English Summaries

Material Culture and Symbolic Communication

By Flemming Højlund

Almost all objects in the bororo tribe in Brazil were decorated with emblems indicating the clan and subclan of the owner. The individual clans had specific privileges consisting of certain ways of cutting and shaping, certain colours, decorative patterns, and artefacts. (C. Lévi-Strauss, Tristes Tropiques 1955, 234).

Among the Yao people living east of the Malawi Lake in South East Africa the political struggle was mainly expressed in the competition for various symbols of prestige. The status of important men was indicated by the type and size of knife carried in public (J. C. Mitchell, The Yao Village. A study in the social structure of a Nyasaland tribe, 1966, 77 f).

In ethnografic literature one frequently comes across similar examples illustrating how material objects such as weapons, ornaments, tools etc. fulfill symbolic functions. In contrast to this the traditional functional analyses of archaeological data are mainly concentrated on the practical use of objects. Material culture is interpreted primarily as a means of adaptation to and utilization of the environment: Tools and weapons are used for gathering, hunting, fishing, and farming; houses and clothing protect against the elements. This is certainly a valid approach to the study of material culture, but it must necessarily be supplemented by another point of view which has its origin in the appreciation of the basic needs for communication and identification in human societies. In this context the material culture that surrounds human beings has an important function as a means of communication, a sort of material language expressing essential group values and norms.

In the above mentioned examples certain objects, patterns etc. have been invested with certain meanings such as membership of a named clan or other social group. In the same way the individual words in a language combine a meaning with a sound. The fact that the expression in the first case is material, in the second phonetic is of minor importance. Other forms of non-verbal expressions, such as certain gestures, e.g. the V-sign and the clenched fist, have acquired a defined meaning just like verbal expressions. The main thing is that there is a connection between expression and meaning, so that a general comprehensibility is ensured. This unity between expression and meaning is called a *symbol* and constitutes the basic element in all human communication, verbal or non-verbal.

Practical and symbolic functions can often be seen

as aspects of the same object. A tool normally has a certain practical use, but at the same time it may function as a symbolic indicator of e.g. a special social rank. The former aspect, which may be called *instrumental*, is directed to bringing about some desired state of affairs; it is oriented towards an end. The latter, which may be called *expressive*, is a way of saying or expressing something. Though often combined in the same form, these two aspects must be analytically distinguished, for each needs a different kind of understanding. The instrumental aspect must be understood in terms of the consequences it aims at and achieves; the expressive aspect in terms of the meanings, the ideas, it expresses (J. Beattie, Other Cultures. Aims, Methods and Achievements in Social Anthropology 1964).

The lack of differentiation between these two levels has in some cases led to undue scepticism towards the kind of knowledge that can be extracted from archaeological sources:

»The first thing that must be remembered is the fact . . . that material evidence will give material results.« »Without a written record, and one in some detail, you can have no knowledge of social or political systems . . .«. (Piggott, S. (red.), The Dawn of Civilization 1961).

One of the aims of this collection of articles has been to show that there is more information embodied in artefacts than appears from the above quotations. By presenting a series of case studies of small-scale communities it will be argued that material culture in all societies has functions besides the purely technological. It indicates affiliation to certain social categories and informs of the identity and values of individuals and groups. Furthermore, it will be shown how rank

symbols may transgress the purely symbolic function as an emblem of prestige. The very production and exchange of these prestigious objects may in certain societies play a vital role in the achievement and maintenance of social control and political power, both within individual societies and in a larger regional system.

Rank Achievement and Symbols of Status Among the Kalasha Of Nuristan

By Schuyler Jones

One purpose of this paper is to show, using an example from the Hindu Kush of Afghanistan, how a particular society uses material culture to express values related to rank and status. A second purpose is to try to show how symbols of rank form an important part of a larger cultural scheme in this society and serve to embody values and attitudes that are, in this particular political arena, essential to group survival.

An outline of the relevant social, economic, political, and environmental factors is given and the indigenous material culture and technology of the area is discussed.

Certain features of the culture are emphasized for the purpose of this analysis, though the nature and extent of the bias used is made clear. Certain hypotheses are put forward, i.e., it is suggested that 1) the political system is such that it requires an aggressive male population in order to function; 2) that the culture is oriented toward producing the aggressive individuals needed and that this is achieved, in part, by

promoting rivalry between individuals and groups; 3) that the aggression and rivalry needs to be controlled and is channelled into organized competitions which contribute to perpetuating the system and which help ensure group survival by offering desirable prizes and achieving political ends.

