4 La Pensée Bourgeoise: Western Society as Culture

> The field of political economy, constructed exclusively on the two values of exchange and use, falls to pieces and must be entirely reanalyzed in the form of a GENERALIZED POLITICAL ECONOMY, which will imply the production of symbolic exchange value [*valeur d'echange/signe*] as the same thing and in the same movement as the production of material goods and of economic exchange value. The analysis of the production of symbols and culture is not thus posed as external, ulterior, or "superstructural" in relation to material production; it is posed as a *revolution of political economy itself,* generalized by the theoretical and practical intervention of symbolic exchange value.
>
> *Baudrillard*
> *1972, p. 130*
> *translation, M.S.*

Historical materialism is truly a self-awareness of bourgeois society—yet an awareness, it would seem, within the terms of that society. In treating production as a natural-pragmatic process of need satisfaction, it risks an alliance with bourgeois economics in the work of raising the alienation of persons and things to a higher cognitive power. The two would join in concealing the meaningful system in the praxis by the practical explanation of the system. If that concealment is allowed, or smuggled in as premise, everything would happen in a Marxist anthropology as it does in the orthodox economics, as if the analyst were duped by the same commodity fetishism that fascinates the participants in the process. Conceiving the creation and movement of goods solely from their pecuniary quantities (exchange-value), one ignores the cultural code of concrete properties governing "utility" and so remains unable to account for what is in fact produced. The explanation is satisfied to recreate the self-deception of the society to which it is addressed, where the logical system of objects and social relations proceeds along an unconscious plane, manifested only through market decisions based on price, leaving the impression that

production is merely the precipitate of an enlightened rationality. The structure of the economy appears as the objectivized consequence of practical behavior, rather than a social organization of things, by the institutional means of the market, but according to a cultural design of persons and goods.

Utilitarianism, however, is the way the Western economy, indeed the entire society, is experienced: the way it is lived by the participating subject, thought by the economist. From all vantages, the process seems one of material maximization: the famous allocation of scarce means among alternative ends to obtain the greatest possible satisfaction—or, as Veblen put it, getting something for nothing at the cost of whom it may concern. On the productive side, material advantage takes the form of added pecuniary value. For the consumer, it is more vaguely understood as the return in "utility" to monetary disbursements; but even here the appeal of the product consists in its purported functional superiority to all available alternatives (cf. Baudrillard 1968). The latest model automobile—or refrigerator, style of clothing, or brand of toothpaste—is by some novel feature or other more convenient, better adapted to "modern living," more comfortable, more healthful, sexier, longer-lasting, or better-tasting than any competing product.[1] In the native conception, the economy is an arena of pragmatic action. And society is the formal outcome. The main relations of class and politics, as well as the conceptions men entertain of nature and of themselves, are generated by this rational pursuit of material happiness. As it were, cultural order is sedimented out of the interplay of men and groups severally acting on the objective logic of their material situations:

> Till jarring interests of themselves create
> The according music of a well-mixed state. . . .
> Thus God and Nature linked the general frame,
> And bade Self-love and Social be the same.
> [Alexander Pope, *Essay on Man*]

Such is the mode of appearance of our bourgeois society, and its common average social science wisdom. On the other hand, it is also common

1. Of course we know at some level that these claims are fraudulent, but this knowledge is only further evidence of the same principle, namely, the ordering power of gain. Having penetrated the secrets of advertising, taken away all substance and sense, what else is left but the gainful motive underneath all social form? Now, by the very abstractness and nakedness in which we discover it, its power is confirmed—even more so by the illusion that we have been able to determine it behind the mask of false claims.

anthropological knowledge that the "rational" and "objective" scheme of any given human group is never the only one possible. Even in very similar material conditions, cultural orders and finalities may be quite dissimilar. For the material conditions, if always indispensable, are potentially "objective" and "necessary" in many different ways—according to the cultural selection by which they become effective "forces." Of course in one sense nature is forever supreme. No society can live on miracles, thinking to exist by playing her false. None can fail to provide for the biological continuity of the population in determining it culturally—can neglect to provide shelter in producing houses, or nourishment in distinguishing the edible from the inedible. Yet men do not merely "survive." They survive in a definite way. They reproduce themselves as certain kinds of men and women, social classes and groups, not as biological organisms or aggregates of organisms ("populations"). True that in so producing a cultural existence, society must remain within the limits of physical-natural necessity. But this has been considered axiomatic at least since Boas, and not even the most biological of cultural ecologies can claim any more: "limits of viability" are the mode of the practical intervention of nature in culture (cf. Rapapport 1967). Within these limits, any group has the possibility of great range of "rational" economic intentions, not even to mention the options of production strategy that can be conceived from the diversity of existing techniques, the example of neighboring societies, or the negation of either.

Practical reason is an indeterminate explanation of cultural form; to do any better, it would have to assume what it purports to explain—the cultural form. But allow me a justifiable "nervousness." Insofar as this applies to historical materialism, it is Marx who here criticizes Marx, if through the medium of a later anthropology. The point of these objections had already been anticipated in Marx's understanding of production as devoted not simply to the reproduction of the producers, but also to the social relations under which it is carried out. The principle is, moreover, interior to Marx's work in an even more general form. I repeat a seminal passage of *The German Ideology:* "This mode of production must not be considered simply as being the reproduction of physical existence of individuals. Rather it is a definite form of activity of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their life, a definite *mode of life* on their part" (Marx and Engels 1965, p. 32). Thus it was Marx who taught that men never produce absolutely, that is, as biological beings in a universe of physical necessity. Men produce objects for given *social* subjects, in the course of reproducing subjects by *social* objects.

Not even capitalism, despite its ostensible organization by and for pragmatic advantage, can escape this cultural constitution of an apparently objective praxis. For as Marx also taught, all production, even where it is governed by the commodity-form, by exchange-value, remains the production of use-values. Without consumption, the object does not complete itself as a product: a house left unoccupied is no house. Yet use-value cannot be specifically understood on the natural level of "needs" and "wants,"—precisely because men do not merely produce "housing" or shelter": they produce dwellings of definite sorts, as a peasant's hut, or a nobleman's castle. This determination of use-values, of a particular type of house as a particular type of home, represents a continuous process of social life in which men reciprocally define objects in terms of themselves and themselves in terms of objects.

Production, therefore, is something more and other than a practical logic of material effectiveness. It is a cultural intention. The material process of physical existence is organized as a meaningful process of social being—which is for men, since they are always culturally defined in determinate ways, the only mode of their existence. If it was Saussure who foresaw the development of a general semiology devoted to "the role played by signs in social life," it was Marx who provided the *mise-en-scène*. Situating society in history, and production in society, Marx framed the problematic of an anthropological science yet unborn. For the question he proposed to it contains its own answer, inasmuch as the question is the definition of symbol itself: How can we account for an existence of persons and things that cannot be recognized in the physical nature of either?

We have seen that Marx nevertheless reserved the symbolic quality to the object in its commodity-form (fetishism). Assuming that use-values transparently serve human needs, that is, by virtue of their evident properties, he gave away the meaningful relations between men and objects essential to the comprehension of production in any historical form. He left the question without an answer: "About the *system of needs* and the *system of labours*—at what point is this to be dealt with?"

In order to frame an answer, to give a cultural account of production, it is critical to note that the social meaning of an object that makes it useful to a certain category of persons is no more apparent from its physical properties than is the value it may be assigned in exchange. Use-value is not less symbolic or less arbitrary than commodity-value. For "utility" is not a quality of the object but a significance of the objective qualities. The reason Americans deem dogs inedible and cattle "food" is no more perceptible to the senses than is the price of meat. Likewise, what stamps trous-

ers as masculine and skirts as feminine has no necessary connection with their physical properties or the relations arising therefrom. It is by their correlations in a symbolic system that pants are produced for men and skirts for women, rather than by the nature of the object per se or its capacity to satisfy a material need—just as it is by the cultural values of men and women that the former normally undertake this production and the latter do not. No object, no thing, has being or movement in human society except by the significance men can give it.[2]

Production is a functional moment of a cultural structure. This understood, the rationality of the market and of bourgeois society is put in another light. The famous logic of maximization is only the manifest appearance of another Reason, for the most part unnoticed and of an entirely different kind. We too have our forebears. It is not as if we had no culture: no symbolic code of objects—in relation to which the mechanism of supply-demand-price, ostensibly in command, is in reality the servant.

Consider, for example, just what Americans do produce in satisfying basic "needs" for food and clothing.[3]

Food Preference and Tabu in American Domestic Animals

The aim of these remarks on American uses of common domestic animals will be modest: merely to suggest the presence of a cultural reason in our

2. In one respect, that of being less bound to a specific situation, use-value is more arbitrary than exchange-value, although in stricter association with concrete properties of the object. Marx was surely correct in understanding the commodity-value as a differential meaning established in the discourse of things, i.e., standing as the concept (*le signifié*) of a given object only by relations developed in the commercial discourse and not by reference to concrete properties. In the latter respect, commodity-value is the more abstract. In order to enter into these determining relations, however, the object must be a use-value, i.e., have a conventional meaning assigned to its objective properties, such as to give it "utility" to certain persons. Since this meaning is a differential *valuation* of the properties, it cannot be grasped by the senses; but it is always connected to the sensible—hence use-value is the more concrete value. On the other hand, the utility-meaning can be invoked outside any specific action, being taken as the meaning of the object as such. But exchange-value is determinable only from the economic interaction of commodities, and differently in each such situation. It is bound to and stipulated within the discourse of commodities; outside the context of exchange, the object resumes the status of a use-value. Viewed thus, use-value is the more arbitrary; exchange-value is a pragmatic "shifter."

