

THE JOKING RELATIONSHIP AND KINSHIP: CHARTING A THEORETICAL DEPENDENCY

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I

ALTHOUGH the anthropology of jokes and of humour generally is a relatively new phenomenon (see, for example, Apte 1985), the anthropology of joking has a long history. It has been taken up at some point or another by most of the main theoreticians of the subject and their treatment of it often serves to characterize their general approach; moreover, there can be few anthropologists who have not encountered it and had to deal with it in the field. What has stimulated anthropologists is the fact that societies are almost invariably internally differentiated in some way and that one does not joke with everyone. The very fact that joking has to involve at least two people ensures its social character, while the requirement *not* to joke is equally obviously a social injunction. The questions anthropologists have asked themselves are, why the difference, and how is it manifested in any particular society?

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Consider for a moment Western society, which, despite its veneer of equality, is certainly not without differentiation of a hierarchical kind. One does not generally joke with the same freedom—if at all—with one's boss, professor or parents as one does with fellow workers or colleagues of roughly equivalent status. Conversely, to not joke or respond to a joke may in some circumstances be taken for unfriendliness, i.e. joking may be an expected form of behaviour, just like not joking. This is even more true of societies that are organized more fully on the basis of kinship. It is not, I think, that roles in such societies are more heavily structured; rather, the structure is openly recognized and positively marked. As Dumont has often remarked, hierarchy is given its due: it is not suppressed by the ideal of equality, as it is in the West. I will return to this contrast later. For the moment the inference is as follows: the more completely a society is ordered by kinship the more expressive and stereotyped the joking seems to be, especially on ritual occasions, which themselves dramatize the society's structure and values.

It is such joking relationships that I want to concentrate on here. They normally take place between kin types, i.e. between individuals standing in a certain relationship of kinship to one another, though there are some such relationships, especially in Africa, between different clans and even between tribes. They are characteristically continuous but apt to be especially marked on ritual occasions at which both referents are present. Indeed, the joking is usually public, involving groups rather than individuals. It may be partly verbal, with much sexual innuendo, or it may be also physical, involving pushing or tripping up the other person, throwing ashes or cowdung or water at him or her, trying to expose the other person's lower body by pulling off their clothing, destroying or stealing his or her property etc. Usually, there are several such stereotypes in any one society, of different intensity and kind. They need not be symmetric, and there is one much discussed form that is characteristically asymmetric, namely the avunculate, to which I will return below. Normally there are limits beyond which joking should not go, but within those limits there is the obligation not only to joke but also not to take offence. However, there is a degree of hostility involved in joking, and breaking the limits may lead to serious fights, or at least to bad feeling.

Joking relationships often strike the anthropologist as one of the most spectacular forms of ritual behaviour. Less noticeable, because much less spectacular, are their converse, that is, relationships of respect or of complete avoidance, though these are no less significant. Again, they constitute the behaviour appropriate, at all times, with certain kin types (different ones from those with whom one jokes), the only exception being that avoidance behaviour is occasionally subject to reversal in ritual situations. Again, the intensity and content of such relationships may vary, even within the same society. Avoidance may be total, i.e. no speaking to, or even in the presence of, the other person, no direct eye contact, no physical contact or passing of objects to one another, no staying in the same room together (especially if the referents are of opposite sex), nor letting one's shadow pass over the other person, not even passing in front of

him or her oneself—all contact in such cases has to be via a third person. On the other hand, respectful conversation, discreet glances and some proximity may be allowed. But such behaviour should not be thought to denote hostility, as joking very often does: Radcliffe-Brown (1949: 134; see also 1952: 106) cites the case of the Australian Aborigine who must avoid his mother-in-law totally but still regards her as his best friend, because she has provided him with his wife.

As already noted, there is one form of joking relationship that is especially prominent in the literature, namely that which sometimes occurs between a mother's brother and his sister's son. Commonly called the avunculate, this has been reported from Sub-Saharan Africa especially, as well as from parts of Oceania. It is generally asymmetric, in the sense that the junior partner, the sister's son, is the active partner, his mother's brother the passive one, able neither to respond in kind nor to take offence. In the typical avunculate the sister's son is at liberty not only to joke with and insult his maternal uncle but also to steal and destroy his property, virtually at will. Sometimes his claims against his mother's brother may extend to his inheriting his widow after his death.

