

Modern Art and Radcliffe–Brown's Scientific Aesthetics

Isak Niehaus

Brunel University of London

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Introduction

In recent years social theorists have explored how ways of seeing have shaped the production of anthropological knowledge. As fieldworkers went out to observe for themselves, Anna Grimshaw (2001) suggests, vision came to stand at the very heart of the discipline. Vision not only operates as technique; it also stands as a metaphor for ways of knowing the world. Historians of anthropology have described the mutual influence between anthropologists and the greatest avant-garde artists in Paris. Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, George Braque and Alberto Giacometti regularly attended the Musée d'ethnographie du Trocadéro then the Musée de l'Homme and were deeply inspired by the objects on display, which they saw as pieces of exotic art that contained a repository of spiritual values lost in the West (Delpuech, Laurière & Peltier-Caroff 2017; Kuper 2019). Anthropologists such as Michel Leiris, Marcel Griaule and Claude Lévi-Strauss saw themselves as part of this movement, and their engagement with these artists shaped the work they produced. Lévi-Strauss, for example, claimed that the conceptual rather than perceptual emphasis of cubists and surrealist artists, inspired his understanding of aesthetic experience (Wiseman 2007).

Likewise, I see a deep affinity between art and the anthropological work of Alfred Radcliffe-Brown, and suggest that modern art was a deep inspiration for the structural functionalist work that he pioneered. This suggestion is somewhat counter-intuitive, given that revisionist scholars frequently conceive of Radcliffe-Brown as a diehard positivist, whose work is a far cry from the humanistic approaches we associate with literature and the arts (Rosaldo 1989). Grimshaw (2001) goes as far as to describe Radcliffe-Brown's approach as a kind of 'iconophobia', that was condemnatory of the deceptive qualities of images (p. 5). She claims that he subscribed to an Enlightenment vision, which posited that the world 'out there' had to

be rendered transparent through the light of reason, scientific knowledge and precise concepts (p. 58).

Radcliffe-Brown's commitment to Enlightenment ideals was not inimical to his interest in the arts (see Eagle 2011). Based on a reading of the archival records, I argue that like many of his French contemporaries, he was deeply reflexive of the metaphysics of vision. Radcliffe-Brown did not only advocate the use of scientific methods in social anthropology, but was also a proponent of the modernist artistic tendency, which opposed photographic realism, vagueness, sentimentalism and an excess of detail. Instead, he advocated abstraction based on a systemic method of composition and expressed a preference for hard lines and definite forms. Modern art, he argued, was in concert with the 'scientific spirit of the time'. I suggest that the continuity between his views on anthropology are most apparent in *The Social Organisation of Australian Tribes* (1931). The monograph exhibits a peculiar 'scientific aesthetic', which seeks to elucidate structural forms underlying everyday social interaction, and is based on the same minimalism and abstraction he advocated for the arts.

Radcliffe-Brown's Evolving Interests in the Arts, 1890–1925

In a letter to Alfred Kroeber [1], written after his retirement, Radcliffe-Brown [2] traced his abiding interest in the arts to his early studies at the Commercial Travellers' School in Middlesex. He gained admission to this institution, which provided 'clothing, maintenance and education' for 'destitute orphans', after his father's death in 1890 (Maddock 1995a: 31). Here the young Rex (as he was known to friends) sat examinations in science and arts, and excelled in chemistry, mathematics, and model drawing. To Kroeber, he recalled, he saw an affinity between the deeper structure of natural phenomena and certain artistic representations. He was fascinated by the structure of molecules, the key to understanding chemical phenomena, and by finite forms in painting. 'Heretically, at the time, I came to prefer Ver Meer [Vermeer] to Rembrandt, and Cotman to Turner, and Cézanne came as a relief after Monet'.

Later, during his schooling at King Edward VI School in Birmingham, and studies at Trinity College in Cambridge, Rex's artistic interests expanded into new directions. With his brother, Herbert, who later became a mining surveyor in South Africa, he shared a passionate interest in literature and music [3]. As a member of the school's debating society, Rex extolled the virtues of Charles Dickens' writings. He argued that Dickens drew his characters from real life and used exaggeration to bring out their humour.