3. The discussion which follows is but a marginal gloss on the larger analysis of notions of edibility and relations to domestic animals launched by Douglas (1966, 1971); Leach (1964), and Lévi-Strauss (1966). See also Barthes (1961), R. Valeri (1971), and, on certain correspondences between social and zoological categories, Bulmer (1967) and Tambiah (1969). The intent here is not so much to contribute to the semiotic analysis as to stress the economic implications.

food habits, some of the meaningful connections in the categorical distinctions of edibility among horses, dogs, pigs, and cattle. Yet the point is not only of consuming interest; the productive relation of American society to its own and the world environment is organized by specific valuations of edibility and inedibility, themselves qualitative and in no way justifiable by biological, ecological, or economic advantage. The functional consequences extend from agricultural "adaptation" to international trade and world political relations. The exploitation of the American environment, the mode of relation to the landscape, depends on the model of a meal that includes a central meat element with the peripheral support of carbohydrates and vegetables—while the centrality of the meat, which is also a notion of its "strength," evokes the masculine pole of a sexual code of food which must go back to the Indo-European identification of cattle or increasable wealth with virility.[4] The indispensabilitty of meat as "strength," and of steak as the epitome of virile meats, remains a basic condition of American diet (note the training table of athletic teams, in football especially). Hence also a corresponding structure of agricultural production of feed grains, and in turn a specific articulation to world markets—all of which would change overnight if we ate dogs. By comparison with this meaningful calculus of food preferences, supply, demand, and price offer the interest of institutional means of a system that does not include production costs in its own principles of hierarchy. The "opportunity costs" of our economic rationality are a secondary formation, an expression of relationships already given by another kind of thought, figured a posteriori within the constraints of a logic of meaningful order. The tabu on horses and dogs thus renders unthinkable the consumption of a set of animals whose production is practically feasible and which are nutritionally not to be despised. Surely it must be practicable to raise *some* horses and dogs for food in combination with pigs and cattle. There is even an enormous industry for raising horses as food for dogs. But then, America is the land of the sacred dog.

A traditional Plains Indian or a Hawaiian (not to mention a Hindu), might be staggered to see how we permit dogs to flourish under the strictest interdictions on their consumption. They roam the streets of major

4. Cf. Benveniste (1969, vol. 1) on Indo-European *pasu vīra;* for example: "it is as an element of mobile wealth that one must take the avestic *vīra* or *pasu vīra*. One designates by that term the ensemble of movable private property, men as well as animals" (p. 49). Or see the extensive discussion of the Latin *pecu, pecunia,* and *peculium* (pp. 55 ff.).

American cities at will, taking their masters about on leashes and depositing their excrements at pleasure on curbs and sidewalks. A whole system of sanitation procedures had to be employed to get rid of the mess—which in the native thought, and despite the respect owed the dogs themselves, is considered "pollution." (Nevertheless, a pedestrian excursion on the streets of New York makes the hazards of a midwestern cow pasture seem like an idyllic walk in the country.) Within the houses and apartments, dogs climb upon chairs designed for humans, sleep in people's beds, and sit at table after their own fashion awaiting their share of the family meal. All this in the calm assurance that they themselves will never be sacrificed to necessity or deity, nor eaten even in the case of accidental death. As for horses, Americans have some reason to suspect they are edible. It is rumored that Frenchmen eat them. But the mention of it is usually enough to evoke the totemic sentiment that the French are to Americans as "frogs" are to people.

In a crisis, the contradictions of the system reveal themselves. During the meteoric inflation of food prices in the spring of 1973, American capitalism did not fall apart—quite the contrary; but the cleavages in the food system did surface. Responsible government officials suggested that the people might be well-advised to buy the cheaper cuts of meat such as kidneys, heart, or entrails—after all, they are just as nutritious as hamburger. To Americans, this particular suggestion made Marie Antoinette seem like a model of compassion (see fig. 10). The reason for the disgust seems to go to the same logic as greeted certain unsavory attempts to substitute horsemeat for beef during the same period. The following item is reprinted in its entirety from the *Honolulu Advertiser* of 15 April 1973:

PROTEST BY HORSE LOVERS

WESTBROOK, Conn. (UPI)—About 25 persons on horseback and on foot paraded outside Carlson's Mart yesterday to protest the store's selling horsemeat as a cheap substitute for beef.

"I think the slaughter of horses for human consumption in this country is disgraceful," said protest organizer Richard Gallagher. "We are not at a stage yet in the United States where we are forced to kill horses for meat."

"Horses are to be loved and ridden," Gallagher said. "In other words, horses are shown affection, where cattle that are raised for beef . . . they've never had someone pet them or brush them, or anything like that. To buy someone's horse up and slaughter it, that, I just don't see it."

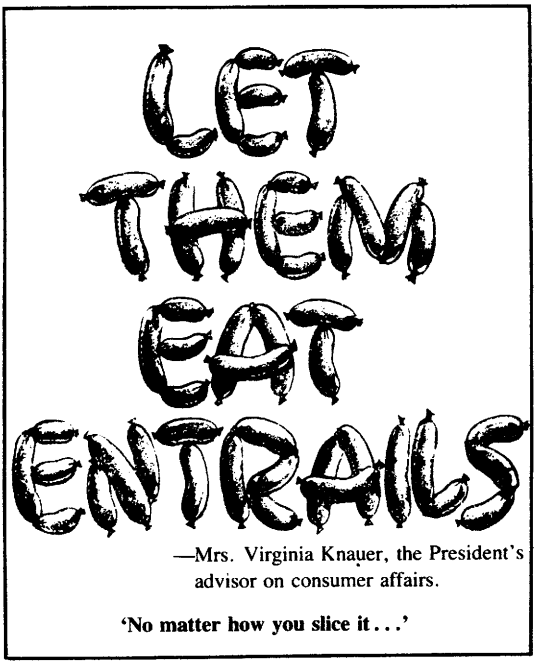

Figure 10 From the *Honolulu Advertiser*, 2 March 1973

The market began selling horsemeat—as "equine round," "horsemeat porterhouse" and "horseburger"—on Tuesday, and owner Kenneth Carlson said about 20,000 pounds were sold in the first week.

Most butchers who sell horsemeat have purchased "real old, useless horses" which would otherwise be sold "for dogfood and stuff like that," Gallagher said. But "now they're picking up the young horses. We can't buy these horses now, because the killers are outbidding us."

The principal reason postulated in the American meat system is the relation of the species to human society. "Horses are shown affection, where cattle that are raised for beef... they've never had someone pet them or brush them, or anything like that."[5] Let us take up in more detail

5. "Supposing an individual accustomed to eating dogs should inquire among us for the reason why we do not eat dogs, we could only reply that it is not customary; and he would

the domesticated series cattle-pigs-horses-dogs. All of these are in some measure integrated in American society, but clearly in different statuses, which correspond to degrees of edibility. The series is divisible, first, into the two classes of edible (cattle-pigs) and inedible (horses-dogs), but then again, within each class, into higher and less preferable categories of food (beef vs. pork) and more and less rigorous categories of tabu (dogs vs. horses). The entire set appears to be differentiated by participation as subject or object in the company of men. Moreover, the same logic attends the differentiations of the edible animal into "meat" and the internal "organs" or "innards." To adopt the conventional incantations of structuralism, "everything happens as if" the food system is inflected throughout by a principle of metonymy, such that taken as a whole it composes a sustained metaphor on cannibalism.

Dogs and horses participate in American society in the capacity of subjects. They have proper personal names, and indeed we are in the habit of conversing with them as we do not talk to pigs and cattle.[6] Dogs and horses are thus deemed inedible, for, as the Red Queen said, "It isn't etiquette to cut anybody you've been introduced to." But as domestic cohabitants, dogs are closer to men than are horses, and their consumption is more unthinkable: they are "one of the family." Traditionally horses stand in a more menial, working relationship to people; if dogs are as kinsmen, horses are as servants and nonkin. Hence the consumption of horses is at least conceivable, if not general, whereas the notion of eating

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be justified in saying that dogs are tabooed among us, just as much as we are justified in speaking of taboos among primitive people. If we were hard pressed for reasons, we should probably base our aversion to eating dogs or horses on the seeming impropriety of eating animals that live with us as our friends" (Boas 1965 [1938], p. 207).

6. French and American naming practices appear to differ here. Lévi-Strauss's observations on the names the French give animals (1966, pp. 204 ff.) apply only fractionally to American custom. A brief ethnographic inquiry is enough to show that the latter is quite complex in this regard. The general rule, however, is that named/unnamed : inedible/edible. The names of both dogs and horses (excluding racehorses) are sometimes "like stage names, forming a series parallel to the names people bear in ordinary life, or, in other words, metaphorical names" (ibid., p. 205)—e.g., Duke, King, Scout, Trigger. More often, however, the names used in English are descriptive terms, likewise metaphorical, but taken from the chain of discourse, Smokey, Paint, Blue, Snoopy, Spot, etc. The French reserve such names for cattle. Our cattle are generally unnamed, except for milk cows, which often have two-syllable human names (Bessie, Ruby, Patty, Rena—these were collected from informants). Work horses—as distinguished from riding horses—also had human names. Differences between related societies in these regards, as Lévi-Strauss (1973) points out, represent different cultural *découpages* or superpositions of the animal on the human series.

dogs understandably evokes some of the revulsion of the incest tabu.[7] On the other hand, the edible animals such as pigs and cattle generally have the status of objects to human subjects, living their own lives apart, neither the direct complement nor the working instrument of human activities. Usually, then, they are anonymous, or if they do have names, as some milk cows do, these are mainly terms of reference in the conversations of men. Yet as barnyard animals and scavengers of human food, pigs are contiguous with human society, more so than cattle (cf. Leach 1964, pp. 50–51). Correspondingly, cut for cut, pork is a less prestigious meat than beef. Beef is the viand of higher social standing and greater social occasion. A roast of pork does not have the solemnity of prime rib of beef, nor does any part of the pig match the standing of steak.

Edibility is inversely related to humanity. The same holds in the preferences and common designations applied to edible portions of the animal. Americans frame a categorical distinction between the "inner" and "outer" parts which represents to them the same principle of relation to humanity, metaphorically extended. The organic nature of the flesh (muscle and fat) is at once disguised and its preferability indicated by the general term "meat," and again by particular conventions such as "roast," "steak," "chops," or "chuck"; whereas the internal organs are frankly known as such (or as "innards"), and more specifically as "heart," "tongue," "kidney," and so on—except as they are euphemistically transformed by the process of preparation into such products as "sweetbreads."[8] The internal and external parts, in other words, are respectively assimilated to and distinguished from parts of the human body—on the same model as we conceive our "innermost selves" as our

7. Leach develops this point in his important paper on English animal categories as fitting into a systematic set of correspondences between relations to people and relations to animals according to degrees of distance from self (1964, pp. 42–47 and appendix). Leach claims the scheme has wide validity, although not universality; of course, it would require some permutation for peoples who (for example) eat domestic dogs. The Hawaiians treat dogs destined for eating with great compassion, "and not infrequently, condescend to treat them with Poi [pounded taro] from their mouths" (Dampier 1971, p. 50). Dogs destined for eating, however, are never allowed to touch meat (Corney 1896 [1821], p. 117). It is not clear whether they are eaten by the family who raised them, or like Melanesian pigs, similarly coddled in the household, reserved for prestations to others.