The model which is used to describe the social and political organization is the one which the people themselves construct – it is not a model that has been put together by the writer.

The functioning of the political system is described and the ways in which aggressive behaviour act to maintain social order is shown. The nature of the organized competitions is explained, together with an account of the 'glittering prizes' to be obtained. The various ways in which groups and individuals compete with one another are recounted, and an account of the accompanying values and attitudes which maintain them is given.

It is concluded that symbols of rank and status provide both reward and incentive and that they promote competition for scarce resources by representing a range of desirable social positions. In the example given, they are an integral part of the political system.

Burial Types, Primitive Money, and Political Alliances on Samoa

By Jan Hjarnø

Burials in Samoa in the South Pacific are not just practical devices for depositing dead bodies; they are also furnished with a number of symbolic functions. The shape reveals whether they are burials of chiefs or common people. Ordinary people are buried in shallow graves near the houses, whereas important people are placed in raised structures with vaults. These raised, tiered structures vary in size depending upon the rank of the title held by the person or persons buried in the vault. Persons who possessed titles of high rank have huge burial mounds, while persons who had titles with lower rank have smaller mounds.

Chiefs are buried on the land which they controlled and where they had their official residence when they lived. Thus the burials also reflect the political structure.

In the 18th. century the title of paramount chief of Samoa, *Tupu o Samoa*, was held by members of the socalled Tuia'ana family who had residence in the province of A'ana and here the paramount chiefs of this period are buried in a huge, tiered mound. Around 1800 a civil war broke out, which finally in 1830 brought another family to power for a short period. This family had its strongest support in the village of Sapapali'i on the Island of Savai'i, and here they buried their leader, who was *Tupu o Samoa*, in 1841 in a huge, tiered burial. The body of this *Tupu o Samoa* was, however, shortly after brought to the Bay of Apia on the Island of Upolu and placed in a huge burial here. This Bay of Apia had in the 1840's become the major trading-centre of Samoa, and politically the most important place, and this was now symbolically expressed by placing the burial of the new dynasty here.

Samoa was at that time a chiefdom. The land was divided between a number of titles. The whole of the country was owned by the title *Tupu o Samoa*. Under this title the country was divided into a number of provinces each of which was controlled by a socalled *ao*-title. Each province was divided into a number of districts of which each was controlled by a socalled *sao*-title. The districts were again divided among a number of titles. In this system each holder of a subordinated title was obliged to show respect and render service to the owner of his superior title. The rendering of service implied that products, mainly food, were continually passed upwards in the hiearchy.

Each male in Samoa competed for acquiring a title, the higher the better. There were no fixed rules as to which person should succeed which person as titleholder. All of a titleholder's subordinates could participate in the election of the next titleholder and could be elected as such, if they could get enough support for their candidature. In order to get as much support as possible, individuals allied themselves with strong titleholders from other local areas. Such alliances were established by giving a daughter as wife to a person holding a high title and promising him a huge dowry to be payed as long as the alliance lasted.

The dowry consisted mainly of fine mats made by women. These mats functioned as money and the labour of specialists could be purchased with such mats. The more mats one could get hold of, the more specialists one could employ for making the major prestige-giving items such as canoes, houses, etc. A son-in-law was therefore very interested in rendering his father-in-law political support, so the latter could acquire a higher title, and thereby come into control of more producers, who could give him more mats which he could pass on as gifts of dowry to his son-in-law.

Daughters were thus passed upwards in the hierarchy as wives together with a dowry of fine mats. To receive a wife ranked higher than to give a daughter away, and this created a conflict for the highest ranked titleholders, and in order to maintain the system, they exported their daughters to Tonga as wives together with a dowry of fine mats. In return they received military support from their Tongan allies and material objects which were rare and extremely valuable in Samoa. Among these objects red feathers played an important role. These feathers were passed on as return gifts to one's father-in-law, who passed them on to his father-in-law, until finally they were placed as decoration on fine mats, whereby these increased their value tremendously. These mats were then passed upwards in the hierarchy as dowry until they finally reached the highest ranked titleholders, who passed them on to Tonga. In this way the system of Samoa was tied together, and the power struggle in Samoa was focused on monopolising the import from Tonga. An alliance which could monopolise the import from Tonga could economically dominate the making of alliances and thereby secure its political dominance.

