1 Introduction

Aims and objectives

This thesis is concerned with the geography of Australian rural society, focusing on the specifically *social* organisation of space, and the radical changes it is currently experiencing. The study brings together a series of existing and ongoing pieces of research, conducted over a period of some years.

To set the scene, by about 1920 the process of white occupation of South Australia was practically complete. It had produced a metropolitan-dominated city state whose settled areas were occupied by a fully-developed mosaic of rural communities, mostly centred on small to medium sized country towns, and adjusted to a relatively low level of personal mobility and accessibility to the metropolis. The economic functions of the urban system corresponded fairly well to the principles of central place theory, and for many country towns patterns of local social interaction were quite closely attuned to standard weekly shopping patterns. However, particularly from about 1950, advances in technology, mobility, urban accessibility, and scale economies raced well ahead of adjustments to this basically nineteenth-century settlement system, leaving it more and more economically outmoded, but still socially resistant to change. The opposition between the forces of change and of inertia was brought to a head in the period 1984-94 approximately, by what can rightfully be described as a rural crisis, initiating a period – perhaps unprecedented – of extremely rapid and fundamental change over the last twenty-plus years. This crisis, and its lasting impact on the social organisation of space, forms the central focus. of this thesis.

With this background, the thesis has five primary aims.
1. The first is to bring together two relevant but disparate sets of theory that together inform an understanding of the radical changes at present under way. One set seeks to explain the powerful macro-level forces of globalization, tending to *compel* local change. The other deals with the origin and development of a deep sense of place and a collective sense of belonging in rural areas, expressed in the formation of an invisible geography of place-bound or socially defined territorial groupings, and strongly *resistant* to change.
2. The second aim is to capture and map this largely invisible geography of place, belonging and community, as it stood in the early 1980s at the outset of the period of intense change.
3. Informed by the above two areas of theory and spatial patterns the third aim is to trace the origins, course and consequences of the rural crisis of 1984-94, and its impact on rural society – particularly on family farms, rural households and the demographic and social viability of rural communities. During these years several severe droughts, at first localised but later nation-wide, coincided in time with abrupt changes in the fundamental ground rules under which Australian rural

society had operated for four decades, and with a collapse of farm commodity markets.

4. Fourthly, the theoretical and empirical findings are applied to the search for an altered accommodation between society and space, through which a modified and regrouped but still essentially intact rural society can survive beyond the crisis.

5. Finally, I reflect on the methodological contribution and limitations of the thesis, and also on the ethical concerns and values confronting an academic researcher reporting on a local- or micro-level social tragedy, concealed and rationalised by apparent national macro-level success.

The thesis layout and its rationale

The thesis is presented in the form of the present introduction (Chapter 1), which deals with some fundamental concepts and epistemology. This is followed by eight substantive chapters whose sequence broadly follows the sequence of aims set out above.

Chapter 2 sets the scene by presenting a thumbnail sketch of the evolution of the South Australian rural habitat up to the early 1980s - covering almost 150 years of white settlement . This section is based entirely on the many excellent secondary sources available. By outlining the way the natural landscape was occupied, the major demographic phases which accompanied this process, and the economic and climatic cycles which orchestrated it, rural South Australia in the early 1980s is placed in its spatial and temporal setting. The chapter concludes with a demonstration of the way that rural space in the State divides into distinct settlement/demographic zones for analysis.

Chapter 3 explicitly acknowledges that the fortunes of a rural society dependent on export-based commercial agriculture cannot be understood without thorough appreciation of the macro-level forces of world capitalism, the trend to globalisation of agriculture, and the impact of the national and local State, in whose broader economic agendas the rural sector is playing a steadily diminishing, though still important, part. In many ways individual rural communities and even whole rural regions may be compared to small cockleshells swept along in a torrent, at best able to keep afloat and exercise enough steerage discretion to avoid the worst shoals. This chapter, then, examines the large and rapidly growing body of macro-level theory in the structuralist and political economy traditions, which seek to explain and account for the forces giving rise to sweeping changes in those politico-economic ground rules within which rural communities have to operate.

Chapter 4 is a key chapter in establishing my own ethical and epistemological stance, for it seeks to redress the balance between the overpowering macro-theory of the economic rationalists, and theory relating to the world of the individual person and his/her most immediate social reference groups - family, neighbourhood and community. In this chapter I argue the individual's *need* for the local and for the familiar, humanised and meaningful, as expressed in his/her links to place and local social group. A review and re-evaluation of community theory, particularly in the literature of rural sociology, is

undertaken and relevant aspects of it are adopted. This is then followed, and linked into, a review of those aspects of the humanistic literature on place and place-making which bear on the rural person's relationship with the immediate local world. The additional insights which structuration theory offers through the concepts of the locale, and Pred's "contingent becoming of places" are examined, and finally the power of theory relating to human territoriality in explaining place-attachment is investigated. This section concludes with a preliminary statement of what may be a suitable middle way for a geographer seeking to marry macro and micro level theory to achieve understanding.

In Chapter 5, informed by the two preceding theoretical chapters, I move on to establish the way that individuals and local social groups actually occupied space in rural South Australia at the outset of the 1980s. This is based, first, on a series of field studies mapping the perceived identification of rural individuals and households with local social groups and the perceived "places" such groups occupy in space. Such studies were carried out between 1979 and 1986, covering most of the Adelaide Hills, Fleurieu and Yorke Peninsulas and the northern Murray Mallee, in order to give a sample of different population density conditions and different periods of initial European settlement. The second major source for this Chapter is a postal sample survey of 2000 rural households, carried out in late 1982 to early 1983, which gives a spatial overview of rural households' attachment to particular country towns for both social and economic purposes. The same study is used to measure a number of significant qualities of rural communities of identification.