8. The meat taxonomy is of course much more complex than these common appellations. Steak, for instance, has a whole vocabulary of its own, in which some organic reference occurs, although usually not the terms applied to the human body (sirloin, T-bone, etc.). Calves' liver is an exception to this entire discussion, the reasons for which I do not know.

"true selves"—and the two categories are accordingly ranked as more or less fit for human consumption. The distinction between "inner" and "outer" thus duplicates within the animal the differentiation drawn between edible and tabu species, the whole making up a single logic on two planes with the consistent implication of a prohibition on cannibalism.

It is this symbolic logic which organizes demand. The social value of steak or roast, as compared with tripe or tongue, is what underlies the difference in economic value. From the nutritional point of view, such a notion of "better" and "inferior" cuts would be difficult to defend. Moreover, steak remains the most expensive meat even though its absolute supply is much greater than that of tongue; there is much more steak to the cow than there is tongue. But more, the symbolic scheme of edibility joins with that organizing the relations of production to precipitate, through income distribution and demand, an entire totemic order, uniting in a parallel series of differences the status of persons and what they eat. The poorer people buy the cheaper cuts, cheaper because they are socially inferior meats. But poverty is in the first place ethnically and racially encoded. Blacks and whites enter differentially into the American labor market, their participation ordered by an invidious distinction of relative "civilization." Black is in American society as the savage among us, objective nature in culture itself. Yet then, by virtue of the ensuing distribution of income, the "inferiority" of blacks is realized also as a culinary defilement. "Soul food" may be made a virtue. But only as the negation of a general logic in which cultural degradation is confirmed by dietary preferences akin to cannibalism, even as this metaphorical attribute of the food is confirmed by the status of those who prefer it.

I would not invoke "the so-called totemism" merely in casual analogy to the *pensée sauvage*. True that Lévi-Strauss writes as if totemism had retreated in our society to a few marginal resorts or occasional practices (1963*a;* 1966). And fair enough—in the sense that the "totemic operator," articulating differences in the cultural series to differences in natural species, is no longer a main architecture of the cultural system. But one must wonder whether it has not been replaced by species and varieties of manufactured objects, which like totemic categories have the power of making even the demarcation of their individual owners a procedure of social classification. (My colleague Milton Singer suggests that what Freud said of national differentiation might well be generalized to capitalism, that it is narcissism in respect of minor differences.) And yet more fundamen-

tal, do not the totemic and product-operators share a common basis in the cultural code of natural features, the significance assigned to contrasts in shape, line, color and other object properties presented by nature? The "development" that is effected by the *pensée bourgeoise* may consist mainly in the capacity to duplicate and combine such variations at will, and within society itself. But in that event, capitalist production stands as an exponential expansion of the same kind of thought, with exchange and consumption as means of its communication.

For, as Baudrillard writes in this connection, consumption itself is an exchange (of meanings), a discourse—to which practical virtues, "utilities" are attached only post facto:

> As it is true of the communication of speech, so it is likewise true of goods and products: consumption is exchange. A consumer is never isolated, any more than a speaker. It is in this sense that we must have a total revolution in the analysis of consumption. In the same way as there is no language simply because of an individual need to speak, but first of all language—not as an absolute, autonomous system but as a contemporary structure of the exchange of meaning, to which is articulated the individual interaction of speech—in the same sense neither is there consumption because of an objective need to consume, a final intention of the subject toward the object. There is a social production, in a system of exchange, of differentiated materials, of a code of meanings and constituted values. The functionality of goods comes afterward, adjusting itself to, rationalizing and at the same time repressing these fundamental structural mechanisms. [Baudrillard 1972, pp. 76–77][9]

The modern totemism is not contradicted by a market rationality. On the contrary, it is promoted precisely to the extent that exchange-value and consumption depend on decisions of "utility." For such decisions turn upon the social significance of concrete contrasts among products. It is by

9. Moreover, there is to this notion of communication a fundamental base, set down by Rousseau in his running debate with Hobbes: "But when it should prove true that this unlimited and indomitable covetousness shall have developed in all men to the point supposed by our sophist, still it would not produce that universal war of each against all of which Hobbes ventures to trace the odious *tableau*. This unchecked desire to appropriate all things is incompatible with that of destroying all fellow beings; and having killed everyone the victor would have only the misfortune of being alone in the world, and could enjoy nothing even as he had everything. Wealth in itself: What good does it do if it cannot be communicated; and what would it serve a man to possess the entire universe, if he were its only inhabitant?" (Rousseau 1964, 3:601).

their meaningful differences from other goods that objects are rendered exchangeable: they thus become use-values to certain persons, who are correspondingly differentiated from other subjects. At the same time, as a modular construction of concrete elements combined by human invention, manufactured goods uniquely lend themselves to this type of discourse. Fashioning the product, man does not merely alienate his labor, congealed thus in objective form, but by the physical modifications he effects he sediments a thought. The object stands as a human concept outside itself, as man speaking to man through the medium of things. And the systematic variation in objective features is capable of serving, even better than the differences between natural species, as the medium of a vast and dynamic scheme of thought: because in manufactured objects many differences can be varied at once, and by a godlike manipulation—and the greater the technical control, the more precise and diversified this manipulation—and because each difference thus developed by human intervention with a view toward "utility" must have a significance and not just those features, existing within nature for their own reasons, which lend themselves to cultural notice. The bourgeois totemism, in other words, is potentially more elaborate than any "wild" (*sauvage*) variety, not that it has been liberated from a natural-material basis, but precisely because nature has been domesticated. "Animals produce only themselves," as Marx taught, "while men reproduce the whole of nature."[10]

Yet if it is not mere existence which men produce but a "definite *mode of life* on their part," it follows that this reproduction of the whole of nature constitutes an objectification of the whole of culture. By the systematic arrangement of meaningful differences assigned the concrete, the cultural order is realized also as an order of goods. The goods stand as an object code for the signification and valuation of persons and occasions, functions and situations. Operating on a specific logic of correspondence between material and social contrasts, production is thus the reproduction of the culture in a system of objects.

One is led naturally to exploit the double meanings in such terms as

10. "Les objets ne constituent ni une flore ni une faune. Pourtant ils donnent bien l'impression d'une végétation proliférante et d'une jungle, où le nouvel homme sauvage des temps modernes a du mal à retrouver les réflexes de la civilisation. Cette faune et cette flore, que l'homme a produit et qui reviennent l'encercler et l'investir . . . il faut tenter de les décrire . . . en n'oubliant jamais, dans leur faste et leur profusion, qu'elles sont le *produit d'une activité humaine*, et qu'elles sont dominées, non par des lois écologiques naturelles, mais par la loi de la valeur d'échange" (Baudrillard 1970, pp. 19–20).

"fashion" and "fabricate": I take the American clothing system as the principal example.

Notes on the American Clothing System

Considered as a whole, the system of American clothing amounts to a very complex scheme of cultural categories and the relations between them, a veritable map—it does not exaggerate to say—of the cultural universe.[11] The first task will be to suggest that the scheme operates on a kind of general syntax: a set of rules for declining and combining classes of the clothing-form so as to formulate the cultural categories. In a study of *mode* as advertised in several French magazines, Roland Barthes discriminated for women's dress alone some sixty foci of signification. Each site or dimension comprised a range of meaningful contrasts: some by mere presence or absence, as of gloves; some as diversified as the indefinite series of colors (Barthes 1967, pp. 114 ff.).[12] It is evident that with a proper syntax, rules of combination, a formidable series of propositions could be developed, constituting so many statements of the relations between persons and situations in the cultural system. It is equally evident that I could not hope to do more than suggest the presence of this grammar, without pretense at having analyzed it.

There are in costume several levels of semantic production. The outfit as a whole makes a statement, developed out of the particular arrangement of garment parts and by contrast to other total outfits. Again there is a logic of the parts, whose meanings are developed differentially by comparison at this level, in a Saussurean way: as, for example,

11. Fashion in clothing is of course frequently commented upon by social scientists and is occasionally given empirical investigation (Barthes 1967; Richardson and Kroeber 1940; Simmel 1904; Stone 1959). But there is a much richer literature upon which one may draw for ethnographic purposes: the direct reflections of participants in the process. Our discussion makes use of the writings of such as admen, market researchers, designers, buyers, fashion editors and critics, and textbooks by teachers of home economics, design, and aesthetics. Moreover, the discussion does not deny itself the advantage of observation and self-reflection in the one situation where the ethnographer finally realizes the privileged position of the participant-observer, namely, in his own village. I do not claim to have exhausted any of these resources—very far from it.

    For a treatment of costume analogous to that attempted here—which, however, came to my attention after this chapter had gone to press—see Bogatyrev 1971.

12. Although Barthes was exclusively concerned with the rhetoric of fashion as written (*le vêtement écrit*) rather than with the symbolic system of the clothing object as such, much of his discussion is pertinent to the present effort, and I have drawn heavily upon it.

the value of women's slacks is simultaneously determined by opposition to other garments of that locus, such as skirts or men's pants, as well as by contrast to other examples of the same class (slacks) that differ in color, pattern, or whatever. My concern in discussing this syntax will be more with what is conveyed than with an account of the entire set of rules. It will be enough to indicate that it provides a systematic basis for the cultural discourse "fashioned" upon it:

> "Most people wear some sign, and don't know what it's saying. Choose your sign according to your audience," Malloy said . . . "a good dark suit, white shirt and conservative tie are a young man's best wardrobe friends, if he's applying for a white collar job in a big range of business and professional categories. They're authority symbols. It's that simple," he said. ["Fashion Column," *Chicago Daily News,* 11 Jan. 1974]

But there is another problem, somewhat more difficult. I should like to move down a level to the constituent units composing the discourse: to demonstrate here how particular social meanings are related to elementary physical contrasts in the clothing object. It will be a movement also of rapprochement with totemic thought. For the principle is very much the same: a series of concrete differences among objects of the same class to which correspond distinctions along some dimension of social order—as the difference between blue collar and white is one between manual labor and bureaucratic; the relative saturation or brightness of hue discriminates fall from spring; or, "A sweet disorder in the dress / Kindles in clothes a wantonness" (Herrick). By such means the set of manufactured objects is able to comprehend the entire cultural order of a society it would at once dress and address. (Two words whose derivation from a common root—as Tylor said of "kindred" and "kindness"—expresses in the happiest way one of the most fundamental principles of social life.)

