true statements. He calls these 'tense-less' relations between events the B-series of time. McTaggart relates the A-series of time to statements about the past, present and future. Such statements are relative, he reasons, because the definition of something as past, present, or future depends on both an observer and surrounding relations. Tensed statements are fundamentally context-dependent and this makes them inherently relative, impermanent, and associated with change and temporality.

Social theorists have either adopted McTaggart's terminology or adapted it for their own purposes. Jaques (1982), for example, extended