Yet it is at Cambridge that he learned to appreciate non-Western artistic traditions [4]. As part of his diploma, he read Alfred Haddon's 'The Decorative Arts of Primitive People', a module illustrated by lantern slides. Haddon, who had himself once worked as a draftsman, was fascinated by decorative designs and by ritual performances in the Torres Straits Islands. Haddon recognised the central importance of artistic representations in social life and wrote: 'the paraphernalia of nearly every ceremony of all peoples awakens deep religious sentiment in the true believer, who, when duly instructed, beholds in them a symbolism that visualises the sacred legends and aspirations of his community' (Haddon 1912: 51).

Radcliffe-Brown's friends, such as the zoologist, Grant Watson, were astonished by his versatility in the arts: 'I have never known any man read poetry better. He read Shelley and

Keats, and André Gide, also he shared my interests in George Meredith's poems' (Watson 1946: 84). Moreover, Watson observed that Radcliffe-Brown had cultivated a peculiar personal style, which, much like minimalism in art, shunned all redundancies. 'No time should be wasted; everything should be done according to a conscious plan. The irrelevant should be ignored and thoughts that might otherwise be squandered employed elsewhere' (Watson 1946: 85).

During his fieldwork in the Andaman Islands (1906–1908), and in Western Australia (1910–1912), Radcliffe-Brown paid meticulous attention to material culture and the decorative arts. He made a series of extremely accurate sketches of clothing and personal adornments, domestic utensils and hunting technologies in the Andaman Islands, which served as the basis of his MA dissertation.

He also wrote a thirty-page manuscript on string figures that women and children made for personal amusement [5]. Radcliffe-Brown drew precise illustrations of twenty figures (including the moon, fish, civet cat, crow, monitor lizard, rat, turtle, pigeon, hornet's nest and bamboo water vessel), and described the procedures by which they are made in great detail. The manuscript was part of a broader discussion on the relation between mathematics and the arts. Haddon postulated that occurrence of string figures in unrelated societies demonstrated a fundamental unity in mental processes, and Radcliffe-Brown's tutor, William Rouse Ball, described the creation of string figures as a form of 'recreational mathematics'. Rouse Ball was impressed by their geometric shapes and saw the step-by-step operations involved in their manufacture as akin to algorithms, in which openings were starting points for many possibilities (Vandendriessche 2014).

In Western Australia, Radcliffe-Brown collected diverse sets of information on decorative designs and the arts. He observed that Aboriginal designs frequently constitute geometric forms built up from smaller units and concentric circles. The meanings of these representations, like works of modern art, were not obvious and had to be interpreted. He also witnessed the dramatic performances at corroborees, where local groups converge to initiate young men into religious mysteries. At these performances, the words and melodies of every song, the costumes and designs of the dancers, and their gestures allude to events of the world dawn. He also made wax recordings of the music. On the Bernier Island, used as a lock-up facility for Aboriginal people with venereal disease, he obliged research participants to sing songs of Woggura (Crow) and Wallardoo (Eagle-hawk) clans into a phonograph. He in turn regaled them with Peer Gynt and Tannhauser and Egmont, to which they listened politely (Bates 1938:101). These recordings are currently housed in the British Library.

Upon his return from the field, he gave a lecture at Birmingham University, in which he reflected on the 'development of art'. In the lecture, he distinguished between 'temporal art', included dancing, music and poetry, and 'spatial art', which embraced ornaments, painting, sculpture and architecture. Radcliffe-Brown saw rhythm as the elementary form of temporal art, from which musical melody developed, and he argued that the original dance, accompanied by song, developed into a religious drama, such as found in ancient Greece [6].

Radcliffe-Brown as Art Critic, 1914–1925

Radcliffe-Brown first associated with artists when he worked as a replacement teacher in

Sydney during the First World War. As a member of a literary society, the Casuals Club, he befriended the brothers Lionel and Norman Lindsay, who were Australia's most well-known cartoonists and illustrators.

In 1917, he wrote an appreciation of Norman Lindsay's watercolours. Rather than commenting on Lindsay's controversial depiction of nudes, he focuses on the artists' interest in the problem of surface. Radcliffe-Brown argues that in Lindsay's pen drawings, lines that mark the outlines of things guide our eye. By even tones, laid in pen, he attains the effects of distance and texture. In Lindsay's watercolours, an interest in colour replaces his earlier interest in light. He guides the eye through a cunning arrangement of light and shadow. This is evident in the background of his painting, *A Roman Night*, in which he attains tone by means of wash (Brown 1917).