The overall objective in all this, I should stress, is some contribution toward a cultural account of production. It is to this end that I explore the code of object properties and their meaningful combinations. The emphasis on the code implies also that we shall not be concerned at present with how individuals dress. This is not simply a decision for *langue* over *parole.* How people dress is a far more complicated semiotic problem than can be attempted here, including as it does the particular consciousness or self-conceptions of the subject in a specific meaningful "context of the situation." Again, I touch too briefly on the related question of the manipulation of the fashion code within the clothing industry. However, if all such

limitations, which have a common reference to the system in action, render this account regrettably incomplete, they do have the advantage of focusing upon the position it is necessary to establish in advance, and without which all further analysis of action risks relapse into a vulgar pragmatics: that production is the realization of a symbolic scheme.

For notice what is produced in the clothing system. By various objective features an item of apparel becomes appropriate for men or women, for night or for day, for "around the house" or "in public," for adult or adolescent. What is produced is, first, classes of time and place which index situations or activities; and, second, classes of status to which all persons are ascribed. These might be called "notional coordinates" of clothing, in the sense that they mark basic notions of time, place, and person as constituted in the cultural order. Hence what is reproduced in clothing is this classificatory scheme. Yet not simply that. Not simply the boundaries, the divisions, and subdivisions of, say, age-grades or social classes; by a specific symbolism of clothing differences, what is produced are the meaningful differences between these categories. In manufacturing apparel of distinct cut, outline, or color for women as opposed to men, we reproduce the distinction between femininity and masculinity as *known* to this society. That is what is going on in the pragmatic-material process of production.

More specifically, what is going on is a differentiation of the cultural space as between town and country, and within the town between downtown and neighborhood—and then again, a contrast between all of these, as collectively making up a public sphere, and the domestic-familial domain. When a woman goes shopping, she normally "dresses *up*" a domestic costume, at least by the addition of peripheral display of elements such as jewelry; and the more so if she is shopping downtown rather than "in the neighborhood." Conversely, when a man returns home from "a hard day at the office," he dresses down a public style in a way consistent with the "familiarity" of the domestic sphere.[13]

13. Cf. Crawley's "principle of adaptation to state": "Dress expresses every social movement, as well as every social grade. It also expresses family, municipal, provincial, regional, tribal, and national character. At the same time it gives full play to the individual. A complete psychology of the subject would analyze all such cases with reference to the principle of adaptation" (Crawley 1931, p. 172). Some of the objective changes that accompany the fundamental proportion of public/private: impersonal/familial are conjured up by the stereotypic image of the good bourgeois returning home from "a hard day at the office": a banal scene in which the social passage is signified by the man successively removing his hat, kissing his wife, taking off his jacket, stripping away his tie (exaggerated gesture), opening his shirt collar (deep breath), sinking into his favorite

At the other extreme are the higher distinctions of national space: for example, the West Coast and East Coast, of which the marked subclasses are California and the Northeast (cf. Rosencranz 1972, pp. 263–64).

We also substantialize in clothing the basic cultural valuations of time—diurnal, hebdomadal, and seasonal. We have evening clothes and daytime clothes, "little afternoon dresses" and nighttime dress (pajamas). Each references the nature of the activities ordered by those times, in the way that weekday apparel is to Sunday "best" as the secular is to the sacred. The marked seasonal variations are spring and fall, the colors of these seasons usually conceived to parallel the vegetation cycle. (Outdoor color per se, however, seems to be inverted for summer and winter dress: spectral green and red mark the winter solstice [Christmas], whereas white is traditionally appropriate between Memorial Day [May 30] and Labor Day.)

A similar treatment could be made of the class, the sex, and the age-grade of clothing. All these social categories have determinate markers, characteristic variations on the object level. In the common ideology of producers and consumers, this consubstantiality of subject and object is predicated on an identity of essences, such that the silk is "womanly" as women are "silky." "Fine as silk," "soft as silk," the cloth opposes itself on one side to the masculinity of wool and on the other to the inferiority of cotton (cf. Dichter 1959, pp. 104 ff.).[14] But this Veblenesque

armchair, donning the slippers fetched by a well-trained child, spouse, or dog—and breathing a sigh of relief. A whole set of statements about the contrast between kinship and the "larger world" is going on. In Stone's sociological study of clothing in Vansburg, Michigan, it was observed that about 70 percent of manual and white-collar workers arrive at work in what they consider their work clothes, and about 60 percent change when they go home. More than 90 percent of their wives changed clothing before going shopping, and about 75 percent did so again upon returning home (Stone 1959, pp. 109–10). Lynes some time ago noticed that on weekends, since the (suburban) home has become an arena of do-it-yourself, the white-collar class has affected "workclothes" (e.g., blue jeans) in the domestic sphere—except for the "backyard barbeque," which is distinguished by bright and dashing holiday wear, "symbols of revolt against the conformity imposed on men by the daily routine of business" (1957, p. 69).

14. Varieties of cotton are again differentiated by sex according to heaviness and stiffness; so the common four-class paradigm in materials:

	male	female
class	wool	silk
mass	denim	"cotton"

fine ↕ coarse

heavy ← → light

In a book on advertising technique, Stephen Baker (1961, unpaginated) presents pictures of the same woman draped in four different fabrics. He comments: "Fabrics have sexual

correlation of the height of luxury with the height of femininity is likely transposed by race, as for American blacks the male seems to be the marked sex whereas whites decorate the female.[15] Yet in turn, the correlation between black male and white female elegance along such dimensions as texture will be differentially inflected by class, insofar as race and class overlap, and it is a commonplace of the homegrown sociology that muted color and minor contrast are upper-class Establishment whereas brilliant color and major contrast are "mass" (Birren 1956). On the other hand, the silken sobriety of the upper-class white woman is exchanged in her daughter's clothes for the textures of youth: which brings us back full circle to wool by the common discrimination of youth and male from the adult female on the attributes of activity/passivity (ceremonial.)[16]

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connotations. Wool is the least feminine of the four materials . . . . It makes a women appear businesslike, urban, sophisticated. Linen has a mixed image. If it is white, the fabric strongly suggests purity. It is more feminine than wool but has little seductive power. Linen is associated with clean, wholesome fun. The delicacy (and lightness) of lace makes it very much a woman's fabric. Rich in pattern, lace exudes an air of elegance, aloofness, yet soft femininity. Silk is the most sensuous of all materials. It shines and reflects the play of light. It is very soft and clings to a woman's body. This characteristic makes silk (or satin) bring out the seductive qualities of the wearer."

15. Cf. Schwartz (1958) on clothing among American blacks. One observation of this empirical study that seems quite generalizable is that "the least significant motive underlying the selection and wearing of certain items of clothing is protection from the elements" (p. 27).

16. An empirical study of favored costumes of upper-class college and middle-aged women developed contrasts of the following type (N. Taylor, cited in Rosencranz 1972, pp. 214–15):

	Young College Women	**Middle-aged Women**
Garment	Dark gray wool dress and coat; scarf of gray, black, and red paisley	Black silk ottoman suit
Shoes	Black brogans	Black silk pumps with bow
Hose	"Hint" of gray	Black sheer
Handbag	Black calf	Black silk
Bracelet	Silver with pearls	Gold
Pin	-------	Diamond sunburst
Ring	Pearl	Pearl and diamond

From the above information and preceding discussion one could probably make a few guesses about production: for example, that (other things being equal, and they are

Gender and age-grade serve to illustrate another property of the grammar: certain mechanisms of opening the set to make it more complex without, however, a revision in principle. Even in expansion, the system seems to adhere to Sapir's dictum that fashion is custom in the guise of a departure from custom. New species and subspecies are permuted, for example, by a combinatory synthesis of existing oppositions. In designer's categories, the received distinction between infants and schoolchildren has latterly been segmented into "infants," "toddlers," "preschoolers," and "schoolchildren"; adolescents are likewise not what they used to be, but "preteens," "subteens," and "teens" (Rosencranz 1972, p. 203). In the same way, various categories of homosexuality can be evolved by particular combinations of male and female apparel, to the extent that we now have six more or less clearly distinguishable sartorial sexes. But at the line between adolescent and adult, a second type of permutation is currently in evidence: the adaptation of an existing distinction from elsewhere in the system, a kind of metaphorical transfer, to signify a change of content in a traditional opposition. The received idea of an "adolescent revolution" doubtless predisposed the change, but since the Vietnam War the conflict with the constituted (i.e., adult) authorities has been specifically idiomized politically, and so in apparel by the contrast, adolescent/adult: worker/capitalist, with youth appropriating the blue jeans and work shirts of *society's* underclass. Perhaps nothing could better prove the absence of practical utility in clothing, since work is one of the last things youth has in mind. But the example serves as well to reveal the singular quality of capitalist society: not that it fails to work on a symbolic code, but that the code works as an open set, responsive to events which it both orchestrates and assimilates to produce expanded versions of itself.