Although the mother's brother-sister's son relationship is often strongly marked, it does not, of course, always involve joking of this sort. In much of eastern Indonesia, for example, a mother's brother often has mystical influence over his sister's son, which is reciprocated not with extravagant behaviour but with respect, gifts, ritual services, and so on. The relationship between *wau* and *laua* among the Iatmul of New Guinea, centred on the ritual called Naven and made famous by Gregory Bateson (1958 [1936]), also seems to exclude joking as such (the only joking Bateson mentions takes place between brothers-in-law, and even this is obviously mild and casual (*ibid.*: 80, 208)). The *wau*, the mother's brother, indulges in much buffoonery, aping the antics of old women, and showing exaggerated submissiveness to his *laua*; but at the same time he is clearly the more active partner, from whom his *laua*, his sister's son, frequently hides through supposed embarrassment. Thus while not active, the *laua* is not subordinate either. The result is a graphic demonstration of the ritualization of such relationships, but it is hardly the avunculate as normally defined. Perhaps this simply shows the arbitrariness of the concept, joking being but one means of marking what is ritually a very fertile relationship.

In fact, explanations for the sorts of joking involved are virtually absent from anthropology, and accounts of joking are often missing from ethnographic reports. Explanation therefore concentrates on the question of who jokes with whom, a question that inevitably leads to a consideration of social structure, especially kinship. There are several theories, especially for the avunculate, though a commonly invoked theme is the significance of marriage or, more accurately, affinity. I will now consider the main ones.

II

An early explanation for the avunculate saw it, like many other phenomena, as a survival of an earlier age in which the whole of mankind was ordered exclusively by matrilineal descent, i.e. human society was 'matriarchal', to use the contemporary phrase. The matriarchal theory was developed in the 1860s virtually simultaneously but independently by Morgan and Bachofen, though it was popularized by McLennan, apparently under Morgan's influence (see Trautmann 1987). Although challenged by Maine, Fustel de Coulanges and Darwin, it was for a long time popular, the view being that the present, 'patriarchal' age developed from it and was, of course, superior. When the avunculate began to be discovered in field situations, therefore, it seemed at first to fit the matriarchal theory. Since it involved ego stealing his mother's brother's property it was regarded as a form of inheritance, even though this could only be by anticipation, as it were, since the mother's brother was still alive. And even if the society's jural institutions were now predominantly patrilineal, this simply meant that the mode of descent and inheritance had changed from being matrilineal at some time in the past.

It was not until the 1920s that Hocart and Radcliffe-Brown set about demolishing this theory. One major problem was that in many societies with matrilineal descent the mother's brother is an authority figure, especially if the family is structured for residential purposes along matrilineal lines. And no role or relationship involving authority is likely to entail joking at the same time, especially of such a violent kind, and especially if the junior partner is the more aggressive. Eventually this theory went the way of the matriarchal theory itself, as anthropology reacted violently away from any form of 'conjectural history', especially if involving uniform 'stages' of civilization. Just the same fate befell Rivers's explanation for the avunculate (1907), that it was a survival of a previous era of cross-cousin marriage, in which a mother's brother gave his daughter in marriage to his sister's son, this daughter now being replaced by his property.

Hocart's short article on the subject (1923) was mainly devoted to debunking the matrilineal theory, though he did also offer a suggestion for the asymmetry of the avunculate. In Fiji, he said, the sister's son is ritually of higher status. In Mozambique too, this was found to be true of the BaThonga—a group studied by Junod and much discussed in this context (e.g. Radcliffe-Brown 1924)—where the sister's son is ritually cared for by his mother's brother, who performs a sacrifice for him when he is ill. In return for this care and attention, a sister's son steals his mother's brother's food and, when the latter dies, claims his property and widow as his own. Hocart shows us his characteristic obsession with ritual in his own explanation of the avunculate. 'Snatching' only occurs on ritual occasions, and although the mother's brother may not retaliate, his children may and do so, usually by giving ego a beating. But despite this violence, Hocart rules out hostile intent, for these cross cousins are 'gods to one another'. It can truly be said, I think, that Hocart saw gods everywhere, and despite his undoubted brilliance, few

have wanted to follow him in his very non-social-structural explanations. None the less, this reminder of the ritual aspects of the avunculate is very useful, and we will return to it later.