Chapter 6 begins with the national drought of 1982, and traces the chronology of events which brought on a ten-year long period of almost continuous rural crisis beginning from about 1984. Here I seek to integrate the macro-level theory outlined in Chapter 3 into an understanding of how the state of the global economy, and political decisions made at the international, national and State levels, impacted upon real people and real places. The effects of this crisis have been muted by other forces in the peri-urban belt, but have been much greater in the more outlying , cereal/sheep farming based rural regions, such as Eyre Peninsula, which is used as the illustrative case study. The chapter examines the main demographic and economic impacts of the crisis on the country town network at the State scale, using data from the population and retail censuses.

Turning next to the social and individual human changes wrought by the crisis period on the rural society and the social organisation of space, Chapter 7 is based dominantly upon an exact replication, in 1992/93, of the postal survey of 2000 rural households first carried out ten years earlier - using an independent household sample, and supplemented by a number of additional questions. From this survey I demonstrate both the dogged persistence and continuity of major features of the rural society, and the extent to which it has been thinned out and decimated to the point of threatened non-viability of the current spatial organisation. This includes both the strictly social hierarchy of symbolic identity groups, and the economic hierarchy of trade centres. Material from a number of surveys and enquiries carried out by various agencies in 1993/94 is used to demonstrate the development of widespread rural poverty., and the chapter concludes with an assessment

of the extent to which the economic organisation of rural space is diverging from its social organisation

Chapter 8 continues the theme of continuity versus change, at the level of respondents' perceived changes in key community characteristics, and the state of rural morale in 1993. It is based entirely on analysis of the *qualitative* material drawn from the postal survey.

Describing a tragedy without some move toward a better future is a fruitless academic exercise, and in Chapter 9 some of the moves already beginning to shape a somewhat modified , but still distinctive and recognisable, post-crisis rural society are critically examined. In the light of the findings of Chapters 6 to 8, I discuss the requirements for a "socially sustainable" rural Australia, in which the individual's need for the local is reconciled to national and global imperatives. A system of mapping community attachment at several different levels is presented as a fundamental tool for social planning in rural areas. Based on this, the chapter explores the possibility of the widening of the sense of place and of belonging, now anchored to the local community level, to a broader regional level with an appropriate governance structure

Finally in Chapter 10, I assess the broader issues arising from the work, including strengths and weaknesses. Finally, I step back from the particular empirical material and the two (macro and micro, structuralist and humanist) sets of theory brought to bear on it, to reflect on the wider problem of the role academics could, should and do (or could have, should have, and actually did) play in relation to the deeply meaningful social transformations we purport to study.

Some basic concepts

In general, the concepts and terms required for this work are introduced in later chapters as they become relevant. A few concepts, however, are used so pervasively throughout the discussion that the reader needs to have a working definition, at the outset, of what I mean by them.

The word "**community**" has already been used frequently in the discussion above. The concept and the theoretical and empirical research literature surrounding it are discussed in Chapter 4. For the present, it will suffice to define a community as a self-defined locality-based group of people in regular social interaction and sharing a number of centrally-located social (and economic) institutions. A sense of belonging is normally shared by at least a large proportion of the group, but residence in the locality does not automatically confer or imply membership. Normally the communities to be discussed approximate to the social catchments of country towns.

The spatial pattern of community groupings is one aspect of the **"social organisation of space"**. I use this term simply to mean the repetitive interaction patterns formed by individuals as they occupy and move across space in the course of their daily lives, and the associated geography of institutions, human social groupings and the meanings that become attached to them.

"Society" is also frequently used in this chapter. I use it in its traditional sociological sense of a macro-division of humanity into groups sharing a total common life in terms of social, political and legal institutions, dominant language and value systems - normally equating to or even transcending a nation-state in magnitude.

 "Social formations" I use as a generic term including all types of socially defined groups within a society.

"Rural society" is used to refer to that element of the total society which is rural by residential location and/or by origin and personal identification. The use of this term makes no assumption that rural society is a clearly definable entity that can be cordoned off from the rest for analytical treatment, as one might separate oxygen from hydrogen: the processes forming, moving and dispersing an air-mass do not distinguish between the constituent gases. It does, however, imply that there is a fraction of our society which has a different original nature and may be subject to a different constellation of social and economic processes and pressures than those which shape the dominant urban element. In short, it implies acceptance of the validity of "rural" as an analytical category for limited purposes, and also of the proposition that the study of the rural elements of an integrated spatial system can validly be undertaken without in any way denying that the system *is* integrated.

This brings as to the term "**rural**" itself. Fundamental to the whole discussion, this term needs more extensive treatment than the others dealt with above. Its well-known derivation from the Latin adjective *ruralis*, from the noun *rus - ruris*, "the country" carries fewer of the social connotations stereotypically applied to the *inhabitants* of the country than does the closely related adjective "rustic", with its associations of simple, plain, rude, awkward, uncouth, and so on. Nevertheless the word "rural" is generally used to describe people as well as places, social as well as economic attributes, and qualities of human activities and lifestyle as well as qualities of landscape, buildings, settlements and scenery. The very all-embracing character of the word and its widespread and manifold uses in ordinary speech has led many social scientists to question its usefulness as an analytical category, yet the absence of adequate alternatives or synonyms together with the indispensable nature of the concept has, willy-nilly, forced social scientists to continue using it, however coy their initial disclaimers. In the discussion below, I shall assume from the outset that "rural" is a subjective, relative (never absolute) term properly applied to landscapes, land-use, economic activities, settlements and residential locations. It expresses a perceived difference in these phenomena from its polar opposite, "urban", in respect of density of population, size and spacing of settlements, and relative importance of the primary, space-occupying industries in land use and employment.