It was the Tongans who determined whether or not trade with Tonga could be monopolised by one Samoan alliance, because the Tongans controlled the traffic between Samoa and Tonga. In the 18th century the political power in Tonga was vested in the title *Tuitoga*, and they were all allied with the holders of the *Tupu o Samoa*. In 1799 a civil war broke out in Tonga and shortly after the holder of the *Tupu o Samoa* died. The fighting groups in Tonga made alliances with different groups in Samoa, and for many years no group in Samoa was able to win a decisive victory and proclaim their leader *Tupu o Samoa*.

At the same time European whalers began to frequ-

ent Samoan waters, and European goods became very valuable and important in Samoa. European items began to play a role in the alliancemaking like the red feathers, and Samoans who had luck in their trade with the whalers who passed their territory, were able to contract alliances, and become politically strong. In the 1840s the whalers began to frequent the Bay of Apia more than any other parts of Samoa, and an alliance who could establish control of this area had a good chance of increasing its strength and dominating the rest of the country.

Europeans were not interested in letting one group of Samoans control the trade, and they interfered in the local struggle for power by rendering support to different groups. For years battles were fought for getting control of the Bay of Apia, but no group was able to win a decisive victory and maintain control of the area for long. Whenever an alliance got in possession of the area, especially the peninsular which protected the entrance to the Bay, it made a huge burial for its leaders, symbolising that their group now possessed the power in Samoa. In 1900 four huge burials could be seen on the peninsular which belonged to each of the four strongest alliances. In 1900, however, Germany and USA annexed the country, and the Germans who got the Bay of Apia forbad the Samoans to conferr the title of *Tupu o Samoa*. Since then, however, the four big alliances have continued to bury their dead leaders on the peninsular, and when the western part of Samoa achieved independence in 1962, the people decided to let the title as Head of State alternate between the leaders of the four big alliances, in order to avoid internal war. It was also decided that the House of Parliament should be placed right next to these burials.

Stone Axes in New Guinea Highlands. The Function of Prestige Symbols in the Reproduction of a Tribal Society

By Flemming Højlund

In New Guinea Highlands stone axes were still being produced, distributed and used in various ways in the forties, fifties, and in remote places also in the sixties. The technological functions of stone axes were very much appreciated by the local people: Without axes one could not build real houses, make gardens, produce digging sticks and weapons, and chop firewood. Apart from this, stone axes formed – together with seashells, packs of salt, containers of oil, and pigs – a group of extremely valuable objects, which played a dominating role in the social and political life of these small scale societies. The essential conditions of power and position in the Highlands were not control over land. This was owned collectively and only the use was delegated to each family. What was decisive was direct control over people, and through this, over the results of their production. This control was carried out primarily through the exchange of valuables, e.g. stone-axes, which were indispensable in order to establish and maintain social relations.

Large scale production of stone axes took place in a comparatively small part of the Central Highlands from where the axes were traded over extensive areas. The typology and functions of the axes varied in relation to social and geographical differences. Near the stone quarries a big man owned several different types of axes with specialized functions: working axes and adzes, »ceremonial axes« and »bride-price axes«. Moving from here vertically down the social ladder towards the »rubbish-man« or horizontally towards the

periphery of the axe distribution area one can isolate identical structural changes: The number of types is gradually reduced and the remaining types take on more functions: The set of axes changes from multi-typic and uni-functional to uni-typic and multi-functional. These systematic variations are defined primarily by the quantitative access to stone axes, which is determined by relative wealth (socially) and the local level of supply (geographically, commercially).

The production and distribution of stone axes and other valuables had a vital influence on the conditions of reproduction of the Highland societies. Areas controlling large quantities of valuables were able to attract more women as wives than they married off to other groups. Rich clans wanted as many wives as possible, especially, because the raising of pigs was the womens job, this meant an increased production of pigs. Poor clans, on the other hand, tried to marry their daughters into wealthy clans in order to get a share of their valuables through bride wealth and other prestations and to establish alliances with strong groups. Thus, on a regional level, centres with many polygamous marriages were formed in contrast to a periphery lacking in women and therefore with a large number of unmarried men. By incorporating both marriageable women and bachelors from the marginal areas the centres increased their control over labour. This made it possible for the central clans to increase their production of valuables, which invested in exchange created further political expansion in the form of setting up new exchange relations.

Before large scale utilization of stone quarries in the Highlands was started, stone axes were everywhere produced from local materials. With the beginning of intensive quarrying of the localized high-quality stone materials and the distribution of the products over continually expanding areas, the number of stone axes in circulation increased enormously. This resulted in an inflationary decrease in the value of axes in the centre, a decrease so marked that the function of axes as prestige symbols and valuables would have become impossible without the development of new and more elaborate types: »bride-price axes« and »ceremonial axes«. The essential character of the axe was retained, but by an extreme development of certain proportions the new axes exceeded the limits of practical use, whereby their symbolic function was stressed.