Parenthetically: this view of production as the substantialization of a cultural logic should prohibit us from speaking naively of the generation of demand by supply, as though the social product were the conspiracy of a few "decision-makers," able to impose an ideology of fashion through the deceits of advertising. In Marx's phrase, "The educator himself needs educating." It is not as if the producers' *parole* becomes our *langue*. Nor

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many), the amount of black silk produced is correlated with the number of middle-aged, upper-class white females in the population—which is itself a product of the total organization of society (notably including production). The proposition is at once banal and totally unself-evident. It is hardly in the nature of things that silk has some affinity with white middle-aged women, although it is in *the culture of the things*.

need one indulge in the converse mystification of capitalist production as a response to consumers' wants: "We always try to adapt," says the head of public relations for the company that has profited most from the recent expansion of blue jeans sales.[17] But who then is dominant, the producer or the consumer? It should be possible to transcend all such subjective representations for an institutional description of capitalist production as a cultural process. Clearly this production is organized to exploit all possible social differentiation by a motivated differentiation of goods. It proceeds according to a meaningful logic of the concrete, of the significance of objective differences, thus developing appropriate signs of emergent social distinctions. Such might well describe the specialization of age differences in clothing, or the metaphoric transfer of blue jeans—especially if it is noted that the iconic integration of social and object distinctions is a dialectic process. The product that reaches its destined market constitutes an objectification of a social category, and so helps to constitute the latter in society; as in turn, the differentiation of the category develops further social declensions of the goods system. Capitalism is no sheer rationality. It is a definite form of cultural order; or a cultural order acting in a particular form. End of parenthesis.

I turn to another type of variation in costume, this corresponding to the division of labor broadly considered, to suggest the presence of systematic rules for social categorization of the clothing form. First, however, we must establish the classification on the social level. In his discussion of the *monde* in the *mode,* Barthes distinguishes two alternate ways in which the social significance of costume is conceived (1967, pp. 249 ff.). These are, in effect, two modalities of social discourse, the active and the passive: doing and being, *faire* and *être,* activity and identity. Adapting the distinction to present purposes, one might say that the first has to do with functions; it indexes costume according to the type of activity, such as sport or manual labor. The second relates to occupational status—the characteristic habit of the industrial worker, the farmer, the waitress, the doctor, the soldier. Again, in the following very general and oversimplified table of

17. Not to deny that such may be the genuine mode of appearance to the participants in the process: "'I don't think I ever figured it would come to this,'" says Haas, who along with his brother Peter, the (Levi-Strauss) company president, was responsible for molding Levi's into its present structure. "'Basically, what we've tried to do is to serve society's needs.'"

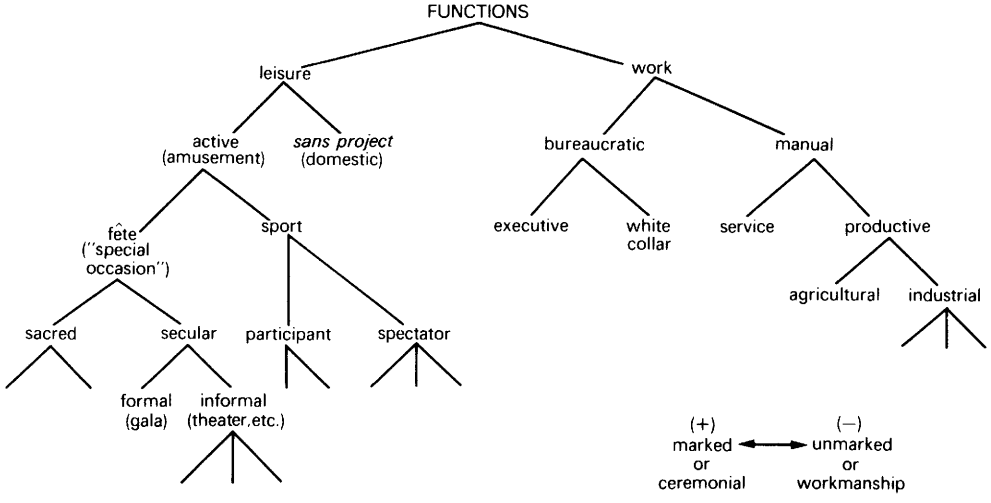
"'The consumer still determines what he wants,'" says Bud Johns, the company's public relations director. "'We always try to adapt'" (Blue jeans: Uniform for a casual world," *Chicago Tribune,* 5 May 1975).

functions (fig. 11), I abbreviate a considerable argument, and more than one assumption:

The main assumption is the validity of Veblen's distinction of ceremony and workmanship in American categories of activity and clothing. The key to the entire table is this principle. In each opposition, the marked or ceremonial function is placed to the left, the unmarked and workmanlike to the right, the whole then a set of differentiations of the master distinction between work and leisure (cf. Veblen 1934 [1899]). If this assumption is allowed as more or less ethnographically correct, and the consequences likewise worked out through the classes and subclasses in a faithful way, two remarkable regularities in the system of clothing are presented to view. The first might be called the *rule of ceremonial correspondence*. It refers to the analogous differentiation of costume in any two functional classes similarly ordered on the opposition of ceremony and workmanship. Consider, for example, the "dress clothes" affected by men on "special occasions" (*fête*), culminating perhaps in formal tuxedo for very ritualized affairs (e.g., marriages, gala) or, slightly less formally, the highly styled dark suit. Notice then that these outfits specifically resemble the "conservative" suits worn by business executives, in a way corresponding to their respective differences from sportive wear in the area of amusement and white-collar dress in the domain of work. The latter two—by their relative "informality," permissible color schemes, and so forth—again resemble each other; indeed, to the extent that a younger office worker may be discriminated from the higher corporate executives precisely by his "sports jacket." Yet exactly the same differences characterize, in a general way, the opposition between the more formal costumes of amusement and the relative undress permitted when "doing nothing; just sitting around the house" (*sans projet*). Or again, it is the difference between the blue jeans or overalls of an industrial worker and the more stylized uniforms of waitresses, deliverymen, and other service workers. This particular opposition also reappears on the leisure side in the sporting outfits of hunting or skiing, which are like uniforms even as they are differentiated from the "casual clothes" of the spectator.[18] It is thus a rule of analogy in the oppositions of ceremony/workmanship, at whatever level they may appear in the system. The terms of any opposition correspond to the terms of any other, such that the marked (ceremonial) costumes of any two classes

18. Or consider the following example of stylization in relation to ceremonial hierarchy noted by Jacinski in one factory: " 'Suntan trousers and shirts but no ties for inspectors; slacks and sport shirts for lead men; slacks, white shirts, and ties for assistant foremen; and the same, plus a jacket, for the foreman' " (Quoted by Ryan 1966, p. 66).

Figure 11 Schema of functions signified in American clothing



resemble each other by an analogous differentiation from the unmarked (workmanlike) costumes of their respective classes. Or more formally:

(1) $M_x/\overline{M}_x \cong M_y/\overline{M}_y$—which says that the opposition (/) of marked (M) and unmarked ($\overline{M}$) in any given class ($_x$) corresponds ($\cong$) to $M/\overline{M}$ in any other class ($_y$).

Besides the similarities in the differences, there are also differences in the similarities—a tuxedo is still more "stylized" than a business suit, as domestic clothes (especially for night) are more "undressed' and "casual" than work clothes—which leads to a second rule: *rule of ceremonial exaggeration*. The rule is that, on one hand, the marked costume in a more ceremonial opposition is itself more ceremonial than its counterpart in some workmanlike opposition: as the uniforms of active sport are more colorful and cut with more flair than the uniform of the waitress or the milkman. On the other hand, the unmarked costume of the ceremonial opposition is even less workmanlike than its counterpart on the more workmanlike side: as the spectator's outfit is more "casual" than the industrial worker's. The same might be said of the opposition of *fête* and sport within the category "amusement," as compared with executive and clerical in the category of managerial work, even as the last pair is at once more ceremonial (the executive suit) and less workmanlike (white collar) than, again, the service versus industrial worker. The rule, therefore, is that the opposition stipulated within a workmanlike class is exaggerated by the corresponding opposition in a more ceremonial class. The exaggeration occurs in both directions: the ceremonial outfit is more ceremonial at its marked pole, less workmanlike at its unmarked pole. Formally:

(2) $M_x^1 > M_y^2 :: M_x^1 < M_y^2$, where the superscripts (1, 2, 3 . . . n) represent a factor of workmanlike function and $>$ and $<$ represent relative formality.

Or, by diagram (fig. 12):

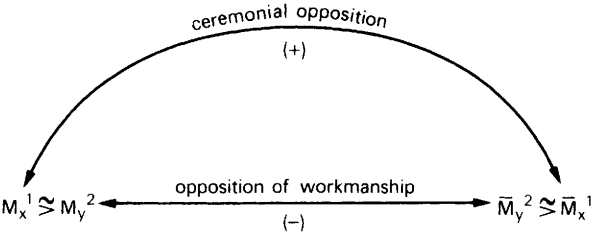


Figure 12 Rule of ceremonial exaggeration

I spare the reader a corresponding discussion of the modality of "being," which, as it responds to a proliferating specialization of occupation, is even more protean than the system of functions.[19] But it seems legitimate to pause at this juncture to explain what claims are being made for exercises of the sort just indulged in. The overall aim is to respond to a question initially posed by Marx, but so far as I know without answer in his or any other Economics: What kind of theoretical account can be given for production as a *mode of life*? I propose here an example of the beginning of such a cultural account: example, because it is concerned only with the system of clothing in modern America; beginning, because it has been concerned so far mostly with the general syntax, social classes of the clothing object, and certain rules of its social declension. But it is necessary to be still more cautious. The claim made for the rules of ceremonial correspondence is only that they suggest such a syntax. To have any higher pretensions, the discussion would have to stipulate the kinds of clothing features to which the rules apply—features of color, color contrast, line and outline, type and congruence of garment pieces, kinds of accessories, qualities of texture—and the modes of their combination. The full scope of the project is very large; this is only an example of the suggestion of a beginning.

In the same spirit I would discuss the symbolic process on the lowest level of constituent elements and their specific meanings. What I have in mind is the determination of minimal distinctive contrasts in object features, as in line, color, or texture, that signify differences in social meaning. Not to claim here, either, any novelty in the attempt, or any superiority by virtue of an apparent systematics to the observations many others have made:

> So far as I know, overalls are a garment native to this country . . . the standard or classical garment at very least . . . of the southern rural American working man: they are his uniform, the badge and proclamation of his peasantry . . . the basis, what they are, can best be seen

19. On occupational differentiation of clothing, see, for example, Ryan 1966, p. 62; Horn 1968. One of Stone's Vansburg informants commented as follows on the changes wrought by recent agricultural specialization: " 'A few years ago you could tell any farmer. They used to wear denim overalls all the time. Now they have diversified farming, so the clothes have changed, too. Well, some still wear denims. Those in the dairy business have uniforms. Those in the poultry business have white uniforms. Those in beef wear women's skirts and corduroy pants—out in the field, they have to wear something heavier. It's altogether different than it was thirty years ago' " (Stone 1959, pp. 120–21).

when they are still new; before they have lost (or gained) shape and color and texture; and before the white seams of their structure have lost their brilliance. . . . In the strapping across the kidneys they again resemble work harness, and in their crossed straps and tin buttons.

