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ART, HISTORY, AND SOCIETY: POPULAR PAINTING IN SHABA, ZAIRE

ILONA SZOMBATI-FABIAN
JOHANNES FABIAN

Students of African visual art are slowly beginning to surmount aesthetic barriers which have prevented them from giving recognition to the products of contemporary artists working in materials and with techniques other than the ones that were canonized by Western scholars as "traditional." Although contributions have grown more numerous in recent years, the kinds of art that catch outside interest are still limited to works which are pleasing to Westerners and therefore marketable, to "higher" art forms which are produced by recognized masters or schools and are acceptable by the standards of art criticism, and to the recently discovered socioeconomic significance of "lower" forms that came to be known as airport art.2

This paper reports on a vital and prolific art form hidden from tourists and even from most of the long-time resident foreigners by socioeconomic as well as cultural barriers.

Our own research on popular painting in the Shaba region of Zaire began with a discovery, almost by accident. From the moment that we first saw a strange creature, half woman, half fish, painted in oil on canvas and hung on the wall in a Zairean worker's livingroom, to the day when a collection of paintings left the country, our object of study continued to constitute itself, to expand and contract, take shape and observable - manifestations, and through Verst"ndigung, a process of understanding of, and of agreement about, these manifestations based on communicative interaction with their producers and consumers. In other words, we neither assume a "given" reality in the form of discrete objects ("paintings"), nor do we presume a domain of thought and action (such as "art").3

We will sketch the ethnographic context of Popular Art in Shaba (PAS),4 trying to convey a sense of the kinds and quality of urban experience which these paintings visually record and, more importantly, which they help to generate and explicate.

We will then attempt to establish a system of genres, i.e., of complexes of form, content, and presentation which structure PAS in such a way that almost any given painting will be recognized as belonging to a known "kind," being systematically different from other kinds (and often referred to by generally accepted labels). Axiomatically, we define genres as comprehensive and recursive expressions of experience shared by producers and consumers of PAS. The concept has heuristic rather than strict classificatory value. As in any ongoing process, one cannot expect neat, unequivocal boundaries between units.

Finally we will concentrate on one genre and a sample of paintings representing it, trying to understand how discrete signs and symbols can create a coherent message, and how the visual message can become part of an ongoing discourse in which this society communicates and transforms its life experience.

THE ETHNOGRAPHIC CONTEXT OF PAS

The urban centers of Shaba, in the copper-producing south-eastern region of Zaire, are results of industrialization, of massive recruitment of labor and, later on, of massive immigration from other parts of the country.5 Around commercial and (formerly European) residential core cities, most of the African population lives in "zones" (minimally planned and serviced communities), in workers' camps (totally planned and serviced by the mining company and its subsidiaries), and in "zones annexes" (huge squatters' towns almost without municipal planning or services). Although some subsistence gardening is important, the economy is thoroughly based on money. Most of the jobs are provided by the copper industry, by transportation and government, with an important but not exactly known proportion of the population counted as unemployed. Many people have lived here for an extended period of time; second to fourth generation urbanites become more and more frequent.

Cultural and linguistic variations notwithstanding, these cities are pervaded by a distinctive style of life. The degree of uniformity of this style is obviously tied to similar socioeconomic conditions for most of the population, but it also has its historical depth and structure. Reaching well into colonial times (Lubumbashi was incorporated in 1911,
Kolwezi in the early 1940s) the population shares a common history marked by dramatic and traumatic events: World War II with revolts and strikes toward its end, Independence in 1960, the Katanga secession 1960-63, and other post-independence upheavals until Mobutu's rise to power in 1965.

For most city dwellers, life is hard by anybody's standards, but somehow many find sufficient means to aspire to an urban, petit bourgeois way of life, expressed in goods of consumption, in dress, leisure activities and, most important for us, in the way in which people arrange and decorate their homes. In a certain sense, PAS is a side product of the differentiation of living space resulting in the idea of a salon (living room) with its typical furnishings and decorations. While paintings probably were first found in many of the innumerable small shops and bars, some more of them are displayed in living rooms (in fact, many of the small bars called buvettes are living rooms open to the public). Paintings (oil or acrylic on canvas over a stretcher, but seldom framed) sell for about $1.50 to $5.00, with portraits fetching as much as $10.00. This represents between 5% and 25% of the monthly income for most workers and craftsmen. Given the cost of materials and the extremely small margin of profit, a typical artist must produce at least a painting a day to support himself and his family. There are no galleries, shops, or markets specializing in the sale of paintings; rather, they are peddled either by the artist himself or by some young people who work for a small commission. Occasionally, they are displayed in food markets and on the streets.

According to our estimates (based on the number of artists we have known to be working) at least 500 paintings are sold monthly in Lubumbashi alone. This is a conservative estimate and does not include second-hand sales, about which we have little information. All these transactions go on in the sections of the towns which are socially, if not legally, off limits for Western expatriates. In rare cases, popular artists will offer their works in the inner city, near places frequented by shoppers and tourists, but then they will only sell the kind of paintings which they perceive to be meaningful to these customers: landscapes, full-breasted black beauties, and other souvenirs.

Until recently, PAS only had occasional ramifications into the curio- and airport-art trade. Although paintings produced in Shaba are exported into Zambia and are reported to have reached the East Coast, the bulk of PAS remains strictly for local African consumption.