Remote Australia: The term "rural" has meaning, however, only to landscapes occupied more or less permanently by a settled human population. The moon can not be "rural", nor can Antarctica. The desert and semi-desert areas, along with areas sparsely or

intermittently used for very low-intensity pastoralism may be considered transitional categories, and in this thesis I shall use the increasingly common distinction between "rural" and "remote" Australia. Although there is no sharp boundary, here the term "rural" is reserved for those areas supporting a permanent settlement pattern based on at least occasional cropping and/or sufficient density of population to support a network of service towns supplying most of the weekly service necessities. The dry, pastoral interior has been variously termed the "outback", "sparselands" (Lonsdale and Holmes, 1981; Holmes, 1981), the "rangelands" (Squires and Sidahmed, 1998), the "non-ecumene" (Holmes 1988) or simply "remote Australia". Holmes, in an analysis of critical population densities for various land uses, suggests that a population density of about 8 Km^2 per person separates the Australian ecumene from the non-ecumene.

In the above discussion the terms rural and remote have been applied very much to the habitat for the human population, but the population itself has only been termed "rural" in the narrow locational sense, by place of residence. There is no great disagreement among scholars about this usage. It is a very different matter, however, when it comes to the question of whether rural people have any distinctive sociological or psychological qualities which systematically or predictably distinguish them from urban populations. This question is one of considerable importance to the rationale and purpose of this study, and requires some degree of detail of treatment.

"Rural" as a sociological category

A leader among those attacking the use of "rural" as a sociological category was R.E. Pahl, a writer who has had a great influence on subsequent analysis of rural populations. Following on the work of earlier writers such as Hofstee (1960), Benet (1963), and Hauser (1965), Pahl (1966) dealt a mortal blow to the academic credentials of the rural-urban continuum concept as a valid sociological model. This continuum depends for its validity on the notion that the folk or traditional , rural society possesses its own distinctive, observable (and presumably measurable) characteristics, which distinguish it from the contraposed characteristics of urban or rational, secular society associated with large cities. Though the modern origins of the concept of rural society as distinctly and predictably different from a highly urbanised society are traced to Ferdinand Tönnies' *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (1887), Sorokin (1955), in his Foreword to the translation of Tönnies' work points out that the roots of the idea are both ancient and cross cultural, being traced back to mediaeval and early Christian writers such as St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Augustine, and further still to Plato, while very similar ideas can be found in the writings of Ibn Khaldun and Confucius.

It is of considerable interest to re-examine the unfashionable writings of Ferdinand Tönnies briefly in this regard. As is so often the case, the original writings lack the naïvety frequently attributed to them by later commentators. In the case of Tönnies, his idealised stereotypes of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft became associated with rural and urban qualities through the influence of urbanisation, which sets up conditions under which *Gesellschaftlische* qualities of social life are favoured while *Gemeinschaftlische*

qualities are destroyed. Tönnies sees the progress of civilisation as a move toward the eventual destruction of the latter by the former. As he puts it ,

> "Two periods thus stand contrasted with each other in the history of the great systems of culture: a period of Gesellschaft follows a period of Gemeinschaft. The Gemeinschaft is characterised by the social will as concord, folkways, mores and religion; the Gesellschaft by the social will as convention, legislation, and public opinion."

A little later in his concluding chapter, he quotes Marx in support of his thesis. Describing the demise of the Gemeinschaft ideal type, he says:

> "In this sense, the whole continual development may be considered as a process of increasing urbanization. `It may be said that the whole economic history of Gesellschaft, i.e. of the modern nations, is in essence summarised in the change in the relationship between town and country' (Karl Marx, *Das Kapital*, I, p. 364). That is, from a certain point on, the towns by their influence and importance achieve, in the nation, predominance over the rural organization. ... Therefore the rural organization is doomed to dissolution, which in consequence leads to the decay of its organs and functions". (Tönnies, 1887, transl. Loomis, 1955, pp. 270-272).

As Loomis points out in his translator's introduction, Tönnies had first-hand contact with both worlds, being the son of a well-to-do peasant family whose elder brother was a trader with English merchants, and observing the inroads of rationalism, mechanisation and commercialisation on the old rural culture of his native Schleswig-Holstein in the 1870s. (Loomis, 1955, x). Yet ingrained culture dies hard, and the extent and completeness of its destruction can easily be overestimated by the contemporary observer. Growing up in a small village in Yorkshire, England, seventy-five years later in the 1940s and 1950s I too was socialised into two worlds: the intensely local world of the village, and the broader, national and dawning academic values inculcated first in a small country grammar school, and subsequently in a city university. I was able to observe closely (and experience) a later wave of the type of change experienced by Tönnies in Schleswig-Holstein. I was a member of probably the last generation of Yorkshire country children to speak the rich local dialect without affectation, to learn to handle draught horses and to master the many now redundant manual farming skills such as stooking, hoeing root crops, use of the scythe, etc. Now, in the early 2000s, most of these are gone, yet the residents of the same area still consider themselves rural (Yorkshire countryfolk) in a *relative* sense. A very similar point is made by Robinson (1990, p.39). Citing examples ranging from the 1770s to the 1930s, he shows that each generation of rural observers reported the decay of the "old" rural folkways.

The above examples strongly suggest that our sense of the disappearance of remembered cultural features blinds us to the persistence of other, taken-for-granted parts of everyday life, whose subsequent loss may in its turn be lamented (or otherwise) by the next generation. Similarly, the degree of attention attracted by cultural innovations in a rural setting diverts attention from elements which persist. In Australia too, well over a century after the appearance of Tönnies seminal work, the process of homogenisation of

society and the eradication of residual rural culture is, as I shall argue in later chapters, still far from complete - though the extent to which the 1982-95 rural crisis has forced the pace is a major focus of this thesis.