And in the functional pocketing of their bib, a harness modified to the convenience of a used animal of such high intelligence that he has use for tools. . . . A new suit of overalls has among its beauties those of a blue print: and they are a map of a working man.

The shirts too; squarely cut and strongly seamed; with big square pockets and with metal buttons: the cloth stiff, the sweat cold when it is new, the collar large in newness and standing out in angles under the ears. [James Agee, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941, pp. 265–67)]

It is these elementary meaningful units—the squareness of the pockets, the stiffness of the cloth, the crossed straps—that the present discussion intends. There is at a higher level a lexicon of the producible units: types of cloth such as silk or wool, kinds of upper garment such as shirts and blouses: products as such, entering integrally into the total outfit and usually contributing several conceptions to the whole. But these are already complex constructions whose meaningful import is predicated on constituent details of the form. In a work which ridicules the conceit that our clothes are in any sense "modern" or "civilized," Rudolfsky writes:

Any piece of fabric can be charged with sexuality by simply working it into a precise shape. The resulting form might determine the actual sex. . . .

The overlap of a blouse, a jacket or a coat determines the sex of the article. By buttoning a garment on the right side, it becomes suitable for men only and definitely unsuitable for women. Whatever the quaint explanations of folklore are, the right side of the body has always been male, the left side female; this orientation survived despite its irrationality. [Rudofsky 1947, pp. 126–27]

One might easily adduce a number of similar elementary features that differentiate the gender of clothes. Men's sleeves, for instance, are characteristically more tailored than women's and extend the full length of the arm by comparison with three-quarter (or less) lengths which expose the lower extremity—contrasts exactly repeated on the lower limbs in trousers and skirts.[20] The masculine fabric is relatively coarse and stiff, usually heavier, the feminine soft and fine; apart from the neutral white, masculine

20. As has often been remarked, there is an asymmetry in the gender of almost all objects, including clothing: it is feminine things that are marked and exclusive; male objects,

colors are darker, feminine light or pastel. The line in men's clothing is square, with angles and corners; women's dress emphasizes the curved, the rounded, the flowing, and the fluffy. Such elements of line, texture, and the like are the minimal constituents, the objective contrasts which convey social meaning.

I refrain from calling them "vestemes," but if necessary they might be deemed ECUs—for "elementary constituent units" and as a pun on McLuhan's dictum that "conformity to a fashion literally gives currency to a style." I propose to consider just three classes of elementary units: texture, line, and color.

Texture first, mainly to illustrate that significance is developed from binary contrasts of signifiers. Texture operates semantically on a number of objective oppositions—heavy/light, rough/smooth, hard/soft,—several of them simultaneously pertinent to any given cloth. Marilyn Horn, in a text subtitled "An Interdisciplinary Study of Clothing" (1968, p. 245), compiles a fair list of textural dyads, supposing each pair the two poles of a graded continuum of variation. I myself would be pressed to discriminate between several of the pairs, but one must incline to Horn as expert and informant. In any event, the cloth may be:

dull	-----	shiny
rough	-----	smooth
uneven	-----	flat
grainy	-----	slippery
coarse	-----	fine
bulky	-----	gossamer
heavy	-----	light
compact	-----	porous
bristly	-----	downy
crisp	-----	limp
stiff	-----	pliable
hard	-----	soft
rigid	-----	spongy
inelastic	-----	stretchy
warm	-----	cool
scroopy	-----	waxy

even such things as razors or electric shavers, are often used by women or appear in feminine versions. On the gender of objects, see Levy 1968; Baker 1961.

The presumption is that such objective differences are at once observable and socially significant (see note, p. 182 above). Any piece of cloth is a particular combination, then, of several textural qualities. Insofar as each quality bears some meaning, in contradistinction to its objective opposite, the texture communicates a parataxic set of propositions concerning age, sex, activity, class, time, place, and the other dimensions of cultural order.

The structural lines figuring in the cut or patterns of costume make up an analogous class of meaningful contrasts. Significance seems to be correlated with at least three characteristics of line: direction, form, and rhythm. *Direction* refers to orientation in relation to a ground: thus, vertical and horizontal and the mediating oblique, the last again divisible into left (downward left to right) and right (upward left to right) (fig. 13).

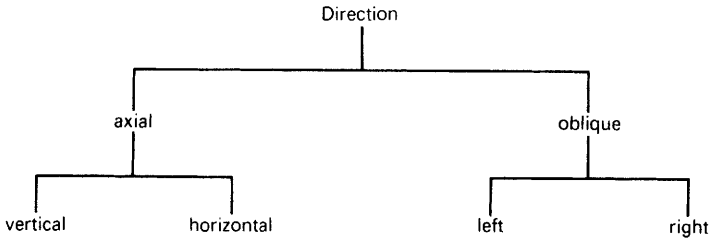


Figure 13 Direction in line

Notice that it is already a small paradigm of the cultural constitution of meaning that an oblique line proceeding downward from right to left is considered by Europeans to slant "up," whereas a line downward from the left slants "down." The distinction "up"/"down" is perfectly arbitrary, if sometimes implicitly accepted experimentally (e.g., Poffenberger and Barrows 1924). Supposing the lines are "read" from left to right, the distinction renders them the potential objectification of any ranked social relation similarly conceived in terms of "up" and "down," "higher" and "lower."[21] The second dimension of line, *form,* refers to its properties as straight or curved, with a mediate angular or zigzag. *Rhythm* is the periodicity of the curve or angle: an indefinite series usually idiomized as movement or velocity from the "slow" or "undulating" to the "rapidly oscillating" but which may also include a significant variation in amplitude.

21. This cultural construction of a line as "going upward to the right," which a Japanese would conceive just the reverse way, is a small but interesting indication that action, including language, proceeds in a world already symbolized and interacting nondiscursively with the conventional code of action.

With the aid of some vintage psychology and aesthetic commentary on the meaning of line, it is possible to present cultural valuations for certain contrasts of line. The experimental psychology can only be suggestive: typically designed to elicit the expressive or affective value of lines, the procedure tests the relation to the individual subject rather than that between objective and social representations as such. Nevertheless, the responses of mood at least indirectly imply cultural interpretations. For further reflection I append therefore an early example of experiment on "the feeling-value of line," the Poffenberger and Barrows study just cited, reporting percentage responses of five hundred educated subjects to a set of eighteen different lines (1924). The lines differed in form as curved or angular; no straight lines were included. For rhythm, both periodicity and amplitude were simultaneously operating, while direction comprised only the horizontal and the two obliques. There was no vertical orientation. The subjects were asked to assign values to the lines presented from a list of thirteen adjectives, such as "sad," "quiet," "lazy." The principal results are summarized in table 1 (p. 194).

Results of this kind are enhanced by another type of information, such as is provided by trained aestheticians, whose descriptions of the significance of the concrete often achieve specifically cultural dimensions. In a fascinating text, *The Art of Color and Design,* Maitland Graves (1951), for example, provides several comments of the following sort on line: "The slightly curved or undulating line is loose and flexible. Because of harmonic transition in the change of direction, it has flowing continuity." The "slow, lazy movement," Graves goes on to say, is "passive," "gentle," "soft," "voluptuous," and "feminine" (p. 202). The straight line, in contrast: "suggests rigidity and precision. It is positive, direct, tense, stiff, uncompromising, harsh, hard, unyielding." One might then add—perhaps without taking undue advantage of the prerogative of informant—that the straight line is, by comparison, masculine. Graves makes an analogous comparison of the vertical and the horizontal, with such additional connotations as strength and authority. Here everything depends on the relation to a ground, and as Graves describes it, most naively, to *the ground.* The horizontal line: "is in harmony with the pull of gravity, that is, at rest. It is quiet, passive, calm, it suggests repose. . . . The vertical is suggestive of poise, balance, and of strong, firm support. Vertical lines . . . are severe and austere; they symbolize uprightness, honesty or integrity, dignity, aspiration and exaltation" (ibid., p. 210).

Now, how does one get from the object feature of the ECU (e.g., straight/curved) to its cultural significance (masculine/feminine)? One

Table 1 **Feelings and Their Appropriate Lines**

	Form		Rhythm			Direction			
	Curve	Angle	Slow	Medium	Fast	Horizontal	Up	Down	
1. Sad	86.3	14.3	86.8	6.9	6.9	12.1	4.2	84.3	Slow descending curve
2. Quiet	97.2	3.0	81.5	7.2	8.5	90.2	5.8	4.2	Slow horizontal curve
3. Lazy	74.0	26.1	72.3	19.9	7.9	38.7	9.9	51.5	Slow descending curve
4. Merry	79.7	20.4	11.5	54.4	34.2	16.4	79.5	4.2	Medium rising curve
5. Agitating	17.4	82.8	4.5	39.1	56.6	23.1	68.8	8.3	Rapid rising angle
6. Furious	10.7	89.2	9.7	44.0	46.2	16.4	62.8	20.7	Rapid or medium rising angle
7. Dead	53.0	46.2	70.3	6.3	22.6	46.6	2.2	50.4	Slow horizontal or descending curve or angle
8. Playful	76.0	23.7	9.8	51.8	38.1	28.2	65.0	6.5	Medium rising curve
9. Weak	69.2	30.6	53.6	14.0	32.2	31.6	8.0	60.2	Slow descending curve
10. Gentle	89.6	10.3	51.7	22.2	26.0	73.7	15.5	10.7	Slow horizontal curve
11. Harsh	7.1	92.9	11.8	62.5	25.7	40.1	30.6	29.3	Medium horizontal curve
12. Serious	35.5	64.2	50.5	28.2	21.0	64.4	19.1	16.2	Slow horizontal angle
13. Powerful	15.3	85.4	27.8	52.7	19.9	37.9	55.5	7.0	Medium rising angle

SOURCE: Poffenberger and Barrows 1924.

must beware of the simple naturalistic trap. The meaning is not a self-evident icon, immanent in the sign; the mental process is something more than an association of resemblances present to the senses. It is hardly enough to remark that men are on average straighter than women—even if the fact that plenty of men are rounder than plenty of women could somehow be disregarded. The problem is infinitely more interesting and subtle and, when one reflects upon it, altogether incorrectly posed in the initial question. *So far as production is concerned,* it is unnecessary to "get to" the cultural gender from the geometric form, as to the signified from the signifier, because from the beginning, as it were, each of these is alternately the meaning of the other. In the society as constituted, "rounded" and "soft" are as much the definition of women as "feminine" is the definition of the line. Gender and line: each is the signification of the other and each stands to the other as the physical sign whose meaning is being determined. From this point of view, the difference between men and women is also "objective," a distinction of the concrete-perceptual type, in relation to which such object notions as "straight" and "curved," "hard" and "soft," "rigid" and "yielding" play the role of the concept. As we understand the difference in line to be a distinction of sex, so we understand the distinction of sex in terms of line.