Radcliffe-Brown also wrote a letter to a Melbourne-based newspaper, in which he complained about the display of Rodin's *Head of Minerva* in the National Gallery [7]. 'Owing to the position in which it is placed', he writes, 'it is absolutely impossible for the visitor to see the qualities it possesses'. 'The head is too low; the background against which it is seen is extremely bad; the direction of the main light is not good; and the poor tone of reflected light robs the shadows of their beauty.'

His interest in the arts persisted when he worked as professor of social anthropology at the University of Cape Town in South Africa (1921–25). Here, he participated in the Mimmers Club, which performed traditional mimes and plays [8], joined the Shakespeare Society, and took up ballroom dancing. He also befriended the wealthy Strubens family, who acted as a patron of artists (Maddock 1995b:26) and stood as a model for the sculptor, Moses Kottler, and for the painter Kathleen Allnatt. These works were both displayed in Johannesburg's art galleries [9].

Radcliffe-Brown's emerging stature as art critic was apparent on 5 June 1921, when he addressed the South African Society of Artists on the topic of *Art and Life*. In the talk he started with the Chinese proverb: 'You can judge a king by the state of dancing during his reign'. Likewise, we can judge civilizations by the state of their arts. This is because art is the medium by which people express their ideals, aspirations and spiritual values. He argued that a wide sense of dissatisfaction throughout the world indicated that there was something wrong in the relation between art and life. In great periods of civilization, art ran through the whole of life. In ancient Greece, China, Japan, and in the Gothic age, people impressed everything they made with beauty – including hinges, ironworks and nails. Today, however, we keep art for special days and look for beauty only in picture galleries and concerts. We are swamped with ugliness. 'Cape Town was a beautiful site, and yet, what have we done to it – it was largely a city of corrugated iron and slums.' 'The only beautiful things are old buildings and old furniture'. 'We need new ideals, and in this respect, the artist is more important than the politician in building a strong South African nation' [10].

A Bohemian in Sydney, 1926–1931

Radcliffe-Brown's most intense activism for modern arts occurred during his tenure as professor of social anthropology at the University of Sydney. At the university he associated himself with an 'enlightened' group of staff, and in the city, he lived a vigorous Bohemian

lifestyle, enjoyed by writers and artists. Being recently divorced, he took up residence in a converted ballroom of the Oxford Hotel in Darlington. He decorated the room with Chinese furniture and installed a piano, 'on which he played, with no great skill, but considerable feeling' (Firth 1956: 295-296). He also regularly frequented the Bohemian haunt, Pakies, with Roy de Maistre, Australia's greatest authority on modern art (Maddock 1995b: 28).

At the University, which was without a lecturer in fine art, Radcliffe-Brown became a spokesperson for artistically inclined students. He was either president or vice president of the Art Club, Dramatic Society and Musical Society, and he formed the Five Arts Club to promote creative debate among artists, architects, writers and musicians. Because all arts are founded on much the same principles, he argued, 'students of painting and sculpture do not lose anything in being interested in the other arts' [11].

In a public lecture, he again identified rhythm as 'the thread that connected all aspects of human life and creativity'. Blood pumps in time to the beating of a drum, and the arts harness and mimic its marching rhythm. This is apparent in the rhythmic dances, drawings, and dramatic improvisations of Australian Aboriginal peoples and Pacific Islanders. Modern artistic compositions and designs, too, mimicked rhythmic waves of sound and light. They described a natural order, recently qualified by science [12]. His associate, Roy De Maistre, too, perceived connections between the spectrum of colours and scale of musical notes. De Maistre applied musical theory to his paintings and chose colours to harmonise like notes to music (Alderton 2011: 243).

In Sydney he renewed his friendship with Lady Enid de Chair, a daughter of the Strubens family from Cape Town, who had married Sir Dudley de Chair, then governor of New South Wales. Lady de Chair regularly hosted visiting painters, musicians, actors and ballet dancers. She and Radcliffe-Brown were most closely associated with a group of Australian painters, that included Roy de Maistre, Margaret Preston, George Lambert, Grace Crossington-Smith, Elliot Gunner, Vida Lakey, Kenneth McQueen, John Moore, Adelaide Perry, Thea Proctor, Sydney Smith and Ronald Wakelin. These artists took delight in post-impressionist, cubist and futuristic designs.