Radcliffe-Brown's explanation was influential for a long time, though his star too is now in eclipse. For him it was, as ever, all a matter of maintaining social cohesion (see his 1924, 1940, 1949 and 1952). Both joking relationships and avoidance relationships were in general designed to avoid conflict wherever there was 'social disjunction', as there was between affines, for instance; and through them 'social equilibrium' was created and maintained. He recognized the element of hostility inherent in joking, and also that avoidance need not suggest hostility. He also recognized that potential marriage was one important basis for joking, especially where there was cross-cousin marriage, or what I, following Dumont, prefer to call positive marriage rules. As is well known, in such cases ego is expected to marry into a particular, predetermined kin category, and as a consequence he in a sense inherits his affinal relationships. Thus the direction of marriages is predictable, at least as to category, and since it may involve ritual and material exchanges as well, is potentially conflictual and hostile. Joking gives expression to the distance involved, as well as assuaging the hostility by directing it into avenues in which it can be controlled.

For Radcliffe-Brown this set of ideas was no less applicable to the avunculate. He was later (1953) to object with some bewilderment to Dumont's argument (1953) that sister's son and mother's brother were really affines, but even he recognized that the relationship stemmed from the marriage of ego's (i.e. the sister's son's) parents. However, Radcliffe-Brown had also identified, quite correctly, the fact that the dichotomy between joking and respect or avoidance was also very commonly one between sets of alternating generations (another matter I shall return to). That is to say, relations between parents and children entail authority and hence exclude joking, but relations between grandparents and grandchildren normally exclude authority and are easier; indeed, not even sexual joking is necessarily excluded. The avunculate, however, is an apparent exception, in that joking takes place between referents of adjacent generations—mother's brother is of the parents' generation in relation to ego. Radcliffe-Brown's explanation starts with the observation that ego's mother is inclined to be less authoritarian than his father; he then combines two favourite concepts of his, the 'extension of sentiments' and the 'unity of the sibling group', and finally, he argues that ego's easier sentiment towards his mother is transferred on to her brother, who indulges ego's insults and violations of his property out of regard for ego's mother, his sister.

Radcliffe-Brown here edges very close to psychological explanations of the social quite at variance with the Durkheimian tradition that he was otherwise so anxious to promote. He also betrays the legacy of Malinowski's teaching, in which the nuclear family was the foundation of everything else, by a series of extensions outwards. Moreover, Radcliffe-Brown's explanation, though intended to be a universal one, is really only good for patrilineal societies, or at any rate for

those in which mother's brother has a non-authoritarian role; and even in these there is much variation in practice. His idea of the resolution of potential conflict is also brought into doubt, if sentiment is enough to drive ego to destroy his maternal uncle's property.

Radcliffe-Brown was later to see the position of the mother's brother as an ambivalent one, rather than one of just indulgence towards his nephew. There is now 'both attachment...and separation', for although the relationship remains indulgent, ego is an outsider to his mother's brother's descent group—put another way, there is both conjunction *and* disjunction. One notices that sentiment and extensionism are still present in this revised theory. What the joking relationship is really intended to express or resolve in such a multivalent relationship suddenly becomes very unclear, making either it or the explanation itself superfluous.

III

Though usually bracketed with the descent theorists in the great kinship debates of the 1950s and after, Radcliffe-Brown allowed at least a moderate degree of importance to the institution of marriage, and more generally, affinity. Its importance was dramatically increased by one later writer, and suppressed entirely by another. Lévi-Strauss (1968 [1945]) accepted Radcliffe-Brown's basic precept that the joking relationship, or rather what he called the 'system of attitudes' as a whole, was designed 'to ensure group cohesion and equilibrium'. But against Radcliffe-Brown he argued that the avunculate, or its absence, could not be traced to the presence of patrilineal and matrilineal descent respectively. Indeed, in these terms its presence could not be predicted, as even Radcliffe-Brown had recognized: but what could be predicted was the fact that if the father-son relationship was one of authority in any one society, the mother's brother-sister's son relationship would be indulgent, and vice versa—whatever the content of these two relationships, they were always contrasted.

This Radcliffe-Brown would have accepted, though it cannot really be said that it has been borne out ethnographically as an invariable rule. But for Lévi-Strauss, the structure was the important thing: it was not a matter of mother's brother and sister's son only, but of ego's mother and father too—the famous 'atom of kinship', from which all elementary structures derive. Here, the incest taboo and exogamy are both accounted for, as Lévi-Strauss intended. Moreover, in an elementary structure (or, if one prefers, with cross-cousin marriage), the mother's brother pre-exists the marriage that carries the structure forward into future generations—thus there is no 'problem' of the mother's brother to be explained, as there had been for Radcliffe-Brown and other early writers. Similarly, Lévi-Strauss demolished the problem of the relation between behaviour and kinship terminology, which for Radcliffe-Brown had meant seeing the latter as a mere

epiphenomenon of the former. Instead, Lévi-Strauss regarded the two as interdependent, though not homologous, since their configurations did not match entirely, as Radcliffe-Brown had assumed. Unfortunately, Lévi-Strauss did not go beyond his basic point of view, that the two were to be seen as separate but related systems obeying a common underlying structure.