PAS, at least in its present importance and degree of general acceptance, is a relatively recent phenomenon. Although isolated popular artists are reported to have sold their works soon after World War II and a group of African painters working in Lubumbashi gained international fame as early as in the fifties, what we call PAS seems to have had its explosive development coincidentally with the current political regime. The reasons for this are complex. Relative political calm and modest economic security, if not prosperity, may be one factor; another is the emergence of a distinctly post-colonial life style. But most important is what we should like to describe as the formation of a new kind of historical consciousness among the masses. It is this consciousness which found in PAS expressions for its myths, its experiences, and its contradictions. In ways which are not yet completely understood, these visual representations are integrated into a social discourse, the verbal culture of the cities of Shaba. Far from being mere objects of contemplation or decoration, popular paintings are distinctly labelled as to content and form, and the kind of distinctions which are expressed in everyday language provide more or less explicit links to a shared narrative lore. We doubt that there is a single adult inhabitant of these cities (short of cases of extreme isolation and deprivation) for whom one of these paintings could not become the object of a "story," a discursive statement on content, form and purpose which would be generally accepted, although not necessarily without corrections and contradictions.

The language of widest acceptance in the area is the Shaba variety of Swahili. Almost all the verbal information we collected about PAS was in that language. Given the recent establishment of Swahili in this region as well as the sudden rise of PAS, it is not surprising that many of the basic terms are loans from French and English. We give a preliminary list in Table 1.

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Table 1: Meanings of selected PAS terms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PAS Term</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sauva</td>
<td>savannah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mfundo</td>
<td>bush</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chui</td>
<td>leopard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kungwe</td>
<td>zebra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kungwa</td>
<td>giraffe</td>
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<tr>
<td>mukupa</td>
<td>elephant</td>
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<tr>
<td>mukwila</td>
<td>rhinoceros</td>
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<tr>
<td>mubanga</td>
<td>buffalo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mubula</td>
<td>hippopotamus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mubula</td>
<td>water buffalo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mubula</td>
<td>bison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mubula</td>
<td>elk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mubula</td>
<td>moose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mubula</td>
<td>caribou</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mubula</td>
<td>reindeer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mubula</td>
<td>elk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mubula</td>
<td>moose</td>
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<tr>
<td>mubula</td>
<td>caribou</td>
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<tr>
<td>mubula</td>
<td>reindeer</td>
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<tr>
<td>mubula</td>
<td>elk</td>
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<td>moose</td>
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<td>mubula</td>
<td>caribou</td>
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<td>mubula</td>
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<td>reindeer</td>
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<td>moose</td>
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<td>mubula</td>
<td>caribou</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mubula</td>
<td>reindeer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Figure 1: **things ancestral: the leopard (chui)**

Figure 2: **things ancestral: the hunt**

2 STUDIES IN THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF VISUAL COMMUNICATION
Askerd, in the presence of a painting, questions such as “What is this?” a person will usually reply with a compound formed from one of the nouns signifying “a painting,” a connective particle, and a noun or phrase referring to the content of the painting. Thus:

- tableau (designation of content)
- picha (ya) (of content)
- foto

However, the same question may be understood to be asking for the meaning or the purpose of a painting. In that case, the answer we heard most frequently was njo ukumbusho (lit. “it is a reminder,” going on the prefix u-, a state rather than a thing causing to think, to reflect). Another statement we heard frequently when we asked why a particular painting was valued more than others was iko naleta hadisi (lit. “It brings a story”).

If one approaches PAS with preconceived ideas of the visual, contemplative nature of aesthetic experience he must be surprised and perhaps disappointed by the pragmatic attitude among artists as well as among consumers regarding the relative value of a painting. “Likeness” in the sense of realistic representation is highly valued but not much talked about in abstract terms. Its importance is attested to indirectly by an almost general rejection of merely decorative or abstract painting. Asked what determines the price of a painting (which of course is only one indicator of its value), some painters and consumers would say that it is uzuri, its beauty. Most, however, would categorically state that it is bunene, its size. Is this to be taken as a naïve, pragmatic, and “utilitarian” appreciation of the kind that was thought to be typical of the creators and consumers of “primitive art”? We think not. Precisely because the consciously recognized function of these paintings is an intellectual and spiritual one (ukumbusho), any particular painting may be valued as a material object. PAS does not hold the idea that the value of a painting resides primarily in the unique ways in which an artist transforms “matter” (pigments, surfaces, textures), irrespective of the cost of materials that go into the product. There is nothing uncommon about this view. As late as in Renaissance art, quality and quantity of materials and size of the painting were decisive factors in the remuneration of painters. Only later do we get the paradoxical development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Terms Used in PAS</th>
<th>Derivation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>painter</td>
<td>peintre-artiste</td>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>paint</td>
<td>penti</td>
<td>English*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a painting</td>
<td>tableau</td>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>picha</td>
<td>English (picture)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>foto</td>
<td>French, English</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drawing</td>
<td>croquis</td>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to paint</td>
<td>kufanya tableau</td>
<td>Swahili, French (“to make a painting”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kupenta</td>
<td>English (to paint), rare</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kufwatula</td>
<td>Swahili (SS kufuatia, to trace), now considered quaint and old-fashioned</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kufotola</td>
<td>French, English (“foto”)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kuchapa</td>
<td>Swahili</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to mix</td>
<td>ku-melanger</td>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rangi</td>
<td>Swahili</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>colors</td>
<td>ma-couleurs</td>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>canvas</td>
<td>guo</td>
<td>Swahili</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>brush</td>
<td>pinceau</td>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stretcher</td>
<td>mbao</td>
<td>Swahili</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to stretch</td>
<td>kupopesha</td>
<td>Swahili</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>frame</td>
<td>cadre</td>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Instead of a generic term, artists often use brand names or terms for types of paint such as latex. Artist's oil paints are rarely used in PAS; they are referred to as couleurs tube.