Radcliffe-Brown's scientific credentials and verbal eloquence made him an ideal speaker for Australia's modern art movement. At the opening of art exhibits he often lamented the conservatism of the Australian public and praised the artists as 'moral pioneers' [13]. He explained that modern artists hated vagueness, smoothness and sentimentality. 'They always tried to be clear cut, and definite... Their technique was always strong and hard'. Moreover, he argued that modern art allied to the scientific spirit of the time and appealed to the viewer's intellect rather than emotions. 'Above all, they wanted to make people think – and this was a very difficult matter when the majority wished nothing more than to escape from the trouble of thinking'. By painting commonplace things, such as kitchen utensils, modern artists showed their qualities of workmanship and avoided subjects such as bunches of flowers and the faces of pretty girls, that arouse sentimental reflections. The works of some German painters had even become brutal. Still, brutality was a good antidote to the over-sentimental [14].

He also defended the principle of artistic abstraction. Radcliffe-Brown argued that distortion was unavoidable when representing solid bodies on a two-dimensional surface. It was all a

matter of usage. When the emperor of China first saw European drawings, he wanted to know whether the one side of the faces of Europeans was darker than the other. The European convention of shadow baffled him because it was unknown in Chinese art. Even the camera distorted reality: if anyone took a photograph of a person who had their feet close to the lens, the feet would come out grotesquely huge' [15].

Radcliffe-Brown's vision of art was truly cosmopolitan, and he criticised the Australian government's decision to treat works of art as a luxury for tariff purposes. To develop a soul, he argued, Australians had to appreciate the arts of other nations. 'I cannot tell you to look at the pictures of great painters, because they are not here. Nor can I tell you to listen to music, ancient and modern, because it simply is not played here' [16]. He also promoted an appreciation for the arts of Aboriginal peoples, and commented that the 'remarkable agility of performance' in their ritual performances 'left him breathless' [17]. He also helped organize the first exhibition of Aboriginal art, which opened in a Melbourne gallery on 16 July 1929. On exhibit were a series of drawings, paintings, engravings, decorated shields, carved trees, and ceremonial objects. Two Arunta/Aranda (Arrernte) artists demonstrated how they made string ornaments and carvings, and Radcliffe-Brown's Australian student, Adolphus Elkin, gave an illustrated lecture on cave art in the Kimberley district [18].

The Australian public did not take kindly to these views. In a lecture at the National Gallery, Dattilo Rubbo castigated Radcliffe-Brown's arguments about realistic and romantic art styles as 'hymns of hate'. He held for inspection a cubist reproduction and exclaimed, 'To my mind drawings like these are only fit for the incinerator' [19]. A columnist of *The Australian Worker* wrote that in asserting that modern artists hated sentimentality, Radcliffe-Brown implied that they hated beauty. 'Wherever beauty is, sentiment is not far away' [20].

Radcliffe-Brown was also an activist for the dramatic arts. He was renowned as a talented impersonator, and as a clever amateur actor, who read Hamlet in a pageant staged at the Repertory Theatre. In 1929, he was elected to chair the Turret Theatre Dramatic Club, which had about 350 members. The club converted the old council's chambers at Milton's Point into a playhouse. [21] They staged a rendition of Alfred Hill's Māori opera, *Teora* (1913), and hosted a competition of one-act plays. Radcliffe-Brown presented the winning prize to A.L. Woollacott for *The Traitor*. The work portrays the fervent, yet totally ineffective, efforts by a group of extreme socialists to remould the destinies of the commonwealth [22].