By the 1960s the work of the classical founding fathers of sociology on the nature and significance of rurality was being questioned. In a milestone paper of 1966, Pahl followed Gans (1962) in rejecting the notions of Louis Wirth (1938) on urbanism as the generator of a specific way of life. The introductory and concluding statements to Pahl's paper on the rural-urban continuum have been widely cited by a great variety of subsequent authors: - "In a sociological context the terms urban and rural are more remarkable for their ability to confuse than for their power to illuminate", and "Any attempt to tie particular patterns of social relationships to specific geographical milieux is a singularly fruitless exercise" (Pahl, 1966, pp. 299 and 322). Pahl proposed instead that, to the extent there is a continuum between urban and rural society, it is more a temporal transition than a synoptic spatial phenomenon, and the real contrast is that between the national and the local. So persuasive was this paper that the investigation of specifically social aspects of rural life, and even the use of the term "rural" to describe human characteristics was blighted by the dead hand of Pahl for more than two decades.

Yet even in his own article, Pahl cannot escape from the concept that rural societies and populations have something distinctive about them. For example, the social groups in his commuter villages include "Traditional Ruralites" and "Rural working class commuters", between which Pahl finds it difficult to distinguish sociologically. (1966, p. 306). Elsewhere, (p. 307) he describes the mobile middle class in his commuter villages as being "*of* the city but not *in* it", clearly implying that to be "of the city" sets this category sociologically apart from its rural host population. Later in his paper, Pahl switches the focus of his attack from Europe to the Third World, and from the validity of the concept "rural" itself to the specific idea of the rural-urban continuum. Indeed on p. 312 he comments "Very many studies from all over the world stress fundamental discontinuities between rural and urban life: the continuum does not appear to exist."

The positive contribution made by Pahl, however, remains very significant. Particularly compelling is his argument that the differences between sociological attributes of populations, once deemed to characterise rural and urban populations *per se*, should rather be attributed to the socialisation of people into a national, society-wide set of norms and values, as opposed to a strongly localised, circumscribed social environment. The national and the local would not then necessarily correspond to the categories "urban" and "rural" - as evidenced by the existence of the urban village and the dispersed city. His point that the transition from rural to urban has greater meaning as a *temporal* process than as a synoptic spatial pattern is also a convincing one.

The point however remains that Pahl's work had an unnecessarily negative influence on efforts by rural researchers to identify typical rural social patterns. In the following chapters I shall argue that, while there is no necessary correspondence between "rural" and "local" in Pahl's terms, there is still a great deal of overlap. The reasons why one may intuitively expect that the survival of a stronger set of local norms and values will

tend to be greater in rural than in urban areas include the following, though in the longer term some will be further modified by the rising use of the Internet and electronic communications.

1. Generally speaking, rural population clusters and groupings are smaller in scale, containing fewer potential actors within the normal range of daily interaction. Thus people in a rural location need to interact with others from a wider socio-economic spectrum than is the case in suburban locations.

2. Anonymity is more difficult to achieve in a smaller scale settlement unit, and it requires more effort to stand apart from local norms and values - particularly for children and young people.

3. Rural distance, isolation and low population density act to reduce the choice and frequency of direct interaction with persons outside the local setting.

4. As postulated by Lewis and Maund (1976), innovations in social attitudes and national values usually originate in metropolitan centres, and diffuse outward from there to rural peripheries. Despite the influence of the (dominantly national/international oriented) electronic media in greatly speeding up such diffusion, there remains a time-lag between centre and periphery in the adoption of new values and the abandonment of old ones.

5. For most of the twentieth century, rural areas have tended to be areas of net out-migration. Despite the fact that the outflow has always been partly offset by an inflow (and during the period of counterurbanisation an increased inflow has in some cases reversed the direction of the net exchange), rural populations tend to be culturally residual. Provided depopulation is not too intense, this creates conditions conducive to the retention of local cultural values in a way which is difficult where once-remote areas are swamped by in-migrants of diverse and distant origin. An excellent example is provided by Forsythe (1980), in her discussion of the impact of immigration in the Orkney Islands.

6. The development of a local ethos depends very considerably on the average period of people's residence in a given location, the rate of population turnover, and the presence of a long-established core of locally-oriented individuals fulfilling leadership roles. This condition may be found in either rural or urban areas, but it will be shown below that in South Australia it is more widely found outside the city.

7. The relatively high degree of dependence on farming in the economy still confers a distinctive set of behaviours and attitudes to rural populations which is lacking or less developed in urban areas. Such distinctions derive from the different work regime, the more direct dependence upon the whims of nature (particularly climate), and greater need for self-reliance due to relative isolation. Although the farm population is now a minority of the total population in most Australian rural

communities, Gray (1993) has shown how farmers are frequently able to have their values and viewpoints accepted as the standard wisdom in the local arena.

8. Finally, it should be pointed out that in Australia, with its five major mainland cities separated by very large distances, lacks the overlapping labour sheds and commuting fields of major cities so characteristic of the United Kingdom, western Europe and parts of the United States. By comparison, a much smaller proportion of Australian rural space has favourable conditions for the mixing and dilution of distinctive urban and rural characteristics.

A working definition of rurality

The above discussion has taken no account of the many and varied positions in the current literature on the nature of rurality and what it is to be "rural" in the early 21st Century. Since the whole thesis is concerned with rural people and their social as well as economic organisation, a working definition is essential. This chapter therefore concludes with a selective look at some conceptions of the field of study currently held by practising rural geographers, and defines my own position.

One of several dilemmas involved in proposing any theorisation of the rural is neatly summarised by Cloke and Goodwin (1992, p.321), and is very relevant to the major aims of the present work. Referring to the potentially great explanatory power of the political economy approach with its emphasis on national and global forces in understanding structural change, they say

> "Therefore the study of the `rural' (or indeed the `urban') represents a misleading interpretation of prevailing social, economic and political structures. Such struggles have led to an important dilemma: accept the arguments of political economy theorists, and the legitimation for studying the `rural' can disappear; reject them and the potential explanatory power of wider bodies of theory is lost."