†Two possible derivations: amerikani is used on the East Coast for a kind of undyed calico. In Shaba, many of the artists pointed to the flour bags they ordinarily use as canvas; these came from U.S. aid.
in which materials are downgraded as mere means, while certain paintings—material nonetheless—fetch astronomic prices because bourgeois thinking places the highest market value on the “unique” creation.

There are no signs of such thinking in PAS and this, we believe, also explains why artists of PAS feel no need to resort to “artsiness,” be it in the form of ostensive originality or in the use or pure-art idioms such as abstraction and the various -isms that mark the fads and fashions of Western bourgeois art.\textsuperscript{7} Incidentally, with rare exceptions among artists and without any exception among consumers, our respondents thought that the métier of the painter was like any other. Given a list of professions to choose from, most compared the painters of PAS to craftsmen (“carpenter”) and to small shopkeepers and peddlers.

In PAS, then, “art,” “artists,” and “works of art” appear to be totally integrated in the processes of production and communication which make up the urban culture of Shaba. There is ample evidence in the survey and in interviews showing that artists enjoy no special privileges, works of art have no special “aura,” and “art” is part of a way of life.

\section*{PAS and Its Genres}

If we assert that PAS is totally integrated in its sociocultural context, are we then not neutralizing its potential as a \textit{distinctive} corpus of visual narrative whose recognized function it is to “make think,” i.e., to transcend, point beyond immediate realities? Not necessarily, because PAS reflects experience, but it also forms experience. While reflections of experience may be analyzed as \textit{states}, or aggregates of structural isomorphisms between a society and an art form, the generation and transformation of experience can only be conceived as a \textit{process}. Any attempt to see PAS as both expressive and constitutive of urban culture in Shaba must be capable of illuminating its processual nature.

Knowing what we know about the narrative orientation of PAS, about the circumstances of its production, of the ways of displaying it, and so forth, we are inclined to view PAS as a \textit{process of communication}. As communication, PAS is not just a carrier of messages about some reality we tentatively called urban experience. We will try to show that PAS articulates and, in a sense, constitutes that reality. For the producer as well as for the beholder, any \textit{particular} painting represents the \textit{totality} of experience through dialectical mediation: a total and shared experience of urban life could neither exist nor be communicated except through particular “statements” (the particular, however, must not be confused with the unique). The social nature of PAS as communication lies in the structured relations between artists and buyers, between production and consumption. We view PAS, then, as objective products of communication-events mediating between the totality and particularities of urban life. In analogy to its use in folklore and socio-linguistics,\textsuperscript{8} we shall take the term \textit{genre} to refer to the structured nature of these complexes of conditions. Genre structures these relationships through differentiation and recursiveness. It makes it possible to identify a painting of PAS as such, to perceive it as a meaningful object, and to recognize it as a “reminder” of a particular aspect, instance, or event of experience.

Abstract as it may sound, all this is but a more rigorous description of an approach perceived and accepted by a majority of anthropologists: the attempt to follow the lead of “folk categories” in order to understand a cultural system from within. We assume the basic cultural activity to be creation through differentiation and not just selection or ordering through classification. Therefore, any discovery and successful identification of a genre is more than just a step toward a complete catalog of PAS: it gives access to the very processes which bring forth paintings that are part of a system of expressions. For these reasons we want to emphasize that we do not think of “genre” as a mere classificatory device (and certainly not an arbitary one). As an analytical tool, it is the analyst’s attempt to join, to comprehend a social praxis, a total process realizing itself through objectification and differentiation. Epistemologically, therefore, our notion of genre is closer to Marx’ concept of “classes” as differentiation of social praxis, than to the linguist’s grammatical “categories” as recursive formal properties of speech.\textsuperscript{9}

Concretely, the researcher “joins” the process of PAS to the extent that he learns to identify the genre of any particular painting. Above and beyond such vague associations as, perhaps, “naive” or “popular” art, “political” or “historical” painting, “portraits” or “landscapes,” the paintings will then convey specific and distinctive messages which, when verbalized, will allow the outsider to share and understand a significant aspect of urban culture in Shaba.

The following list of genres in PAS is far from being definitive. It is uneven in terms of linguistic information and, in some cases, of pictorial documentation supporting our claims. Most genres are labelled, but not necessarily such that all ambiguity would be excluded. Not all terms serving as labels are in fact “generic”; many have no obvious classificatory significance. All this is not surprising; what we are observing is an ongoing process, not a fully established system. Moreover, since nothing permits us to postulate that “urban experience” is uniform (i.e., without levels of consciousness in the individual, and without different kinds of consciousness among different groups of the society) we cannot expect that all identified distinctions of genres be strictly on the same logical level,\textsuperscript{10} nor that they be shared by the total population. Allowing for all these sources of imprecision, we may now briefly comment on the main features of our chart (cf. Table 2).

Taking a lead from the expression \textit{ukumbusho}, we found it useful to think of various genres as being located on three levels of thought or “memory.”\textsuperscript{11} On the one we call “things ancestral” (see Figures 1, 2) we find genres which artists and consumers alike would consistently place in a collective or individual past, but without reference to specific events. Because they depict states, activities and sometimes objects associated with life in a village-past, one might be inclined to think of these paintings as “folkloric,” but since they are generalized they are among the products of PAS which are least likely to “bring a story.” Compared to other genres, they appear to be \textit{evocative} rather than discursive-narrative. Tentatively we also included on this level a genre—religious paintings of Christian background—for which we found only...
scanty documentation. This is an interesting fact in itself, considering that religious prints and objects of Christian (mostly Catholic) inspiration were the most important objets d’art displayed in African households prior to the rise of PAS.