Modernist Aesthetics I: The Science of Art

Radcliffe-Brown's contribution to the development of a modernist scientific aesthetic in art is most apparent in his engagements with the works of Aletta Lewis and Margaret Preston,

In Sydney, Radcliffe-Brown acted as mentor for Aletta Lewis, a British painter in her mid-twenties. She painted portraits of him and of the American anthropologist Lloyd Warner. He suggested that she should go to Samoa to paint and introduced her to Margaret Mead, who was in Sydney at the time. Radcliffe-Brown also took her to a trade store to purchase items that would appeal to Samoans as gifts (Lewis 1938: x-xii). At the opening exhibit of her Samoan paintings, he praised Lewis' 'sincere attempt to understand people she did not know.' [23]. He also defended her strong colours and boldly decisive strokes, which he said would not raise any controversy in Europe. Lewis' excursion to Samoa demonstrates the

affinity between the observations and representations of the painter and those of the ethnographer. Radcliffe-Brown saw her paintings as a contribution to the emerging science of anthropology. Lewis subsequently wrote an illustrated monograph on her observations in Samoa, entitled *They Called Them Savages* (1938).

Radcliffe-Brown also endorsed the views of the Australian painter, Margaret Preston, who advocated a systemic approach to artistic composition. She was one of the most original thinkers among Australia's artists. Preston studied painting and poster design during successive tours of Munich, Paris and London, but her interests transcended the concerns of European art. Through the work of Fernand Léger, she learned to appreciate the Japanese treatment of interior spaces as a series of interrelated open boxes, and was inspired by Pablo Picasso and Paul Nash's emulation of non-Western artistic styles. At home, she suggested that white Australian painters could utilize the designs of Aboriginal peoples, who had refined a succinct code of symbols to represent the Australian landscape, to create a national tradition. In her paintings, she synthesised the use of a reductive modernist approach with Japanese boxes, and Aboriginal symbols, such as the gum leaf, narrow triangle, deep curving boomerang and circle. She also emulated the use of sharp contrast of red, yellow and brown ochres in Aboriginal art (Thomas 1999; Eagle 2011).

Moreover, Preston compared her work as a modern painter in the studio, with that of the scientist in the anatomical laboratory [24]. Like science, she argued, modern art concerned itself with problems of relationships and of structure. Whereas culture is orientated towards the past and directs our energies inwards, science is revolutionary and directs our attention outwards. 'The world that science is making', she wrote, 'may be disgusting, but it is the world in which we live' (Preston 1927: 2). In her later works, Preston no longer painted in a realistic style but broke down her compositions into basic elements and used clearly separate tone areas and a limited palette of colours. Her painting, *Banksia* (1927) exemplifies this approach. She portrays a complementary contrast between the multiple circles of the plant; the three-dimensional cylindrical forms of the vases; and the plain and solid surfaces and cubed forms of the interior. Her style is economical, and her compositions reflect more than the subjects she paints (Eagle 2011: 28).

Radcliffe-Brown (1927) situates Preston's work in the context of an international transformation in spirit and vision, and mode of expressing this vision. He argues that the late nineteenth century was dominated by romantic literature, symbolist poetry, Wagnerian music, and impressionist art. Impressionists preferred atmosphere to outline; their designs were soft, fluid, and porous; and they focused on momentary, fugitive, and individual aspects of nature. A new movement had started with post-impressionism at the end of that century and come to fruition with modernism in 1910. Its artists focused on what was firm, solid and definite in nature, and reduced landscapes to their essential traits. They unified colour in a few simple tones and rendered their designs 'to contours that approximate elementary geometrical forms' (p. 2). Therefore, their work possessed a constructed quality. Unlike the impressionists, modern artists transposed the permanent and universal aspects of reality. They also appreciated neglected arts, such as those of the East and of 'so-called' 'savage peoples' in Africa, Oceania and America, 'which formerly reposed unnoticed on the shelves of ethnological museums' (p. 3).

Radcliffe-Brown suggests that in her oil painting, *Anemones* (1926), Preston reacts against the

bright, saturated colours of the impressionists. The still life looks to be painted in black and white, but is full of subdued colours. This is a well-established technique in Japanese and Chinese art. By painting commonplace forms of furniture and kitchen utensils, with which we surround ourselves at every turn in modern life, she aims to get rid of the irrelevance of subject (p. 5).

Modernist Aesthetics II: The Art of Science

Radcliffe-Brown did not explicitly acknowledge influences beyond the university halls on his anthropological writings. But his arguments for the interconnectedness of artistic and scientific endeavours does suggest an implicit recognition of the resonances between modern art and his own brand of unsentimental anthropology, aimed at identifying basic structures implicit in social interaction (Eagle 2011).