But more, a second moment of reflection on the language suggests that as much can be said for a great number of social distinctions: they are characteristically idiomized in geometric terms. Our social world is presented as an enormous object world—and vice versa. Death is a "decline" to the "end" of immobility and prostration; hence in the Poffenberger experiment, the line of "slow" horizontal or "descending" curve is "dead." But likewise, status is a "standing" among men, understood in the terms of "higher" and "lower," as a command is something before which we "incline" or "yield." Some people are "upright"; others are "crooked" or at least "devious." Some are even "deviants." Some are "strong," others are "weak." Certain are "forceful"; "force" also is an attribute of constituted authority. We speak "directly" or "indirectly." We act "rigidly" or "flexibly." We have "near" kinsmen and "distant" kinsmen, on some of whom we may "lean" while others we "support." It would be easy to go on indefinitely, but I shall cut the discussion "short" to make the "point." The point is that the social world is commonly figured by the so-called objective, which precisely as it is figurative here functions as the idea. Consequently, when it comes to the manufacture of a product, of a clothing set which objectifies the proportion straight/

curved:masculine/feminine, no greater privlege has to be given to the attribution of gender to shape than of shape to gender. The correspondence already exists in full before and outside that moment when "any piece of fabric can be charged with sexuality by simply working it into a precise shape" (Rudolfsky). Only a particular realization of that correspondence, the cloth is a total social fact, at once material and conceptual, which seamlessly interweaves the spatial meaning of sex with the sexual meaning of space.

Production, then, is the practice of a much more pervasive logic of the concrete, which logic is itself produced as a symbolic appropriation of nature. It is not merely species which are "good to think." Lévi-Strauss's famous dictum is applicable to all kinds of naturally occurring things and relations. The whole of nature is the potential object of the symbolic praxis, whose cunning, rather like Hegel's Reason, consists in this: that it puts to the service of its own intentions those relations among things existing by their own properties. The difference between vertical and horizontal line may carry with it a commonly experienced "resistance" and "submission" to a well-known "force." Hence the suitability of a contrast provided by nature to a distinction present in culture—for instance, between authority and subordination. Nor need we be deceived by the apparent objectivity of the sign, which is only the result of a dialectic process in which the natural fact was first seized culturally in order to be reapplied naturally. Nature rigidly separated from man, as Marx said, does not exist for man. The notions of "force," "resistance," and the like are already valuations, relative cultural representations of the natural process. Contrary to our received perspectives, this sort of metaphor does not really proceed from the concrete to the abstract, from nature to culture. Such would suppose that language's power of classification mysteriously fails at the moment of "real" experience, that it can merely then give forth a new name, which is to say degenerate into a signal. We can be sure that "force" was a spiritual relation before it became an objective fact. And, correspondingly, the material appropriation of nature we call "production" is a sequitur to its symbolic appropriation.

Saussurean principle, therefore, is not violated, whatever the apparent resemblances between object-sign and cultural referent. More than a reflection, the sign is a conception of objective differences. Arbitrariness thus retains a double historical guarantee. Which features of nature are harnessed by culture to its own intentions remains a relative determination: that particular contrast of line to represent gender is not the only one possible. Conversely, the specific content of any particular contrast on the

object level is not given with the difference: whether the upright line is to represent honesty, masculinity, or authority, and if authority, what kind, none of this can be said apart from a determinate cultural system. Yet at the same time, the historical appropriation of concrete contrasts must carry into the order of culture at least two *conditions of nature* if it is to function as social discourse. First, the selection of a given material opposition—as straight/curved:masculine/feminine—must be *true*: the penalty of a contradiction between the perceptible object contrasts and the relationships signified is meaninglessness and, ultimately, silence. In use the sign is relatively motivated, if according to a certain cultural scheme. And second, then, the condition of perceptible resemblance, itself relative and indeterminate (as merely a condition of noncontradiction), argues the encompassment within the symbolic system of specific natural structures: those of perception itself. This is an activity of appropriation and exploitation, the employment of sensible contrasts and relations as a semiotic code. In the event, when color, for example, is harnessed to the symbolic work—granted that neither the extent nor the specific content of color symbolism is naturally determined—the relationships that subsist among cultural meanings will correspond formally to relationships among hues laid down in perception.

At this point we are no longer concerned to demonstrate that color contrasts function as elementary constituents of significance in production. There is abundant evidence to this effect, not only for clothing but for household furnishings, automobiles, and all sorts of goods. The class of color operators is again complex, making use of distinctions of hue (including neutrals), saturation, value (brightness), and the several ways these are combined in multicolor patterns.[22] The problem of present interest is to discover whether there is any structure common to the relations between color-meanings and the perception of color differences. Such a structure would itself be without specific meaning, merely a formal *combinatoire* of oppositions and compatibilities. Its presence would, for some, testify to the limitations placed on the symbolic system by the nature of perception (or of the mind). But said more positively and perhaps more fruitfully, the *combinatoire* would testify to the employment of structures already present to the mind in the social project of symbolic production.[23]

22. Cf. Arnheim 1974; Birren 1956; Wexner 1954; Kintner 1940; Murray and Deabler 1957; Graves 1951; Sargent 1923; Baker 1961; among others, and the texts on clothing previously cited by Ryan, Rosencranz, and Horn.

23. See below on the cultural employment of mental structures. This kind of phrasing has certain advantages over the usual appeal to innate structures, which tends to be

Let us take up in this connection the oft-cited example of the traffic signal: an opposition of red and green mediated by yellow. For Leach (1970, p. 16–21), this segmentation of the spectrum operated by the mind is in a fundamental part iconic, experientially motivated by an association of red with blood, "which certainly goes back to very early paleolithic times" (p. 19). Out of this "natural fact" comes the significance of red as danger. In another part, however, the traffic signal seems arbitrary, since the selection of green for contrast is a learned convention—other colors (blue, black, white yellow) could also be selected for contrast with red. Finally, the analysis depends too on a physicalist notion of color as presented on a spectrum of wavelength, by virtue of which it is said that yellow is intermediate between red and green. Thus, brought together on inconsistent principles, each of these postulates is also inadequate in itself, and the total effect rather obscures the natural structure of the symbol system and the relation between that structure and the assignment of meaning.

Very briefly: the first argument, on the naturalness of red as danger, attempts to reduce the symbolic process to a nomenclature of meanings immanent in experience. It is not only that the explanation thus violates Saussurean canons of value as a relation of differentiation in a system of signs; by the same token, it neglects that the "blood" signified by red would not be blood as such but the (cultural) meaning of blood. Hence the motivated iconic relation that Leach supposes—*as is true of all signs* proper (American usage)—is a moment within and dependent upon preexistent symbolic values (V. Valeri 1970).[24] The second of Leach's arguments concerning the arbitrary selection of green for contrast with red

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reductionist even as it is static and a negative determination by natural constraints. The implication of the alternative phrasing is to retain the primacy of the cultural over the mental, while suggesting some notion of mediation between the two. It supposes some functional connection—the pervasiveness of the mental structure rendering it suitable for symbolic communication—and certain dynamic possibilities, at least in the sense that the symbolic project is at liberty to develop various potentialities of mental structure and to do so to a variable extent. One might sum up the position by giving a slight displacement to the classic Durkheimian dictum, arguing that representations are general insofar as they are collective (social), not collective merely insofar as they are general (mental).

24. The generality of this point, that human sign behavior (motivated) is always a secondary formation of symboling (unmotivated), may be argued on grounds that the very *découpage* of object signifiers presupposes the process of valuation, thus the position and content of the object-sign in a meaningful order, on which basis motivation proceeds. It also follows that the concepts of both the object-sign and its signified, here redness and blood-danger, will likely "outrun" (Barthes) the formal motivation connecting them, so

ignores the salient relations of attraction and opposition between red and green as complementary colors, on the level of both perception and conception—a point to which we will return in a moment. The last of Leach's postulates supposes that the common experience of color takes the form of a refracted spectrum, but this is very rare in nature by comparison with object colors, where blue's claim to mediacy between red and green would be as good as yellow's. The moral: the analysis should aim singularly at the correspondences between the structure of symbolic meanings and the structure of perception, avoiding en route the parallel ideological pitfalls of physicalism and associationalism. For the first is not the way the world is presented to the mind, nor the second the way it is represented. And again, the elicitation of correct correspondences between the perceptual and meaningful would show not the delimination of culture by nature, but the appropriation of nature by culture.

The following is merely a suggestion of such an analysis, taking departure from the observation that the color relations of the traffic signal seem to be duplicated in other symbolic domains of Western culture. This logically ensues provided the principle of the signal is generalized as follows: red is opposed in meaning to green, while yellow is mediate in the sense that it is like red in opposition to green but also like green in opposition to red. Yellow, for a simple example, shares with red the significance of danger in the flag of quarantine, which also unites it with "sickly green" in contradiction to the vigor and energy of red.[25] Or, to take the correlated domains of age and sexuality: as compared to the charged sexuality and virility of red, green and yellow are forms of relative impotency, although

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that the attempt to furnish an explanation by iconic resemblance will never be empirically satisfactory. Thus red in Western society is not always negative or indicative of danger, as Leach has it. Red also has implications of health, strength, virility or marked sexuality, and *fête* ("red-letter day"). The several meanings do have a common marked or "advancing" value, by comparison especially with the senses of white and green, which is corollary to differences in the perception of the distance of objects reflecting longer wave lengths. By the combination of relative nearness (chromatic aberration effect) and the high levels of saturation achieved by reds over a variety of wavelengths and brightness values, this hue is the most "penetrating" of colors. Red, indeed, is the most color (cf. Graves 1951; Gregory 1966; Bidwell 1899; Southall 1937). It is this contrastive feature of red that makes it especially valuable in coding.