On the level we called “things past” (see Figures 3, 4) paintings depict specific persons, localities, and events. This emphasis on specificity is expressed in dates, legends and inscriptions, both on the margins and on objects in the pictures, which are most frequent on paintings of this category. Most painters specializing in “things past” restrict their production to a limited number of genres in popular demand (usually not more than four or five). But we have met at least one artist who, while complying with the generic definitions of PAS, thought that his real vocation was that of a “historian.” Given an opportunity to realize his ambition he did in fact paint a history of Zaire in 99 paintings, a striking repetitiveness of paraphernalia, features of landscape, and color schemes. The human part of the mermaid (with few variations proving the rule) is always depicted as a “historian.” Given an opportunity to realize his ambition he did in fact paint a history of Zaire in 99 paintings, a fascinating corpus but too complex to be considered here.

Although it may not be appropriate to refer to “things present” (see Figures 5, 6) as a level of memory, the genres of this category clearly share the function of ukumbusho with the ones mentioned so far. Portraits, personal and political, views of the city (especially of the centrally located copper smelting plant in Lubumbashi) serve to remind the urban African of his present predicaments: life in the family, in the city, and in his country. In the genre we called “commercial” we find paintings that have caught the attention of observers in many African countries (barbers’ signs especially). Being the kind of painting that a person would encounter outside his own house, they provide powerful and unifying expressions of a shared lifestyle—the importance of drinking in bars, of bodily care and “beauty,” of indebtedness at the grocer’s.

Finally, there is one genre which contains clearly the most striking and the most widely appreciated paintings of PAS (see Figures 8-10). In fact, this account reverses our actual learning process. It was first mamba muntu ‘the mermaid’ which caught our attention and made us gradually discover the rest of PAS. This is in many respects an extraordinary genre. It is, first of all, represented by an amazing number of paintings. In most households, mamba muntu is the first painting to be bought; in many it remains the only one. Although some variation in style, composition, and elements is clearly recognizable, these paintings are produced with a striking repetitiveness of paraphernalia, features of landscape, and color schemes. The human part of the mermaid (with few exceptions proving the rule) is always depicted as a non-African woman, most frequently as a European. In sharp contrast to the repetitiveness of pose, background, and paraphernalia, are obvious attempts in each of the paintings we have seen to achieve portrait-likeness for the face and for facial expressions.

In this paper we will not attempt to interpret the genre mamba muntu, but several remarkable facts necessary to understand its position in Table 2 should be mentioned. Mamba muntu seems to encompass all the levels of “memory” on which we located other genres of PAS: it connects past, present, and future. Not only is mamba muntu an all-encompassing genre, it also marks a clear boundary of taste and appreciation. While other products of PAS occasionally reach the emerging middle class among Zaïreans and even expatriates, mamba muntu remains the one painting...
Figure 5 - things present: credit est mort

Figure 6 - things present: the smelter (mumbunda na mampala)

Figure 7 - the mermaid (mamba muntu) (1)

Figure 8 - the mermaid (2)

Figure 9 - the mermaid (3)

Figure 10 - the mermaid (4)
typical of the class to which most of the producers and consumers of PAS belong. *Mambu muntu* paintings are consistently rejected and even ridiculed by those who have attained higher socioeconomic status or by those whose aspirations to such a status have grown strong enough to create an ideological identification with the middle class. Thus, for the class it marks off against others, *mamba muntu* undoubtedly is a totalizing symbol, the kind of precious key every anthropologist hopes to find. We will return to these observations in our conclusions.

**THE GENRE COLONIE BELGE**

PAS interests us as an expression of an African urban life experience and culture. What we have said so far was to convey our view of PAS as a total process being realized through generic differentiation. In a way, the fact that genres have such general acceptance and that they are relatively few (10-15, depending on whether one should give generic status to certain subdivisions) seems to limit the variety of expressable topics. It results, as structuralists would say, in a *selection*, a reduction of potentially unlimited aspects of reality to a system consisting of a few related elements. Such is obviously the case, although we prefer to think of this "reduction" as a kind of bounding, i.e., a positive process of "collecting" rather than of (negative) selecting. PAS, as we shall see now, is not only bold, recursive, and generalizing; it shows itself to be surprisingly complex and subtle as soon as one considers how its different genres are realized by individual paintings.

The genre we should like to interpret in this paper is known (interchangeably) as *colonie belge*, *le temps colonial*, *état belge*, *wakati y waBelges* (the time of the Belgians), and *fimbo* 'the whip' (see Figures 11-24). As a rule, the scene is a kind of yard or open plaza in front of a colonial prison. While one prisoner is being flogged by an African policeman, the white administrator looks on. Usually, other prisoners and guards are shown engaged in various activities and many paintings include other, outside persons. Paintings of the *colonie belge* are among the most widely appreciated works of PAS. In a survey among consumers of PAS designed to approach random sampling and conducted in six different locations in Lubumbashi, eight of 127 respondents actually owned a *colonie belge*, and 59 identified it as one of the preferred genres. Our sample contains a choice of 14 works by 13 different artists from four different locations. To the best of our knowledge (based on