Cloke and Goodwin go on to classify the various strategies taken by scholars to deal with this dilemma: ignore theory and get on with the practicalities; restrict analysis of the rural to agriculture, whose rural nature is hard to question; acknowledge the objective weakness of 'Rural' as a concept, but, because many human decision makers retain it as a subjective category ("real" to them, like Pahl's "village in the mind"), accept rural as a category with *behavioural* validity. An excellent example of the latter is a contribution by Mormont, who makes the point that despite the virtually complete integration of peasant societies in developed countries, "the opposition between city and countryside remains, and may take on new social significances depending on the ideological or cultural frame of reference to which the agents refer". (Mormont, 1990, p.41). None of these strategies are entirely satisfactory, and sometimes major works are based on evasive action in relation to this issue. Thus Cloke and Little (1990, p.xii) state:

> "Although we do not argue that localities should be defined by characteristics of rurality (there are not, therefore, *'rural'* localities *per se*), we find there is a strong case for

subjecting localities previously considered as rural (by virtue of their economic base, land use characteristics, population density etc.) to political economic analysis, in the same way as other locality configurations have been analysed." (emphasis in the original).

This is surely having two bob each way! An example of Cloke's first category of responses to the dilemma is provided by Bollman and Biggs (1992, p.4). Acknowledging that "The growing similarity of rural and urban lifestyles make the distinctions between urban and rural more misleading than informative", they go on to accept the Canadian census definition without further ado. In another version of the same approach, Pacione (1984) defines his field of study as "The rural area", and after a brief outline of the evolution of approaches to definition, avoids making his own, and proceeds on an essentially spatial basis. Robinson (1990), introducing his work with a much fuller discussion of the concept of rurality, cautiously allows more of his own position to shine through, accepting at least the behavioural validity of the concept, to use Cloke's categorisation. Thus he writes "Even if it is accepted that the rural-urban continuum is essentially spurious, it must be acknowledged that its two poles, the urban and the rural, are distinctive. They are also concepts that still occupy a central place in western culture."

In a later attempt to grapple with the rural, Cloke and Thrift (1994) recognise four phases in the evolution of the concept in social science: the first sees the rural as a spatially defined category, residual after the urban is excluded, and tending to engender a particular lifestyle. The second, typified by Hoggart (1990) relegated the rural to a minor, pragmatic issue among broader society-wide concepts of class, structure, and political economy. The third, typified by Mormont's approach, emphasises the social construction of the concept of rurality, seeing a plurality of social spaces occupying the same physical space; while the fourth phase goes further in a postmodernist foray into a "poststructuralist deconstruction of different rural texts" allowing rurality as seen from "other" perspectives and voices (e.g. feminist, ethnic) to emerge in the literature. These issues are fully explored in Cloke and Little (Eds.) (1997).

Fortunately the picture in rural Australia, though fluid, is far less complex than that of the crowded, contested space of the U.K. To introduce some degree of order into what is in danger of becoming a chaotic concept, I take as a starting point a conceptualisation of rurality suggested by Burie (1967), cited by Robinson (1990). Here rurality is accepted as a highly multidimensional concept. Starting from some position in time when there was a greater congruence between the cultural, social organisation, and physical appearance/landuse attributes of rural formations, Burie postulates the impact of urbanisation as producing uneven amounts of change over time in the three different dimensions of rurality (physical, cultural, social). Thus a community originally strongly rural on all three dimensions may become (for example) heavily urbanised in respect of its culture and social organisation, but remain physically rural in terms of land use, landscape, population density etc.

A final example of a current approach which implicitly accepts two of the above dimensions as still relevant to rural Australia, but rejects or at least adopts a highly ambivalent attitude towards the third (cultural) dimension, is that of Sorensen and Epps (1993, pp. 2-4). Quoting Bessant (1978), they aver:

> "Perhaps as little as two decades ago, we could identify a typical rural way of life. Incomes were largely dependent upon seasonal conditions and the fluctuations of commodity prices; housing was often cheap and functional rather than attractive; food prices were high; less emphasis was placed on educational attainment than today; services were fewer and of poorer quality than in larger cities because of low population density and insufficient demand to make delivery worthwhile; and many communities experienced out-migration of the young and energetic. ... In addition, most people identified closely with the natural seasonal rhythms, took more than recreational interest in the weather, were particularly concerned about isolation and road conditions, strongly respected the work ethic, and viewed the impersonal city with suspicion."

The above description, as will become apparent in later chapters, remains a very accurate description of a great deal of rural South Australia in the 1990s and early 2000s. Although Sorensen and Epps seem to imply in the above citation that such distinctive features are defunct, they modify this stance later by stating (p.3) that the many homogenising influences on culture, economy and lifestyle have caused "*a partial loss* of regional identity as urban culture and social mores invade the bush", and "Traditional rural Australia *is losing* its social and cultural identity as considerable functional and cultural diversity is imposed from outside." (My emphasis). My own contention is that change is constant and ongoing; only its rate and strength vary; and while the force of arguments presented by, for example, Dunleavy (1982) and Hoggart (1990) for the redundancy of the terms 'urban' and 'rural' is fully acknowledged, I do not believe that they have fully removed the social and cultural distinctiveness of the rural.

To summarise my position on the definition of the study object - rural space in South Australia - in a few lines, then, I first of all, for practical and pragmatic reasons, accept a spatial inner limit corresponding roughly to the Adelaide Statistical division for some purposes, and to the 30-minute, non-rush hour driving isochrone for others. The spatial outer limit between 'rural' and 'remote' is placed approximately at the edge of the "settled areas" of the State - i.e., those with a sufficient population density to warrant incorporation into local government areas, for the most part also characterised by owner-occupation of land rather than pastoral leasehold from the Crown. All this does is to place two arbitrary lines across a spatial continuum of metropolitan accessibility and the climatic viability of land uses.