Jack Goody criticized this point of view for its concentration on the senior generation at the expense of the vertical, i.e. intergenerational, dimension. For Goody, marriage and affinity had nothing to do with the matter—nor, we may add, with virtually anything else—it was descent that was important. In an article published in 1959 he compared two Ghanaian societies, the LoWiili, with patrilineal inheritance rules, and the LoDagaba, with matrilineal ones (they both had double unilineal descent in Goody's words, i.e. both patrilineal and matrilineal descent groups). Indeed, for him the descent group was defined by the fact that it held material property in common. In a society with patrilineal descent groups, a male ego's mother has no rights or property to transmit to him directly, through matrilineal inheritance. However, he has 'residual rights' in his mother's patrilineal descent group, i.e. from his mother's brother, and it is this that the avunculate, with its ritual stealing, expresses. This really explains nothing, since no reason is given why the exchange should take this extraordinary form, and not merely consist in a direct transfer with or without ritual. Goody realizes that this will not work for matrilineal societies, and here he invokes just such an ordinary and, one may say, normally surreptitious transmission of property between father and son as the counterpart to the avunculate and its 'ritual stealing'. It is well known, or course, that fathers in a matrilineal milieu often seek to divert some of their property to their own children despite matrilineal inheritance rules, which they often break in doing so, and Goody admits that there is nothing ritualized about this among the LoDagaba.

Dumont (1961) heavily criticized this attempt to interpret a privileged relationship *between* descent groups as what he called a matter of substance, i.e. as a matter of ego's relationship with his mother's brother, regardless of the marriage of his parents. He stresses, as Hocart did, the ritual aspect of the relationship. For example, among the LoWiili, 'the sister's son has not only the right to "snatch a leg of the sacrifice" but also the duty to perform certain ritual services which have for their effect the making of "hot things cool", that is to say of calming the anger of his uncle's ancestors' (ibid.: 79). Whereas Goody had separated them, Dumont, quite properly, wants to consider them together. For Dumont, 'the "snatching" is a privilege rather than a residue, a ritual recognition of the indispensability of the nephew' (ibid.), and, more generally, it 'affirms in the face of the corporateness of the lineage the necessity of a help from outside' (ibid.), i.e. the ultimate dependence of lineages on one another for marriage partners. Among the LoDagaba, with their matrilineal rules of descent, there is a parallel relationship, involving what Goody merely calls a 'joking partner'. Here, obviously, though Goody chooses to ignore it, is the true analogue of the avunculate in this society; residual inheritance has nothing to do with the matter.

In passing from Goody to Dumont, we are passing from descent theory back to alliance theory, and thus also back to Lévi-Strauss. It is with the alliance theorists that we encounter attempts to interpret joking relationships in general, both symmetric and asymmetric—not just the avunculate, as was the case with the British school, excepting, to some extent, Radcliffe-Brown.

Both Lévi-Strauss and Dumont were, of course, pupils of Marcel Mauss. Mauss (1928) was perhaps the first to point out the extent to which joking was a form of social control—in ridiculing behaviour, one could direct it. More fundamentally—and in line with the arguments of his most famous and influential work, *The Gift*—he regarded joking as a form of exchange. Joking relations corresponded to reciprocal rights. If these rights were unequal, the joking relationship would be asymmetric, as was the case with the avunculate; and this asymmetry he explained through a ‘religious [or, as we would probably prefer to say today, ‘ritual’] inequality’. Radcliffe-Brown was soon to add to this that avoidance could also be interpreted as a form of exchange, and he offered examples (1940: 207-8; see also 1952: 102). Thus among the Zande of the Southern Sudan, blood-brotherhood and the exchange of names involves joking; among the Yarlde of South Australia, on the other hand, it goes with avoidance. Here, in fact, we have the elements of a system of contrasts involving the whole of society.