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements of Representation</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Actors</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>White administrator</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Other persons</td>
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<tr>
<td>Policeman, Guards</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Smoke pipe</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Prisoners</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Bugler</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Activities</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Stand and watch</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Tropical helmet</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Watch flogging</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>White uniform and shorts</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Flogging</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Bugler</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>Being flogged</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Fleeing</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Shorts pulled down</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Plaza/road</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Village</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bush</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Signs</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Military insignia</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Uniform (shorts &amp; fez)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>9</td>
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<td>Striped shirts</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Tools/Loads</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Whip</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Chains</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Belgian flag</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Huts</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonial house</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Letter/Book</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bush</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Road</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Artist's signatures</td>
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<td>On margin</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrated</td>
<td>9</td>
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</table>

*Total number of paintings in sample = 14.*
acquaintance with many other examples) these represent a fair range of variability in this genre.\footnote{14}

For the purpose of such quick identification, we compared the paintings in our sample in terms of the following elements of representation: actors, activities, setting, signs and symbols (roughly differentiating between denotative and connotative iconic signs), and linguistic messages in the form of inscriptions. The results are listed in Table 3 where, in order to show some degree of variation, we distinguished between primary and secondary features. That distinction is based on an arbitrary cut placed at a certain frequency of occurrence. Primary features are shared by nine or more paintings, secondary features are found in five or more paintings. Notice that some elements, such as the bush, huts, and the road, are listed both as parts of the setting and as symbols. The reason for this will become clear in later comments.

Obviously, similarities such as the ones listed in Table 3 are useful for quick, preliminary identification. But it would be contrary to our dialectical conception of PAS if we were to conclude that the genre \textit{colonie beige} generates its message simply through aggregates of conventionalized iconic elements. As a kind of pictorial rhetoric, it uses such elements in ways which convey both, similarity and difference, agreement and contradiction. The signified content of \textit{colonie beige}, far from being simply an equivalent response to a standardized stimulus, must be seen as the result of a process of elaboration which involves artists as well as viewers. It is in this sense that we postulate that the experience of \textit{colonie beige} is constituted and not merely depicted. Thus, analysis must go beyond identifying what one might call a \textit{factual} genre (through an inventory of features, elements, etc.); it must attempt to reveal its \textit{operative} nature.

We shall examine three contexts apt to illuminate the dynamic processual character of PAS. First, we will show how different painters use variation in similar basic elements to create specific expressions. In a second step, we will apply a semiotic model to the corpus under consideration in order to show how a given painting in fact achieves its significance by articulating several “planes of expression.” Finally, we will once more consider the process of generic differentiation in PAS in the light of insights gained so far.

\textbf{Composing colonie beige: Artistic Variations}

To illustrate the first point—how individual painters use generic elements to construct a specific message—we will examine four aspects of composition: the uses of “perspective,” of spatial arrangements, of cultural symbols, and of colors.

All painters in our sample respect one rule which may occasionally be verbalized: objects near to the viewer appear larger, objects farther removed appear smaller. All the scenes depicting life in a colonial compound have depth. Some artists concentrate on activities in the prison yard; others, by the way they place the horizon, suggest the vastness of these administrative and punitive establishments (see Figures 11, 16, 17, 19, 21, 22). What surprises is the absence of walls or other containing structures. The scene is an open plaza, and, in more than half of the paintings, a road running through the center or along the periphery suggests a kind of boundless, peripatetic presence of colonial rule. The same idea is expressed in paintings where the colonial administrator has set up his table in the plaza, and especially in Kayembe’s picture of the colony on the road—the administrator and his dog being carried past the viewer (see Figure 22).

All these painters, then, master some techniques of creating the illusion of depth. On the other hand, none of them seems to make attempts to relate the picture to the viewer by means of “scientific” perspective (requiring an imaginary but definite vantage point). Cubic objects such as houses appear in parallel perspective, a kind of presentation which is often said to be typical of “primitive” painting. Furthermore, these paintings show little or no concern with relating depicted objects to a source of light. Most buildings, trees, and people cast no shadow, and where they do it is erratic, contributing little toward structuring the composition.
All this, however, is insignificant as soon as one discovers that these painters have in fact ingenious ways of suggesting "perspective"—if one defines the term as the means to link the viewer with the presented scene.15 Several of them achieve this effect by violating the very rules of academic presentation which they basically respect. Invariably this heightens the realistic and dramatic quality of these paintings. Such dramatization through violation is most striking when principal actors are depicted larger than life. What surprises perhaps is that the African policeman, at least as often as the colonial official, is chosen to express the might and oppressiveness of colonial rule in this way. Without doubt, this is the case in Figures 11, 12, 15, 17, 19, 20, 22, and 23; only 13, 14, 21, and 24 make no use of this device.

Deviation from expected (or prescribed) size is but one way of dramatizing the central message of the colonie bleue. With the possible exception of three (Figures 19, 22, 24), these paintings exhibit yet another effective way of getting the viewer involved in the scene: some or all actors are shown with their regard fixed on the central event, the beating of the prisoner. Thus the viewer, who might be tempted to contemplate individual persons separately, is constantly directed to the dramatic core and, in some cases, this is reinforced by gestures such as outstretched arms or a pointing index finger (see Figures 11, 13, 14, 17, 20, 21, 23, 24).

About half of the paintings use a device not uncommon in Western painting and film: one or several actors disregard the confines of the depicted scene and look into the eyes of the viewer. This may have different effects in the hands of different painters. In Tshibumba's colonie (see Figure 11), the two women on the right seem to address a remote from the beating which is the dramatic core in almost all of the paintings. To be sure, the White is associated with powerful symbols evoking colonial times17 and may not need a central position for the same reasons as the Belgian flag. On the other hand, none of the painters bestows on him the kind of meanness and active cruelty that make the African policeman a target of rejection. One wonders whether this is not meant to evoke the remoteness and abstract nature of colonial power so often discussed in colonial times.