Ethnic Symbols in an African Kingdom, Borno

By Mette Bovin

In Africa we find thousands of ethnic groups and the societies are typically poly-ethnic in character. Ethnic groups live in symbiotic relationships, often marked by conflicting interests and competition for resources, within the framework of the African kingdom or state.

In the present article one particular kind of symbols is analyzed, namely »ethnic symbols«. An ethnic group as defined by Barth 1969 »shares fundamental cultural values, realized in overt unity in cultural forms, (and) makes up a field of communication and interaction«. Ethnic symbols, as used in the article, are symbols of ethnic differentiation. The ethnic symbols are part of the communication system, and non-verbal, material symbols are chosen for the present analysis. Thus for example »a hat with ostrich feathers« stands for »Anagamba nomad identity«.

The traditional African kingdom of Borno – in the dry Sahél belt – was founded around 900 A.D. in the Lake Chad area where one of the nomadic lineages, *Sef*, took political control over the other lineages in the area and founded the first dynasty. Borno is one among several West African states of the »Sudanic« type. It was based on a combination of rich long-distance exchange with North Africa, controlled by the aristocracy, slave raids and slave trade – a system with an Islamic superstructure. The King of Borno, called the *Shehu* of Borno, is still today the symbol of the State power. Borno has practiced an extensive incorporation of various ethnic groups into the state through centuries, and this incorporation process continues today.

After a chapter on the state level follows a chapter on the village level. It deals with the actual ethnic groups and their internal relationships within the peasant class: Kanuri agriculturalists, Shuwa Arab nomads, Fulani nomads, and Anagamba nomads, etc., each occupying a particular ecological »niche«. In the physical village ground plan we find the ethnic and social stratification structure materialised in the shape of a large U with the political leader in the bottom of the U.

The following chapter deals with the various criteria for ethnic differentiation in general, followed by the specific ethnic elements forming »Kanuri-ness«, the ethnic majority in Borno: scarification, hair styles, clothing, tools and weapons, housing milieu, and colour symbolism.

The contrast between »Kanuri« farmers and »Anagamba« pastoralists in Borno shows the contradiction between the »civilized« sedentary life and the »wild« nomadic life. It is the town: bush opposition, which is given symbolic form in various ways.

Certain ethnic symbols are given a priority by the peoples themselves, and these symbols I call »sacred ethnic symbols«. They are key symbols, dominant symbols, and they can represent magical power as well.

The most striking cultural archaism is found among the true nomadic minority Anagamba, who exhibit an almost fanatic conservatism, probably related to a defence of political (tribal) and economic interests, and survival in the difficult Sahél area.

A hypothesis is put forward that the *female* half of the Kanuri society is more »ethnic« than the *male* half of that society, because of certain socio-political facts. The Kanuri women – and women of other ethnic groups in Borno, too – exhibit an ethnic particularism which corresponds to the marriage policy of the expanding Borno State through centuries. The Kanuri reproduce themselves · openly, but asymmetrically: Kanuri men marrying non-Kanuri women, but not *vice versa*. The marital/sexual status of women is always essential, and mirrored in actual ethnic traits, hairstyles etc. The males in Borno are part of the *pan-ethnic, muslim culture* in the West African context, rather than making reference to their ethnic group. This is reflected in the difference in use of ethnic symbols by men and women respectively. Males exhibit religious symbols rather than ethnic symbols.

Cultural changes do take place, and an example is given of change in »Kanuri« through time along with socio-political changes of society.

The »ethnic symbols« are at one level »material« objects, at another level »political« objects, and »ideological« objects. Ethnic symbols express relationships between ethnic groups reflecting the hierarchy in the African state, Borno, which is a poly-ethnic society.

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The Maintenance of Group Identities in the Baringo District, Western Kenya

By Ian Hodder

The aim of this paper is to discuss some of the range of factors which cause variability in the form and structure of regional distributions of styles and customs. Borders between the tribes in the Baringo district, Western Kenya are clearly identifiable in terms of material items of dress and everyday use, even though there is considerable contact between these groups. The expression of the cultural differences is seen as being related to the economic competition between tribes for basic resources. The idea that conflict over resources leads to distinctive forms of material culture patterning is shown to be of value in explaining variation in the sharpness of the tribal borders, changes in the nature of the borders through time, and overt identity differences within the tribes. The potential is stressed for archaeological studies of the symbolic nature of artifacts.