Within this area of study, though, I define rurality as a multi-dimensional concept , each of whose dimensions may apply quasi-independently to different territories or social formations within the study area. Thus an area may be strongly rural in one dimension, but in others its degree of rurality may be very low. These dimensions specifically *include* the cultural and the social/organisational as well as the physical dimension based on such things as accessibility, land use, population density etc., for it is the change in the

former two aspects over the 1980s and 1990s which form the main focus of attention. In addition to the three dimensions listed above, I would add at least one other - the visual/perceptual . The essence of the physical dimension of rurality is given by the low population density, and land use dominated by primary production. The social dimension is expressed by the small number and relative isolation of individuals, smallness of social groups in daily interaction range, the impact of distance and isolation on local interaction patterns, and so on. The cultural dimension is expressed in surviving distinctive social mores, values, attitudes, habits, customs etc.   The perceptual/visual dimension is important, for while the physical dimension is concrete and measurable, the perceptual/visual one is subjective and personal, expressing the extent to which an area looks and feels "rural", and allowing a behavioural approach to rurality.

In relation to my insistence that the cultural dimension of rurality has not (yet?) been wiped out by the homogenisation processes at work in society, I return to the analogy of air-masses, which acquire their original characteristics by an extended period of stability in a given area. As they move away and mix with air of different origin, they lose their distinctive character - but as long as the source regions remain intact, new masses will form. People are a lot less miscible than air, and even in zones of intense mixing, such as the commuting belt, subgroups of different origin can retain cultural distinctiveness for a long time. I hypothesise that, in human terms, the rural source-regions will continue to generate people with some recognisably rural characteristics, as long as there remains a high enough proportion of localised culture-bearers with a long enough period of residence in the area and influential enough to legitimise their values in the local community. The extent to which these conditions are met is examined in Chapter 5.

A realist approach to rural spatial organisation

Before moving on, it is important to establish my own epistemological position and place it into the context of the general aims of this thesis. The reader, I believe, in any thesis is entitled to know where the writer is "coming from" philosophically. The answer in my case is partly ontological conviction, partly epistemological choice. I have always seen academic endeavour as a search for truth, which can never be totally uncovered - followed by a search for understanding of that which has been uncovered - which in turn leads to the formation of further questions. Truth and wisdom mostly keep close company, and both are very hard to find. However, while accepting many of the standard criticisms of positivism, I do not accept the poststructuralist view of truth as a purely relative construct – a position consistent with my adherence to Christianity as both a religion and a philosophy of life. Having said that, I seek to present evidence in as balanced, representative and verifiable a way as possible, without laying spurious claims to objectivity. Both structure and agency are deeply involved in the project, with 'agency' incorporating not only the social but also the cultural and experiential aspects of what it is to be human. Structuration theory, I shall argue, does not truly incorporate the latter, and is difficult to operationalise. A realist approach (most thoroughly introduced into geography by Sayer (1984), and reviewed *in extenso* by Cloke, Philo and Sadler (1991)) seems most suitable, both ontologically, epistemologically and operationally,

though I do not claim this work to be strictly framed in the mould of transcendental realism.

Ontologically, I accept the realist position that phenomena, including natural and (qualitatively different) human phenomena, exist in the world independent of our knowing; and that reality can further be divided into the levels of the *real*, the *actual* and the *empirical*. The *real*, or deep structural level is made up of mechanisms which are not directly observable (as in structuration theory, or in Marxism) but which, often in interaction with each other, can shape or cause events and experiences. At this level, we need to recognise that structures, strictly defined, are "sets of *internally related* objects or practices" (Sayer 1984, p. 85). 'Internally related' conveys that the relationship between the objects/practices is internal, or *essential*, since one cannot exist without the other - eg., 'oppression' is an internal relationship between oppressor(s) and victim(s). Against this, many relationships (e.g. that between poverty and unsustainable farming practices) may be very important but are nevertheless only *contingently related*.