Positioning with regard to the geometric center of the picture is not the only means to evaluate a painter's use of space (if only, because the notion of a center and of symmetrically extended space around it is not a proven cultural universal). Equally important, and more interesting, is the position of elements in relation to each other. Significance, in this case, will be created through opposition, contrast, alignment and any number of spatial arrangements resulting in (or disturbing) a balance of iconic elements. Arrangements of this kind presuppose a kind of decomposition of the principal theme into discrete elements or clusters of elements. This is apparent in the setting (road/plaza, bush, colonial buildings, village huts) and even more so with regard to actors and activities. The paintings in our sample contain an average of almost ten persons and, with the exception of two (see Figures 18, 22), the actors are shown to be involved in a number of sub-plots to the main scene. For instance, Tshibumba's colonie is composed of seven distinct scenes: flogging (official, policeman, prisoner), a bugler, a policeman chasing a prisoner who runs away, a policeman guarding two prisoners carrying water, a prisoner chopping wood, and the two visiting women (see Figure 11).

In what way are elements arranged in spatial relation to...
each other and what is the significance of these arrangements? Three possibilities can easily be recognized:

Upper vs. Lower Part. This should not be confused with perspectival presentation. In this section we consider segments of a picture's surface, not (the illusion of) depth. It appears that only two or three of the paintings are structured by an emphasis on a horizontal division of space. Both Mutumbo and Kayembe (see Figures 19, 22) oppose the colonie in the lower part of the picture to the symbols of what the colony controls—village and bush—in the upper part (for reasons of perspective the Belgian flag in Mutumbo's painting reaches into the upper portion but this does not affect the basic division). Ilunga (see Figure 20) introduces a kind of proscenium with three prisoners in the lower portion. This is in keeping with other paintings of his in which he likes to reserve this place for actors who, either through their attitudes or through the direction of their regard, seem to comment on the scene.

Left vs. Right. Opposition and contrast along a vertical axis is predominant in only one painting (see Figure 18) where the villagers on the left face the colony on the right. Notice that space is allocated in such a way that the villagers appear crowded together and pushed to the side by the colonie occupying three-fourths of the space.

Complex Oppositions. Quite clearly, the majority of the paintings show complex arrangements such that both a vertical and horizontal axis may have to be considered. The best example for this is Tshimbumba's colonie (see Figures 11, 25). Here the central scene depicting prison life and culminating in the flogging, appears to be enclosed in a circle of symbols in relationships of opposition (R1, R2, R3, R4) which may be "read" by starting at any point. Notice that this is basically achieved by diagonally arranged relations of equivalence (R11 and R32). Without pushing interpretation too far, we would suggest that the position of the bush (as country contested between village and colony) and of the beaten prisoner (man contested between relatives and bureaucracy) is not accidental. As a relation, they express an opposition between man and nature (R3). As terms of a relationship, they can be conceived as mediations between opposites, but as "mediations" which dramatize and do not reconcile. Thus, humiliation, toil and violence which make the substance of the colonie are framed and contained by a kind of meta-statement consisting of discontinuous symbols in opposition. This creates an impression of balance and of inescapability which seems to us more powerful than could be conveyed by prison walls.

The devices and techniques discussed so far have been of a general order; they can be identified and described with the help of a number of geometrical and art-historical concepts (although professional students of perspective and art history would be expected to give a more thorough analysis than ours). Because they result in establishing arrangements and relationships, they tend to affect the picture as a whole; this is why we approached them as aspects of "composition." In our search for ways in which individual artists arrive at creations which are both generic and unique, we will now consider the use of symbols which, by virtue of their powerful cultural connotations, add a dimension to PAS that could easily escape the outside observer. Because our knowledge of African culture in Shaba remains imperfect we are certain to overlook a number of them; others we have been able to identify through experience, and often with the help of the artists.

Take gestures. Although it is a commonplace that people who do not understand each others' language resort to gesticulation, anthropologists have become increasingly aware of the fact that gestures are culturally coded. For instance, placing one's chin in the cupped hand while the elbow rests on the knee or on a thigh (see Figures 11 and possibly 15) probably suggests thoughtfulness to us. In Shaba it expresses grief. So do hands clasped over or behind one's head (see Figure 23). Arms crossed on the lap not only suggest inactivity but also attentiveness, a gesture by which women show their submission (see Figures 11, 15). The person on the right side of Kasongo's painting (see Figure 16) is an almost exact copy of another of his paintings in which he (according to his comments) depicts the bereavement of a divorced or abandoned woman. To use the index finger, pointing at a person, or flexing it to call a person, is an insult by the standards of this culture (see Figures 13, 18, 21). Consider also the scene on the right side of Kapenda's painting (See Figure 12). The administrator and a person marked by his attire as the village chief are seen exchanging a letter. It is not clear who gives and who receives the letter, unless one knows that the culturally appropriate gestures are one hand for giving and two for receiving an object.

We were also intrigued by the frequency with which prisoners are depicted as being bald or balding (see Figures 11, 14, 15, 16, 17). An obvious explanation would be that prisoners were shaved as in many other places of the world. But this conflicts with the fact that the painters in our sample use baldness selectively. Natural baldness is relatively rare and it would thus be an even stronger sign of maturity or old age than in our culture. On the other hand, to shave one's head (among women as well as men) is a custom associated with mourning. We may assume, then, that baldness, as a cultural symbol, accentuates the degree of humiliation and evokes a diffuse sense of sadness.