A Native Society and its Style*

By Claude Lévi-Strauss

»The ensemble of a people's customs has always its particular style; they form into systems. I am convinced that the number of these systems is not unlimited and that human societies, like individual human beings (at play, in their dreams, or in moments of delirium), never create *absolutely*: all they can do is to choose certain combinations from a repertory of ideas which it should be possible to reconstitute«.

These remarks lead off an analysis of facial painting among the Caduveo indians of Brazil, one of the few surviving groups of the Mbaya-Guaicuru, a once powerful confederacy of warrior-tribes in the region. The analysis is in a way an attempt at such a reconstitution, for though it is based only on Caduveo material, it pertains to the past of the whole Mbaya society. That society was divided into caste-like groupings: Nobles, warriors, and serfs. The pride and arrogance of the nobles and warriors was legendary, and it was expressed not only towards fellow human beings: »What we call 'natural' sentiments were held in great disfavour in their society: for instance, the idea of procreation filled them with disgust. Abortion and infanticide were so common as to be almost normal – to the extent, in fact, that it was by adoption, rather than by procreation, that the group ensured its continuance«.

Among the Caduveo the men were sculptors and the women painters. »The painter . . . works on the face or body of one of her fellow-women, or sometimes on those of a small boy . . . She ornaments the upper lip with a bow-shaped motif finished off with a spiral at either end. Then she divides the face with a vertical line; this she occasionally cuts across horizontally. From this stage onwards the decorations proceed freely in arabesque, irrespective of the position of eyes, nose, cheeks, forehead, and chin – as if in fact, the artist were working on a single unbroken surface«. The designs exhibit a total lack of respect for the natural features of the face. »The Mbaya manifested in their face-paintings that abhorrence of Nature which made them resort so freely to abortion and infanticide . . . And this may, indeed, explain the exceptional character of Caduveo art: that it makes it possible for Man to refuse to be made in God's image«.

The stylistic analysis of Caduveo art starts from the

observation of an all-pervading dualism. »The dualism, to begin with, which recurs over and over again, on one level or another, like a hall of mirrors: men and women, painting and sculpture, abstraction and representation, angle and curve, geometry and arabesque, neck and belly, symmetry and asymmetry, border and centrepiece, figure and ground«. Thus »the Caduveo style strikes us as a subtler variant of that which we employ in our playing-cards. Each of our card-designs corresponds to a twofold necessity and must assume a double function. It must be an independent object, and it must serve for the dialogue – or the duel – in which two partners meet face to face. It must also play the role which is assigned to each card, in its capacity as a member of the pack, in the game as a whole. Its vocation is a complicated one, therefore: and it must satisfy demands of more than one sort – symmetrical, where its functions are concerned, asymmetrical where its role is in question. The problem is solved by the use of a design which is symmetrical but yet lies across an oblique axis«.

The analysis is then taken beyond that of artistic style, and the question is put as to the meaning of Caduveo art. One answer is that »the face-paintings confer upon the individual his dignity as a human being: they help him to cross the frontier from Nature to culture, and from the 'mindless' animal to civilized Man. Furthermore, they differ in style and composition according to social status, and thus have a social function«.

After the Caduveo analysis the scope is broadened: »It is significant that, on the north-east and south-west extremes of the enormous territory controlled by the Mbaya, we come upon two almost identical forms of social organization, great as is the distance which separates them from one another. The Paraguayan Gu-

ana and the Bororo of the Mato Grosso had (and in the latter case still have) a hierarchical structure very similar to that of the Mbaya; they were, or are, divided into three classes which seem to have stood, in the past at any rate, for different social statuses. These classes were hereditary and endogamous. Yet the dangers [of disintegration of the society] were avoided in both cases by a vertical division which, in the case of the Bororo, also cut across the classes. Members of one class could not marry members of another, but in each class the members of one moiety were, on the contrary, compelled to marry members of the other moiety. It would therefore be fair to say that asymmetry of class was balanced, in a sense, by symmetry of 'moieties'«. The brief description of the Guana and Bororo societies »clearly suggests that on the sociological level these two societies have a structure comparable to what we have detected, on the level of style, in Caduveo art. There is, in each case, a double antithesis. In the first instance a ternary and asymmetrical organization is opposed to one that is binary and symmetrical. In the second, social mechanisms based on reciprocity are opposed to social mechanisms based on hierarchy. In the effort to remain faithful to these contradictory principles the social group divides and subdivides itself into allied and opposed sub-groups. Just as an escutcheon is a symbolical assembly of prerogatives derived from many separate lines of descent, so is Society cut open, cut across, divided, and partitioned. As we shall see later, the organization of the groundplan of a Bororo village is comparable to that of a Caduveo drawing«.