Fig. 1.1 Types of research in relation to domains of reality
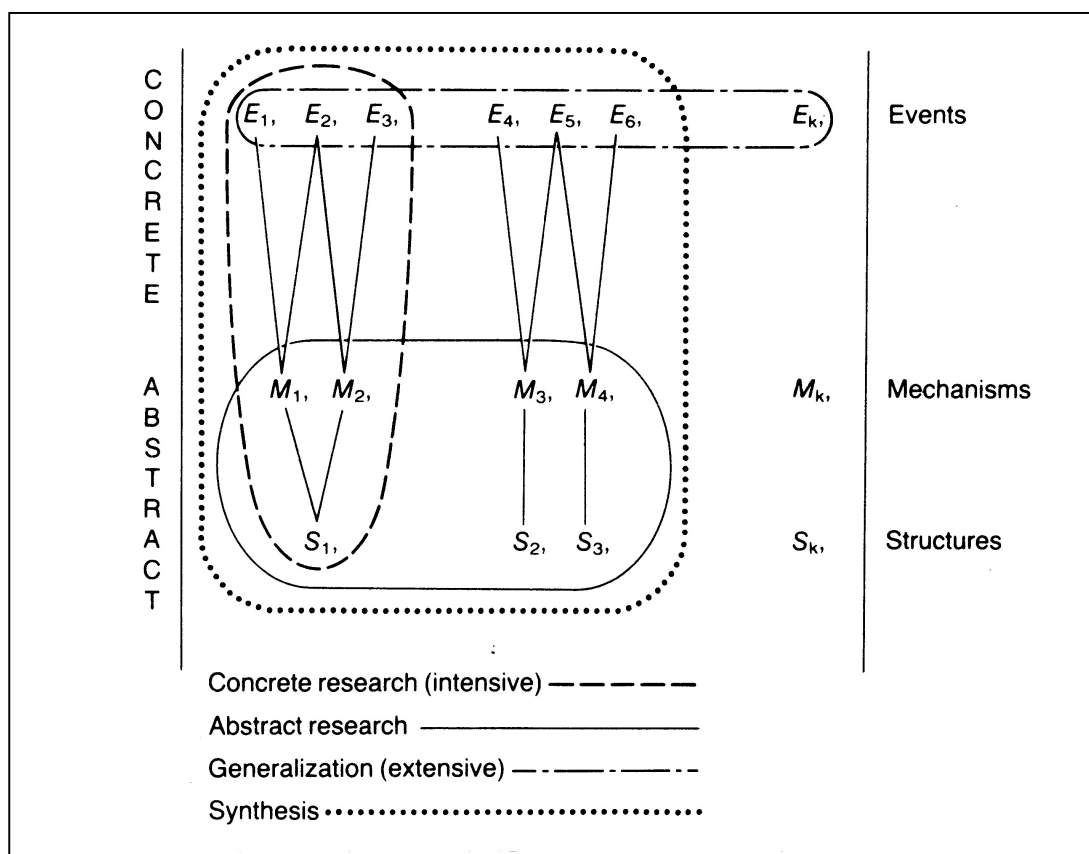
Source: Sayer, 1984, p. 215, reproduced in Cloke, Philo and Sadler 1991, p. 153
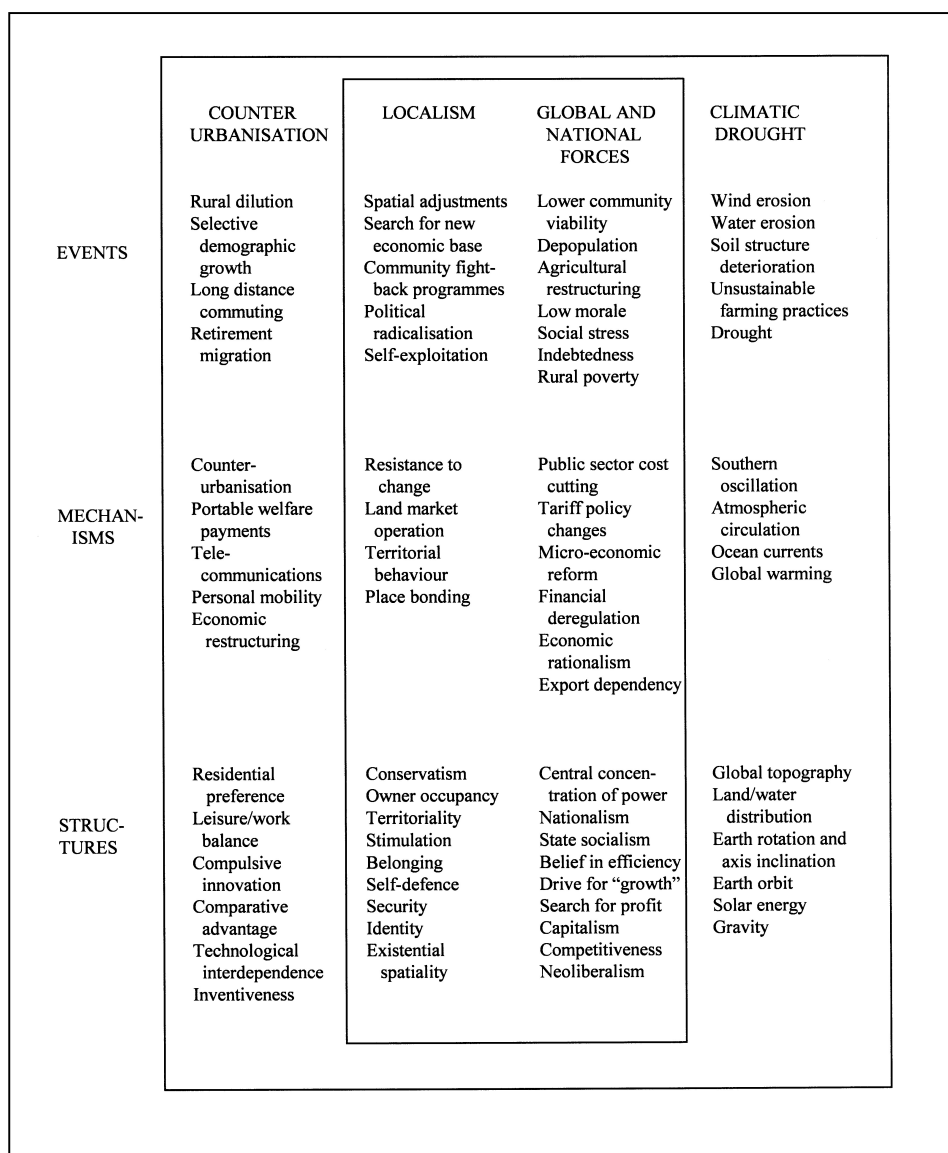
The *actual* level of reality consists of events or processes (series of events) which can be directly observed, and involve interaction between structure(s) and human agents. The form such interaction takes is not *essential*, but *contingent* upon innumerable circumstances relating to both the human agents involved, and the setting (or 'locale' as Giddens would call it) where the events take place. Finally, the *empirical* level of reality is our experience of events, involving our perception, conceptualisation and efforts to describe and measure them.

The relationship between these levels, and Sayers' very succinct classification of types of research aimed at understanding social reality, appear in Fig. 1.1, as reproduced in Cloke, Philo and Sadler (1991). This is a very useful tool for classifying the approach taken in this thesis. Basically, I would regard Chapters 2, 5, 6 and part of 7 as 'extensive generalisation', Chapters 3 and 4 as 'abstract research', Chapters 7 (part) and 8 as 'intensive concrete research' and Chapters 9 and 10 as 'synthesis'.

To clarify the conceptual structure of the problem complex, in place of the general symbols used in Fig. 1.1, I now attempt to substitute (in simplified form) the specific phenomena under investigation (Fig. 1.2). This process at once highlights the problems inherent in the application of general theoretical schemae to concrete research problems. In a complex real-world situation, causal chains are not reducible to the simple threefold progression from structures, through mechanisms, to events. There are many phenomena whose status is marginal between structure and mechanism, and between mechanism and event. Secondly, the realist insistence on the 'unpacking' of high-order concepts (e.g. 'economic rationalism') into more closely defined elements, in order to avoid the (mis)use of chaotic concepts as elements in causal chains, necessarily involves layers of structures within structures. Alternatively, if 'structures' are restricted to prime causal, internally or necessarily related elements, then there will be even more layers within layers at the level of 'mechanisms'. Finally, the decision of where to stop the unpacking process is subjective and subject to the danger of infinite regression.