Similarly, some of the activities depicted have cultural connotations beyond their obvious significations. On several paintings (see Figures 11, 13, 16, 19), prisoners carry water, a task traditionally reserved for women. To impose it on men implies shame and humiliation.

Color, similarly to perspective and the spatial arrangements of the composing elements of colonie beige, is used to convey information and accentuate the pictorial message. The colors of the Belgian flag (black, yellow, and red) are
systematically repeated as composing elements of the clothing of the policeman (see Figures 11, 12, 18, 19, 22, 24) or of the policeman and the prisoners (see Figures 14, 15, 16, 17, 20, 21, 23). In some paintings (see Figures 13, 17, 21, 23) black is replaced by dark bluish-gray, which may indicate a change in colonial uniform, or simply a lack of black paint. Here again, it is the policemen and the prisoners, and not the white colonial official, who carry, symbolically, the colors of the colonial rule. The majority of the paintings (see Figures 12, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 24) depict the white colonial officer in white, some in gray uniforms (see Figures 11, 13, 14, 22, 23), indicating a different historical period as well as the intensification of colonial rule in the transition from white-clad administrative (missionary?) to gray-clad military types. Most important for us is that color distinctions in the clothing of the colonial officer and the policeman and prisoners are systematically maintained, even if, as in one painting (see Figure 23) they are reduced to the red fez of the African policeman.

In our work on PAS we have not come to a point where we could offer more detailed and conclusive observations on the use of colors, but we feel fairly confident in stating that, on a conscious level, colors play a minor role in composition. In interviews, several artists insisted on the primacy of dessin (design) over color. Notice that, with the exception of Ndaie, Laskas, Mutombo, Kalema, and perhaps Matchika, all painters use lines to mark the contours of all or some objects and persons, often coloring the surfaces thus created evenly without much regard for shades. An extreme case is Nkulu whose technique approaches brush drawing (see Figure 15).

On the other hand, skill in mixing colors is recognized as a mark of craftsmanship. This may have to be seen in contrast to a tradition which is accustomed to the use of plain colors and which values a basic triad of black, white, and red. From conversations with the painters we got the sense that "mixing" was felt to be a modern accomplishment and that the ideal is to approach the natural colors of the objects depicted. Occasionally, though, one finds interesting deviations from that ideal. One of them reflects the socioeconomic context of PAS. Almost always when we pointed out deviations from an expected color scheme, the artists would tell us that they ran out of a certain color, or had no money to buy it, or that it was not available on the market. Some found ingenious solutions (to paint the sky, Tshibumba mixed ball-point ink with a white base on the canvas); all of them were constantly concerned about their supply. Thus, cultural traditions and economic conditions, as well as a canon developing in the context of both, limit the use of colors in PAS. By implication this puts artistic weight on design and content.

This brings us to a final observation immediately relevant to our genre. In one painting (see Figure 15), colonial official and Africans are not distinguished in terms of skin color. The same color is used for the uniforms of official, policeman and prisoners, and the painting is extremely reduced in other respects. We also know, from the circumstances of its acquisition, that the painter thought of himself as a beginner. But quality is not at issue here and we take "inferior" paintings of this kind to be powerful indicators of the degree to which colonie belge has become standardized and firmly imprinted in the minds of people in Shaba. It has become a message which may be coded almost without redundancy. We will return to this point in the following section.>

Let us summarize the suggestions and conclusions resulting from our attempt to compare the ways in which individual painters create specific realizations of colonie belge. In their uses of perspective, most of them depict colonial rule as a vast and peripatetic presence. The prison is not a place where some people are locked up; it invades the lives of people. Several artists consciously violate rules of perspective to dramatize oppressiveness and brutality although, strangely enough, the white administrator is rarely shown as the chief villain. Almost all the paintings have a staged, theatrical quality, and several use devices that involve the viewer with the scene: colonie belge is anything but "monumental" historical painting; it claims immediate, present relevance. Subtle shades of meaning are conveyed by spatial arrangements. The logic of relationships between iconic elements may thus project a sense of the inescapability of colonial rule, expressing at the same time its remote and abstract bureaucratic nature. Cultural symbols highlight humiliation and grief and create an overall feeling of cultural intimacy. Colonel belge is not any kind of oppression; it has a special meaning for the artists of PAS and their customers. And finally, paintings of this genre have become powerful evocative messages that need little elaboration because they are manifestly embedded in common understandings.>

Decomposing colonie belge:

Semiological Structures

The majority of the paintings of colonie belge contain linguistic messages of various kinds. Leaving aside the artist's signature, numerous inscriptions, either on the margin, or on objects depicted, contain information about topic, time, place, functions of buildings, and so forth. What is the purpose of these messages? Our analysis up to this point has clearly shown that both, the generic content and the specific intentions of individual artists, are unambiguously rendered by iconic means. Are linguistic messages simply redundant? Or are they the kind of embellishments one expects to find on naive and children's paintings as if inscriptions and titles were to make up for a lack of precision or for the artist's insecurity about his capacities? For several reasons we doubt that it is as simple as that.

Even a casual glance at the inventory compiled in Table 4 shows that, perhaps with one exception (where the painter includes his address), all inscriptions provide a commentary on the subject as a whole rather than on specific items. This is evident when the artist designates the genre (e.g., "Colonie Belge") and the historical period (e.g., "1885-1959"). The same intention may be inferred when he selects a salient aspect of colonial administration such as the most important territorial subdivision ("tortorites de . . .") or one of the most obvious repressive institutions (e.g., "police," "prison"). It even applies to seemingly cryptic signs such as "IMPO" (for impôts 'taxes') and "TP" (for travaux publiques 'public works', often involving labor conscription). Our claim that these messages aim at the total subject is reinforced by the fact that it makes apparently little difference where exactly they appear, on objects or on the margin. Generic title, dates, locations, all occur in both ways (see Table 4).