And what is the basis of this system of contrasts? For Mauss, it can be summed up in one word, marriageability—not, let us note straightaway, marriage, for actual marriage partners rarely seem to have a relationship of *public* joking at any rate. Thus one jokes with potential marriage partners (e.g. cross cousins) but avoids, or treats respectfully, those with whom marriage and sexual contact are quite out of the question (e.g. one’s mother or mother-in-law). Actually, it is not enough to say simply this, for marriageability normally only applies to opposite-sex relationships. To take account of *same*-sex ones, one needs to shift away from considering marriageability towards considering relations of actual or potential affinity in the global sense intended by Dumont: thus, cross-culturally, brothers-in-law are more likely to joke than brothers. Yet even this is insufficient, for there are many exceptions; for instance, in many societies one may not joke with one’s father-in-law any more than with one’s father. To show more exactly what is involved, we need to examine a particular ethnographic example. I have chosen that provided by the Juang, a tribal group of central India (see McDougal 1964; see also Parkin 1988, 1992: ch. 9).

IV

The Juang divide the universe of kin in two different ways, one vertical, the other horizontal. The vertical dichotomy separates agnates, called *kutumb*, from

potential and actual affines, called *bondhu*. The horizontal dichotomy is really one between sets of alternating generations. One set consists of the generations adjacent to ego's, i.e. those of his parents and children. The other set connects ego's own generation with alternating ones, i.e. those of his grandparents and grandchildren. These two generation sets have no specific names, though they are called generically *bhaiguli*, literally 'group of brothers'. Combining the two dichotomies gives a fourfold classification, though these are not sociocentric classes of the sort well known in Australia.

Juang marriage is a matter of what McDougal calls 'classificatory sister exchange' between patrilineal local descent groups residentially grouped into villages. The prescribed category of spouse is a *saliray*, which although translatable not as 'cross cousin' but as 'sibling's spouse's sibling', still expresses a situation in which groups of siblings intermarry. In terms of the two dichotomies outlined above, one can only marry an opposite-sex referent who is a *bondhu* relative and who belongs to one's own generation set. And this includes the whole of that set in principle, including the alternating generations. The term *saliray*, like many other Juang kin terms, covers kin types not only in ego's generation but also in the alternating ones, such as (in the case of *saliray*) father's mother's younger sister and son's son's wife's younger sister. There are, none the less, certain exceptions. For example, a wife's younger sister is marriageable (normally in a second marriage) but a wife's elder sister is not. Marriage to a *kutumb*, i.e. an agnatic relative, or with a member of the opposite generation set is formally not allowed, though the second of these rules is frequently violated.

Joking and non-joking broadly follow this structure: joking is basically confined to one's own generation set and to *bondhu* relatives, restraint being appropriate with agnates and all of the opposed generation set. Joking takes place especially on such ritual occasions as the mutual dancing visits between affinally linked villages, at which parents literally capture visiting girls as brides for the youth of their village. While there is no regular feuding, affinal villages are prone to quarrel as well as to marry and joke, and some supposedly *kutumb* villages are actually originally *bondhu* villages with whom one's own has quarrelled.

Let us take matters one generation set at a time. As regards the consanguines of one's father's generation, the greatest respect is reserved for one's father, one's father's elder brother and his wife, and one's father's elder sister. Relations with one's mother's sisters and their husbands are a little easier, since they normally live elsewhere and have no authority over one, but there is still no joking. There is no avunculate, but the villages of a mother's brother and a sister's son owe each other ritual services and prestations at life-crisis rites. Classificatory father's younger brothers are often in practice joking partners, especially since, despite belonging to the generation above ego's, they may in fact be younger. But the joking is milder than it is within ego's generation set—it is only verbal, not also physical, and only takes place between same-sex referents, not across the sex line. Moreover, it is purely informal and does not take place on ritual occasions, when the two generation sets are rigorously opposed to one another. As regards affines

of one's father's or children's generation, however, there are no exceptions to the rule of non-joking, and across the sex line (e.g. a male ego with his mother-in-law or son's wife) relations approach total avoidance.

Thus joking, especially formalized joking on ritual occasions, is confined to one's own *bhaiguli*. Yet even here there are particular exceptions, and again, especially across the sex line. Though the generation of one's grandparents is usually a suitable one to joke with, there can be no joking between a woman and her father's father or a man and his mother's mother, since these are classed as agnates. On the other hand, classificatory mother's father for a woman, and classificatory father's mother for a man, are *bondhu* relatives and potential marriage partners (they may in fact be roughly the same age as ego).