Despite these problems, Fig. 1.2 illustrates the structure of my argument, organising concepts into an approximate sequence from structures, through mechanisms, to the events that constitute the social upheaval, rural crisis and consequent need for redefinition of the local. The cause-event sequences are organised into four columns or complexes; in practice there are many links and junctions between the columns. The phenomena grouped into the three blocks in each column are placed in approximate causal sequence, the most primal at the base. The two central columns are the core of the investigation in the thesis - namely, the opposition between the human need for the local as expressed in local struggles for survival, and the national and global forces promoting restructuring, which tend to destroy current social configurations in space. The two outer columns are major contributing factors to the social changes of the study period; each is worthy of substantive study in its own right, but here the structures and mechanisms behind them are beyond my scope. They are merely discussed at the level of empirical events impinging heavily on the social organisation of space.

Figure 1.2 Conceptual structure of the argument

	COUNTER URBANISATION	LOCALISM	GLOBAL AND NATIONAL FORCES	CLIMATIC DROUGHT
EVENTS	Rural dilution Selective demographic growth Long distance commuting Retirement migration	Spatial adjustments Search for new economic base Community fight-back programmes Political radicalisation Self-exploitation	Lower community viability Depopulation Agricultural restructuring Low morale Social stress Indebtedness Rural poverty	Wind erosion Water erosion Soil structure deterioration Unsustainable farming practices Drought
MECHAN-ISMS	Counter-urbanisation Portable welfare payments Tele-communications Personal mobility Economic restructuring	Resistance to change Land market operation Territorial behaviour Place bonding	Public sector cost cutting Tariff policy changes Micro-economic reform Financial deregulation Economic rationalism Export dependency	Southern oscillation Atmospheric circulation Ocean currents Global warming
STRUC-TURES	Residential preference Leisure/work balance Compulsive innovation Comparative advantage Technological interdependence Inventiveness	Conservatism Owner occupancy Territoriality Stimulation Belonging Self-defence Security Identity Existential spatiality	Central concen-tration of power Nationalism State socialism Belief in efficiency Drive for "growth" Search for profit Capitalism Competitiveness Neoliberalism	Global topography Land/water distribution Earth rotation and axis inclination Earth orbit Solar energy Gravity

Source: present author

Relation to current rural social research trends

The political turmoil generated by the rural crisis and its widely acknowledged aftermath has generated a great volume of research, into which I need to position the research reported in this thesis. Palmer (1997, more fully discussed in Chapter 8) identified four major discourses which incorporate a great deal of the contemporary mainstream research. They were labelled 'Traditional farming', 'Self-sufficiency', 'Permaculture' and 'Agronomic' respectively, the last-named incorporating much writing in agricultural

economics and agribusiness. By the nature of each discourse ("institutionally based ways of thinking, talking and feeling drawing upon historically bound systems of knowledge") its participants addressed a like-minded audience sharing a common set of values and priorities, with limited cross-fertilisation and competing unequally for the ear of policy-making elites. I would suggest however that complementary to, but largely outside of, these four discourses, a number of fairly distinctive themes of a cross-disciplinary nature has developed in rural studies over recent years, in which rural sociologists (to their great credit) have taken a leading role, but geographers, demographers and political and regional scientists have also taken a significant part.

These themes are listed below, with a couple of type examples for each. The list does not claim to be complete, and to a considerable extent the themes overlap and link up, as indeed they must since many of the type examples are compendia of the work of multiple authors. I believe that the work presented in this thesis in turn overlaps and contributes to several of these.

1. Globalisation, integration (vertical and horizontal) and restructuring in the *agrifood sector* (e.g. Lawrence, 1987; Burch et al. 1998; Burch, Rickson and Lawrence, 1996)
2. Community, social capital, and leadership (e.g. Black and Hughes, 2001; Australian Bureau of Statistics 2004; Cocklin and Alston, 2003)
3. Sustainability, conservation, land care and the 'triple bottom line' (e.g. Lawrence, Vanclay and Furze 1992; Lockie and Vanclay 1997; Pritchard et. al. 2003)
4. Demographic change and its impact; population density issues (e.g. Hugo and Bell 1998; Burnley and Murphy 2004; Smailes et al. 2002)
5. Neoliberalism, the 'region', rural development and 'self-help' (e.g. Gray and Lawrence 2001; Beer, Maude and Pritchard 2003; Eversole and Martin 2005)
6. Multifunctionality, amenity and the post-productive countryside (e.g. Argent 2002; Barr 2002, 2005; Holmes 2002, 2006)
7. Equity: gender, indigenous issues, health, poverty, and social exclusion (e.g. Cheers, 1998; Alston 1995, 2000; Dempsey 1992; Saggers and Gray 1991)

In addition to these more or less focussed themes several important and more general works have appeared, including Sorensen and Epps (1993), Lockie and Bourke (2001), Rogers, M.F. and Collins, Y.M.J. (2001) and Cocklin and Dibden (2005).

How, then, does the work presented in this thesis contribute to this very broad front of cutting edge social science research? At least in part, I consider that it overlaps the first five themes listed above. However, in seeking to build on the previous chapters I would suggest that the greatest value of this work for future research lies in its potential contribution to theme 5 above – namely, the re-structuring of the social organisation of space to accommodate rural society (as well as possible) to the neo-liberal, bottom-up, self-help, larger scale regional framework favoured by a consensus of opinion among policy makers. As the title of this work suggests, what constitutes the 'local' will need to be redefined.