25. By testimony of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, green used in reference to human complexion implies a "pale, sickly or bilious hue, indicative of fear, jealousy, ill-humour or sickness"; whereas red, when said of lips or cheeks, indicates "a natural, healthy color." In the discussion which follows, I make use of various authorities on color meanings cited on p. 197, note, as well as dictionaries of slang and usage, principally Mathews 1951; Partridge 1967; and Wentworth and Flexner 1967. See also Spengler 1956, 1:242 ff.

at the opposite poles of immaturity and maturity, fresh, inexperienced youth and a ripe old age whose course has been run—"my way of life / Is fall'n into the sere, the yellow leaf." Yet in the passions, yellow and green become tangent again in meanings of jealousy and envy. However as a "warm" color, yellow—cheerful yellow—joins red and orange as "positive and aggressive, restless or stimulating" (Graves 1951, p. 401), as against the cooler greens and blues, which are "transcendent," "spiritual," and "non-sensuous" (Spengler 1956, p. 246). Red is courage and war; green (with blue) passive, quiescent, peaceable; yellow as cowardice is the pretext of the one but the reality of the other. And notice how the system expands to include blue in a particular way. Just as green is to red, whatever yellow is, blue is the contrary: depressed ("the blues") where yellow is cheerful; loyal and genuine ("true blue") where yellow is deceitful and cowardly. Blue has a meaning comparable to yellow's about once in a blue moon. As we have seen, however, blue entertains similarities with green in opposition to the warm reds and yellows; on the other hand, blue's constancy distinguishes it from the recklessness of new and young green;[26] and indeed where green is the nascent, blue is the eternal and immortal. In the same way, blue is both like and distinguished from red: noble (blue-blood) and king in an age of monarchy, blue and red in another time become the party of order and the revolution. Red is the color of saints and martyrs in Christianity and blue, correlatively, of faith and piety; but red is also the mark of sinners—yet then, "the blues" once referred more specifically to the "blue devils." In sum, one may draw up a set of relationships of the following sort between red, green, yellow, and blue (fig. 14):

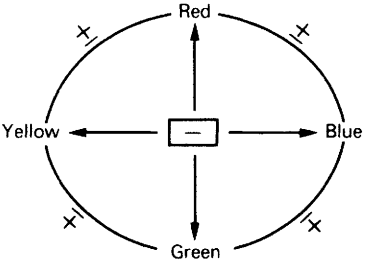

Figure 14 Relations of color meaning

26. The *OED* quotes Chaucer: "To newe things your lust is ever kene / in stede of blue, thus may ye were al grene."

The point I will make is that the diagram serves exactly as well for perception, if the relations of semantic intermediacy (±) between adjacent colors are taken for compatibility or simultaneous presence in object-colors and the semantic oppositions (−) are taken for complementarity. This structure can be built up on the perceptual level from a few elementary propositions, well known to color science and aesthetics. First, the four hues in question (along with the neutrals black and white) are peculiarly suited to the semantic function because they alone are perceptually unique, not decomposable into other hues. I speak specifically of vision, which is a totally different matter from the mixing of pigments. As a matter of perception, no other hues can be seen in the values usually named as "blue," "red," "yellow," and "green" (Hurvich and Jameson 1957; Hering 1964 [1920]; Linksz 1964; Pokorny and Smith 1972).[27] Yet where these four are perceptually unique, all other hues are seen as some mixture of two of them; as orange is perceived to be compounded of red and yellow, purple of blue and red, and so forth. Accordingly, red, green, yellow, and blue are deemed the "primary" or "primal" hues of perception in the scientific literature—and in the aesthetic literature, sometimes the "primitive" colors. The last makes a nice connection with Berlin and Kay's (1969) conclusion that, after black and white, these four are the first "basic color terms" to emerge in natural languages, and that their spectral position (on a chart of maximum saturation) is similar cross-culturally.[28] A second pertinent observation is that each of the four "primitives" will mix visually with only two of the other three, but never with the third. Blue may

27. Also note that only four hues in the spectrum—a blue of about 475 nm, a green of ca. 505 nm, a yellow of ca. 578 nm, and a red of the complement 495 nm—remain constant in color appearance despite changes in intensity.

28. There is some paradox in the conclusion that the "basic" color terms should have similar spectral referents in widely different cultures. The paradox is that, after all, these are not the "basic" color terms of any language, but abstract concepts of color, disengaged from any particular object. At a more "basic" level everywhere are the myriad of color terms recognized in their object form (as lemon-yellow, sea green, etc., cf. Conklin 1955). Why then should a concept that is clearly a secondary formation nevertheless have specific and apparently universal "basis"? The present discussion suggests an answer: that these hues, precisely as they have the perceptual qualities of distinctiveness, complementarity, etc., at certain loci—which lend them to meaningful contrast—are the most suitable for semantic employment in rituals, production exchange-value discrimination, and the like. Colors are in practice semiotic codes. Precisely as they subserve this significance, only certain color precepts are appropriately singled out as "basic," namely, those that by their distinctive features and relations can function as signifiers in informational systems. See Sahlins, in press.

appear in combination with red or green (to make, e.g., purple or cyan), as also may yellow; but one never sees a yellowish blue or a bluish yellow. Likewise red and green are each compatible in perception with blue and yellow, yet not with each other: there are no reddish greens or greenish reds. (See the several sources on color perception previously cited, as well as Hering 1964[1920]; Hurvich 1960; Hurvich and Jameson 1957). Third observation: there is good perceptual as well as physiological sense to conceiving these color relationships as "compatibilities" and "oppositions." Where the members of each complementary dyad, blue-yellow and red-green, will separately synthesize with the members of the other, the complementary hues themselves not only oppose but evoke each other in a classic pattern of negation and correlation.[29] Green is banished from the sensation of red, only to reappear as the afterimage of red or the effect given by red to a neutral background—a relation perfectly reciprocal and also true of blue and yellow. Each pair of complements, moreover, is linked in perception by contrast to the other dyad. Under increasing intensity, blue and yellow increase in brightness more rapidly than green and red; the latter retain their values longer under decreasing intensity (Bezold-Brücke effect). Or, as the stimulus size is reduced, the ability to discriminate blue and yellow deteriorates progressively by comparison with green and red. The linkage is again confirmed pathologically by the existence of distinctive red-green and yellow-blue syndromes of color blindness. All these perceptual facts, finally, have a ground in the physiology of color vision, specifically the "opponent-process" mechanism of transmission from eye to brain—an understanding first developed for man but recently supported by electrophysiological data from monkeys and fish. The evidence is that the transmission of color sensation (as distinct from retinal photoreception) is organized as a triadic set of binary processes: red-green, blue-yellow, and black-white. Each of these processes fires impulses to the brain in a privative manner through cells which respond to one of the complementary pair but exclude the other; for example, the red-green process is activated either as +R−G or −R+G (see Pokorny and Smith 1972; Hurvich and Jameson 1957).

29. Linksz writes: "Red and green are a dyad of opposing colors and so are yellow and blue. Either member of one dyad cancels the other, antagonizes the other or—as Stilling (1880) described it—destroys the other" (1964, p. 2). But this antagonism has also an aspect of reciprocal reinforcement, as Goethe long ago remarked: "Red and green (or yellow and blue), as he expressed it, demand each other at the same time; they promote each other, further each other" (ibid.).

In sum, the perceptual system of primitive hues can be described as follows: It is composed of two dyads of opposed colors, red-green and yellow-blue, and four dyads of compatible colors, red-yellow, red-blue, green-blue, and green-yellow. This is exactly the same system as is figured in the preceding diagram of semantic relationships (fig. 14). The claim is that such correspondence between symbolic and perceptual structures represents a mobilization of the latter in the project of the former.

In its economic dimension, this project consists of the reproduction of society in a system of objects not merely useful but meaningful; whose utility indeed consists of a significance. The clothing system in particular replicates for Western society the functions of the so-called totemism. A sumptuary materialization of the principal coordinates of person and occasion, it becomes a vast scheme of communication—such as to serve as a language of everyday life among those who may well have no prior intercourse of acquaintance.[30] "Mere appearance" must be one of the most important forms of symbolic statement in Western civilization. For it is by appearances that civilization turns the basic contradiction of its construction into a miracle of existence: a cohesive society of perfect strangers. But in the event, its cohesion depends on a *coherence* of specific kind: on the possibility of apprehending others, their social condition, and thereby their relation to oneself "on first glance." This dependence on seeing helps to explain, on one hand, why the symbolic dimensions have nevertheless not been obvious. The code works on an unconscious level, the conception built into perception itself. It is precisely the type of thought generally known as "savage"—thought that "does not distinguish the moment of observation and that of interpretation any more than, on observing them one first registers the interlocutor's signs and then tries to understand them; when he speaks, the signs expressed carry with them their meanings" (Lévi-Strauss 1966, p. 223). On the other hand, this dependence on the glance suggests the presence in the economic and social life of a logic completely foreign to the conventional "rationality." For rationality is time elapsed, a comparison: at least another glance beyond, and a weighing

30. "With briefest visual perception, a complex mental process is aroused, resulting within a very short time, 30 seconds perhaps [*sic*], in judgment of the sex, age, size, nationality, profession and social caste of the stranger together with some estimate of his temperament, his ascendence, friendliness, neatness; and even his trustworthiness" (G. Allport, cited in Horn 1968, p. 109; cf. Linton 1936, p. 416).

of the alternatives. The relation between logics is that the first, the symbolic, defines and ranks the alternatives by the ''choice'' among which rationality, oblivious of its own cultural basis, is pleased to consider itself as constituting.