His critique of impressionist artists, concerned with capturing light and fleeting sensations, also resonates with his critique of the romantic, unscientific work of the amateur ethnographers, Edward H. Man and Daisy Bates. 1910, the year in which he locates the advent of modernism in art, coincides with the publication of Radcliffe-Brown's first writings on the Andaman Islands. Here he dismisses E.H. Man's argument that the Andamanese being, Puluga, is an instantiation of a 'primitive Father God', as unscientific. Instead, he observes, Puluga is female and personifies the monsoon (Brown 1909). He argues that unlike the scientist, Man did not approach the problem with a 'mind free from preconceived opinion'. Moreover, Man failed to follow the scientific procedure of relating the beliefs around Puluga to others in the entire Andamanese mentality, and of comparing those of different Andamanese groups, living in isolation from each other, to search those that are common, and hence original (Brown 1910: 33-34).

Radcliffe-Brown's enmity with Bates during their fieldwork expedition in Western Australia is well-documented and frequently often attributed to political differences (Stocking 1995: 312). However, my reading of the archival record suggests that he was irritated more by Bates' emotional temperament than by her conservatism. Radcliffe-Brown was irked by her excessive talk, her romantic views of Aboriginal peoples, and by her maternal and judgemental attitudes (Watson 1946: 99). These views are apparent when, in a newspaper interview, Bates called Aboriginal people 'simple children', commended their courteous attitude towards each other's ceremonies, and condemned the swearing they learned from 'the bad white fellow' [25]. He was also dismayed by the lack of system that characterised Bates' writing and told Grant Watson that 'the contents of her mind [and manuscript] ...were somewhat similar to the content of a well-stocked sewing basket, after half a dozen kittens had been playing there undisturbed' (Grant Watson 1946: 105).

Bates' temperament contrasts strongly with Radcliffe-Brown's own emotional restraint. He, for example, refrains from any judgement when describing infanticide and endo-cannibalism among Aboriginal peoples. He argues that the former practice is a requirement of a nomadic lifestyle which precludes women from caring for more than one child, and suggests that people ate part of a corpse after burial to strengthen themselves against enemies (Brown 1913a: 143,174). In his writings on Western Australia, Radcliffe-Brown excludes any reference to his personal relations with research participants, refrains from commenting on the

conditions on Bernier and Dorre Islands, and confines himself to a structural analysis of their kinship relations and four-class marriage system (Brown 1913b).

Like the modern artist, Radcliff-Brown searched for essential forms. ‘The purpose of liberal education’, he argued, ‘is not to fill our minds with miscellaneous learning’, but is rather ‘to develop proper intellect’. Instead, a liberal education ‘should teach students proper use of the human intellect, which is to get to the point, disentangle skeins of thought, detect what is significant, and discard the irrelevant’ [26]. He (1926) postulated that it is through the extension of sentiments from the elementary relations between father, mother and child that infinitely complex systems of kinship are built. This trinity comes into being when the child is born. Relations of the first order are those between the parents and the child, the husband and wife, and siblings. Those of the second order, such as the father’s father, are traced through one connecting person. Those of the third order, such as mother’s brother’s son, two connecting links. In each order, the number of relationships are greater than the preceding one. Hence, the logic of kinship resembles that of Andamanese string games, where simple geographic shapes are transformed through step-by-step operations into complex figures.

Radcliffe-Brown’s study, *The Social Organisation of Australian Tribes* (1931) best exemplifies his approach to the study of social life. The work is revolutionary insofar that it is a conceptual rather than perceptual study, that concerns problems of social relationships. It is from a synthesis of ethnographic minutiae that he constructs a ‘systematic catalogue’ of fifty-one tribes, and abstracts models of social structures and basic social laws that underlie everyday social behaviour. The study makes no reference to the particularity of observed events.

Radcliffe-Brown basically argues that all Australian social systems are varieties of a single type. He distinguishes between the ‘family’, ‘horde’ and ‘tribe’ as elementary units of social structure. The family comprises a man, woman and child; and the horde a local group which occupies a specific territory and hunting ground and claims rights to its products. Membership of the horde is usually through patrilineal descent. The tribe connotes a larger unit, comprising those who speak a common language or dialect and share certain customs. It is not a political grouping, and cannot be defined by kinship, because people have kin in different tribes. These units are abstractions, and their precise definitions do not capture the actual fuzzy nature of social boundaries (Peterson 2006).