* It is with some reluctance that I comply with the Editor's request that I do an English summary of Lévi-Strauss' text. Firstly because what appears central to me in the text may not be the same that was central to the author or will be central to other readers;

and secondly because I feel that such an abstract is really a violation of 'a native (French) anthropologist and his style'. It is because of the latter objection that what I have presented is largely a series of quotations from the English translation (Claude Lévi-Strauss: *Tristes Tropiques*. Translated by John Russell. New York 1963. Chapter 17). I must strongly recommend non-Danish speaking readers to consult that work, or, better still, the French original (Claude Lévi-Strauss: *Tristes tropiques*. Paris 1955, 2nd edition 1973).

<div align="right">Jan Ovesen.</div>

The Study of Symbolization in Social Anthropology

By Jan Ovesen

The basic premiss of this paper is that there is no distinct class of objects which may be classified as symbolic. Virtually any object, event, statement, etc. may in certain circumstances acquire a symbolic meaning. Symbolism is to a large extent culture-specific in that every culture has 'chosen' from the total environment (natural phenomena, artefacts, social relations, linguistic expressions, etc.) a repertoire of phenomena which are bestowed with a wider meaning than one might immediately have expected. Such a repertoire may be called cultural symbolism. One of the most pertinent problems for the anthropologist, both in his fieldwork and in his analyses, is to account for cultural symbolism in such a way that it is intelligible to members of his own culture without violating the conception of the reality of the culture under investigation.

In a brief historical overview of the anthropological treatment of symbolism two attitudes are contrasted: that of James G. Frazer and that of Lucien Lévy-Bruhl. While Frazer held that in primitive societies symbolic phenomena such as magic and religion represented an attempt to come to grips with the world in a way that was rational, but which failed because it was unsystematic, Lévy-Bruhl held that the mentality of primitive man was indeed systematic, but that it was different from ours because our criteria of rationality did not apply. Modern anthropology has tended, even if implicitly, to favour the latter point of view, firstly because it is an ethnocentric fallacy to believe (with Frazer) that our culture-specific conception of rationality should apply universally, and secondly because the premiss that every culture organizes itself and its conception of the world in a systematic fashion has facilitated the greater part of the contributions to modern theoretical anthropology.

Modern social anthropology is characterized mainly by two different theoretical orientations, marxism and structuralism. The two are often regarded as opposed, even conflicting, but it is argued that they may reasonably be seen as complementary. Marxism is a general theory of societies (or social formations), and insofar as it accounts for symbolism this is relegated to the domain of ideology, which is incorporated into the notion of superstructure; the formation of the superstructure is (in the more traditional marxism) determined by the infrastructure (i.e. means of production, forces of production, and social relations of production). Approaching symbolic phenomena from this angle can enable us to elucidate their function, but not their meaning. The problem of meaning has been addressed by structuralism, which may be said to be a general theory of culture. Structuralism has commonly been concerned with ideological representations as expressed in myths, rituals, etc. But it has at the same time

demonstrated how such representations reflect basic social and economic relations in society, frequently demonstrating a structural correspondance between the classification of different cultural (and natural) domains. It is argued that whether we say that there is no such thing as a symbolic phenomenon (which a marxist might say), or that all social phenomena are symbolic (which a structuralist might say), the two statements are not incompatible; rather they are two ways of expressing the same insight. And there is agreement between marxists and structuralists that ideological, or 'symbolic' representations are determined both by the already existing system of representations and the way the human mind processes this system, and by the material conditions for the existence of the society.

As a concrete illustration of these theoretical points I offer a summary of an analysis – presented in detail elsewhere (Ovesen 1979) – of the phenomenon of lycanthropy among the Nagas of North-east India. It is shown how the belief in were-tigers is moulded on existing beliefs about tigers, shamans, the soul, the wilderness, etc. But it is demonstrated how specific demographic, socio-economic, and political conditions influence the shape that the belief takes among specific groups. It is concluded that any anthropological analysis should be conducted without preconceived ideas about what is symbolic and what is not, for what may at a first glance appear to us as symbolic and therefore as unreal may be shown to have very tangible effects indeed in the reality of another culture, and vice-versa.

M