Ego's level is similarly complicated. Primary joking partners are those belonging to the class of potential spouses, mostly *saliray* or sibling's spouse's siblings (more specifically, elder sibling's spouse's younger siblings), together with their opposite-sex siblings, who are, of course, ego's same-sex siblings-in-law. Also, joking partners are wife's younger sister and husband's younger brother, who are potential second spouses for male and female ego respectively. However, wife's elder sister and husband's elder brother are banned as both marriage and joking partners, partly because, like elder siblings generally, they tend to be assimilated to the parents' generation: an elder brother is, in this society and in much of India generally, the 'natural' heir to one's father, as is husband's elder brother to one's husband's father. There is no real joking between spouses or between siblings, i.e. within the nuclear family, even within one's own generation (this being common cross-culturally according to Apte (1985)), where relations may be described as neutral.

The most marked joking, and the most marked avoidance, undoubtedly occurs with opposite-sex *bondhu* relatives, according to whether or not such relatives are also potential spouses. Joking and avoidance between same-sex *bondhu* relatives follows this pattern, being applied respectively to the analogous same-sex relatives according to relative age (i.e. you may joke with wife's younger brother as well as wife's younger sister, but not with wife's elder brother any more than with wife's elder sister). Relations between agnates tend to be more neutral, especially within the nuclear family, i.e. non-joking does not necessarily imply avoidance, nor even great respect, as among siblings. Thus among the Juang the joking/non-joking dichotomy broadly reflects the social structure, but is more marked where relations are potentially or actually affinal, whether particular referents are marriageable or strictly not marriageable.

V

It is evident from Mauss's review (1928) that the explanation for joking in terms of potential or actual affinity can be applied very widely to kinship-based societies,

even those lacking the positive marriage rules of the Juang or similar groups. In such societies, potential affines, and actual non-affines, are usually clearly defined, and joking and non-joking express not the individual's personality but a kinship role that is very often shared with others. Joking is characteristically ritualized and takes place especially on ritual occasions and between well-defined groups, not purely between individuals—this in itself, of course, promotes group definition. It is often, as well, an ingredient of the equation between marrying and fighting that is frequently found in the anthropological literature, especially in societies with positive marriage rules.

Comparisons between ritual and drama are perhaps too obvious to be more than commonplace. None the less, one is reminded of Mauss's later work on the category of the person (1938), in which the individual exists less than his *personnage* (literally 'role'), i.e. his position in society, especially the kinship structure. Mauss was fascinated by the mask as representing different roles, and by the recirculation of the same souls through different generations, uniting different physical individuals. He might have added joking as another manifestation of the role. For Mauss, history had progressively weakened the *personnage* and allowed the development of the individual personality in its place. Of course, history—to continue in Mauss's evolutionary spirit for a moment—has also progressively devalued kinship as the basis of social organization. With marriage choices in the West no longer confined by kinship category or any other injunction, except negatively, there has ceased to be a class of potential affines or of potential spouses. Put another way, this potential now lies in the whole of society, apart from a few near kin types, and even outside it. Marriage—to the extent that it is still regarded as essential at all—is now a matter of property considerations or romantic love (or at least companionship), certainly not of category or of structural segment. And affinity has to obey the same chance factors, since it only exists after the marriage has been concluded, not also before, not even potentially in any meaningful sense. Joking has become similarly arbitrary, a matter of personal relations even within groups of people not otherwise internally differentiated. If any comprehensive explanation for joking in modern societies is ever to be produced, it will have to be couched in terms of structures of a different sort from those obtaining among kinship-based societies; and in a society like ours, these are generally very elusive.

Finally, what of the importance of joking to anthropology itself? It cannot be said that joking has generated any special theory to explain itself: rather, it has been used to illustrate theoretical approaches that had already been developed for other reasons. We have mentioned many examples here: the 'age of matriarchy' theory, Rivers's cross-cousin marriage theory, Mauss's theory of exchange, Radcliffe-Brown's theory of social cohesion, Lévi-Strauss's structuralism, Goody's descent theory and Dumont's alliance theory. Despite their often profound differences, most of the figures we have been discussing—except, in their different ways, Hocart, Bateson and Lévi-Strauss—are linked by one thing: their devotion to the study of social structure to the exclusion, relatively speaking, of ritual. That

is to say, ritual is seen consistently as an epiphenomenon of the social structure, however the latter may be interpreted, and has no existence apart from it—it merely supports it. Joking, however, belongs in the domain of ritual, and its study has suffered accordingly.

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