He then discusses the segmentary structure of Australian tribes, and their division into moieties, sections and sub-sections, sometimes called ‘marriage classes’. In the case of moieties, a member of one segment (e.g. crow) takes a spouse from the other (e.g. white cockatoo). Children belong to either the mother or father, depending on the mode of descent. Where the tribe is divided into four sections, a man may only marry a woman from the section with which he is paired: their child belongs to the third section and may only marry a spouse from the fourth section, with which it is paired. Radcliffe-Brown demonstrates this, with reference to the Kariera, where a Banaka marries a Barung. Their child is called Palyeri, who in turn marries a Karimera.

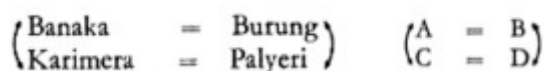


Fig. 1. Example of the segmentary structure in the Kariera tribe (four sections)

A more complex system prevails among tribes such as the Aranda (Arrernte), which are divided into eight subsections. If a man belongs to one subsection, the child belongs to the other subsection of the other (see below).

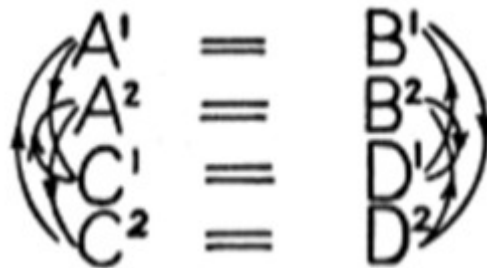


Fig. 2. Example of the segmentary structure in the Arrernte tribe (eight sections)

Australian kinship systems are classificatory and marked by three different principles: the equivalence of siblings, the grouping of affinal with consanguineal relatives, and extensions of the system without limits, so that everyone a person might have contact with was a 'relative of one kind or another' (p. 44).

In the latter part of the work, Radcliffe-Brown investigates the relations between kinship terminologies, principles of classifying kin, and social institutions. He delineates four active principles in the classification of kin, which he seeks to formulate as universal sociological laws. These are: (i) the equivalence of brothers and sisters, as evident in the use of a single term to denote the father and father's brother, and the mother and her sister. These terms correlate with the practice of the levirate and sororate; (ii) the distinction between father, mother and their respective relatives. Here, the differences between the father and mother's brother, and mother and father's sister are vitally important; (iii) the 'relations of authority and subordination' between members of adjacent generations; and the 'social equivalence between those one generation apart'; and (iv) reciprocity in marriage as an instance of a 'wider principle of reciprocity'. Proceeding with the study of relations, Radcliffe-Brown argues that the system of segments makes more definite and permanent an organisation already present in the kinship system. It separates parents and children, who belong to different divisions, and generalises parent-child relationships throughout the whole society. It also brings into one social group grandparents and grandchildren.

Only in the conclusion does Radcliffe-Brown diverge from the synchronicity that characterises modern paintings. He argues that there is constant readjustment in the system, and that forces leading to the contraction and expansion of circles of solidarity tend towards an equilibrium. He, nonetheless, recognises a broadening social integration, through time. We find the most elementary form of integration among the Kariera. Here marriage with the mother's brother's daughter enables a man to establish social relations with his mother's horde. He can also exchange a sister for a wife from a distant horde, which he encounters during a journey he undertakes after initiation. A more complex mode of integration prevails among the Aranda (Arrernte). The selection of the mother's mother's brother's daughter (MMBD) as mother-in-law, brings a man into social relations with four different hordes. In the case of the Yaralde (Jarildekald), where there is no moiety and section organisation, a man connects with all clans of all great-grandparents.

Radcliffe-Brown's interest in the arts did not wane after he departed from Sydney to work at



the University of Chicago (1931–1937) and at Oxford University (1937–1946). He was known to have admired Chicago's minimalist architecture, and the use of structure and function in Frank Lloyd Wright's designs. But Radcliffe-Brown no longer participated in public debates on modernism in the arts, as his prime associates were no longer Bohemian artists, but fellow anthropologists. The emphasis on social structure, nonetheless, continued to characterise his anthropological works.

Conclusions

Today, Radcliffe-Brown's advocacy of positivist anthropology seems at odds with his life as an art critic. This, I feel, is because we align positivism with the physical sciences, and the postmodern orientation of Clifford Geertz and his followers with the humanities, the use of literary metaphors, and with modes of representation (Clifford 1988). However, as studies of the lives and works of individual anthropologists show, these alignments are often more assumed than real.

It is true that anthropologists of the early twentieth century were trained in the physical sciences, and/or appealed to the use of scientific methods in the study of social life. But it is frequently ignored that many showed a parallel interest in modern arts. As I hope to have shown in this biographical essay on the life and works of Radcliffe-Brown, these interests were not always, nor consistently, compartmentalized. This becomes apparent when we juxtapose the artistic works of the Australian modernist painters, Roy De Maistre and Margaret Preston, with his anthropological monograph *The Social Organisation of Australian Tribes* (1931). Their artistic works and his anthropological writings both display a common modernist concern with elementary structures and with problems of relationships.

Perhaps the oddity lies not so much in the perception of an affinity between anthropology with the arts, as with the perception of an affinity between the arts and physical sciences. Radcliffe-Brown unsettled these boundaries and envisioned a scientific aesthetic, as a central feature of modernity. The science of art is apparent when the observations of painters such as Aletta Lewis contribute to the science of anthropology, while others such as Margaret Preston follow procedures similar to those of laboratory scientists in their compositions. The art of science is apparent when anthropological representations of social life exhibit the same minimalism and abstraction encountered in modern paintings, and when scholars contemplate the beauty of mathematical theorem (Radcliffe-Brown 1927).

Radcliffe-Brown's thinking also unsettled the pervasive distinction between 'primitive' and 'civilised' societies. In his thinking, modernity was cosmopolitan rather than Western, and his metaphysics of vision was a universal one, profoundly shaped by his encounters with Andamanese string figures and technologies, and by Australian dances and bora paintings (both directly, and also through the paintings of artists, such as Margaret Preston, that he so admired).

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[1] Letter, A. R. Radcliffe-Brown to Alfred Kroeber, (undated, possibly 1947). Fred Egan Papers, Regenstein Library, University of Chicago.

[2] Born as Alfred Reginald Brown, he changed his surname to Radcliffe-Brown by deed poll in 1921. Radcliffe was the surname of his mother. To eliminate confusion, I use Radcliffe-Brown throughout the paper.

[3] Letter H. Radcliffe-Brown to R. Firth, 1 August 1956. Raymond Firth Papers, London School of Economics (LSE), Manuscripts Library.

[4] *King Edward's School Chronicle* XIV (110), May 1898.

[5] See, A.R. Brown, 'String Figures from the Andaman Islands' (undated, possibly 1910). Radcliffe-Brown papers, Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford.

[6] 'The Development of Art', *The Birmingham Daily Post*, 19 December 1913, p. 6.

[7] A. Radcliffe Brown, Letter to the Editor, *The Age*, 27 January 1920, p. 6.

[8] Letter A.V.H. Carter, Registrar, University of Cape Town, to A. Radcliffe-Brown, Oxford University, 12 January 1951, Senate Library, University of Cape Town.



- [9] 'Exhibition of Pictures' *Rand Daily Mail*, 19 June 1925, p. 4.
- [10] 'Art and Civilization: What is Wrong with the World? Lecture by Professor Radcliffe-Brown'. *The Cape Times*, 5 June 1921.
- [11] 'The Students Club', *Undergrowth*, November–December 1927.
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- [20] 'Just a Word from the Editor: Sentiment and Art' *The Australian Worker*, 2 October 1929, p. 7.
- [21] 'New Turret Theatre Opened in North Sydney', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 March 1929, p. 10.
- [22] 'Play Contest: First Prize to The Traitor', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 December 1930, p. 7.
- [23] 'Scenes in Samoa', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 October 1929.
- [24] 'What is our national art? A lively discussion by Margaret Preston' *Undergrowth*, March-April 1927.
- [25] 'Study of Native Races, Research in Western Australia' *West Australian*, 14 April 1911, p. 5
- [26] 'The Functions of Universities: Professional and Liberal Education: Lecture by Professor Radcliffe-Brown', *The Cape Times*, 16 March 1922, p. 12.