An even stronger argument may be derived from the fact
that inscriptions are in French. As linguistic messages they are addressed to a population which uses an African language in daily life and French mostly in contacts with various bureaucracies. This gives them a connotative significance: colonial language symbolizes the colony as such.

If it is true that these linguistic messages aim at the totality of the iconic message and, through it, at the totality of the designated content, we should conclude with R. Barthes that

the words as much as the images are fragments of a more general syntagm and the unity of the message is achieved on a higher level, the level of history, of anecdote, and of interpretation [1964:45; our translation].

In the essay from which we just quoted, Barthes analyzes an advertisement consisting of iconic as well as linguistic elements. Many suggestions and conclusions flowing from his semiological approach could be applied to the corpus under consideration. We, too, distinguished in substance, if not terminologically, "denotative signs" (those that are in an immediate analogous relationship to objects depicted) and "connotative symbols" (those that demand for their interpretation what Barthes calls "un savoir presque anthropologique," 1964:42). Undoubtedly, the specific cultural significance we try to elaborate for the genre colonie beige is found where connotation takes off, so to speak, from denotative signs. As regards the inner coherence of connotative symbols, we agree with Barthes that it reflects a "common domain,"

that of ideology which can only be unique for a given society and history whatever the signifiers of connotation may be... [1964:49].

Finally, we also think that specific expressions of a given ideology may constitute a kind of "rhétorique" (1964:49), and this is perhaps the point where iconic signification rejoins linguistic signification. The linguistic messages on the paintings of colonie belge do in fact "anchor" (1964:44) the images in a social discourse about the colonial experience and with Barthes we may see in this "a technique... to fight the terror of uncertain signs" (1964:44).

Of course, the cardinal principle in a semiological analysis is that the signifiers must be discontinuous so as to be codable and to be—true to structuralist dogma—convertible into "culture" (1964:42, 48f.). In this context, it matters little whether or not we agree with structuralist nature—culture dualism. Our material invites us, though, to take a further step in applying semiological analysis which, if we may anticipate the result, will lead us to identify a surprising connotation of colonie beige.

In Elements of Semiology, Barthes introduces the notion of "staggered systems"—ways in which relationships between expression and content may be represented as interlocking "planes." Let us briefly recapitulate the principles (cf. Barthes 1970:89ff.):

A system of signification can be described as a relationship $R$ between a plane of expression $E$ and a plane of content $C$: $ERC$. In two ways, systems of this kind can become in turn part of higher-level systems. Either $ERC$ becomes the plane of expression of a second system—$(E RC)$—in which case the second system is the plane of connotation of the first, or the first system becomes the plane of content of a second system—$E R(ERC)$—in which case the second system is a metalanguage of the first. Figure 26 shows how this might be applied to our corpus. Although the cut-off point is somewhat arbitrary, let us assume that the series of staggered systems is grounded in what Barthes calls the "real system" (1970:93), i.e., a first-level system in

<table>
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<td>La Police, Territoire de Kambove</td>
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</tr>
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<td>12 Kapenda</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
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<td>13 Ndaie (1)</td>
<td>la Colonie Belges. Depuis 1940 à 60 Fin</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 Mutombo</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>x</td>
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<td>—</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
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<td>23 Anonymous</td>
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<td>24 Kalema</td>
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STUDIES IN THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF VISUAL COMMUNICATION
which the contents of experience are denoted by continuous (analogous) images and by discontinuous (digital) linguistic signs. The next higher level would then be constituted when these fundamental relationships are absorbed by second-order systems as their planes of expression and of content respectively. Thus, while ER1C describes basic iconic expressions and their contents, (ER1C)R2C would be the level on which we locate a given painting as the realization of an iconic system. In this case, the plane of expression would no longer be considered as an agglomerate of images; it is now an ensemble of discontinuous signs and symbols expressing similarly discontinuous elements of experience (persons, objects, acts, attitudes, moods, etc.). To the extent that such discontinuity reflects cultural coding, R2 is to R1 in a relationship of connotation (but keep in mind that there is no connotation without a denotative “rest”; cf. Barthes 1964:50). A painting of colonie belge, therefore, never simply depicts colonial experience(s). Even at this lowest level of interpretation—taking a painting as a discrete object and disregarding its context within PAS—it points to specific forms of experience which are mediated and constituted by a culture.

However, our entire approach rests on the assumption that paintings of PAS are not perceived and valued as individual objects but rather as collective “reminders” of kinds of experience or knowledge. The notion of genre was introduced to express this. We can now understand its function more clearly if we hypothesize that the painting (ER2C) becomes the plane of expression of a higher system—(ER2C)R3C. This opens up a highly interesting perspective. What would in this case be the content signified by the genre colonie belge? Clearly, it could be neither actual, individual experience as in ER1C, nor simply any kind of culturally coded experience as in ER2C. We surmise that it must be a significant and especially meaningful kind of collective memory of colonial experience. As memory it is an aspect of present consciousness and that means that it is, historically, embedded in post-colonial experience. According to semiological rules, colonie belge as a genre of PAS connotes a level of present consciousness—a “level” because it seems that ER3C might be linked to a still higher level, (ER3C)R4C, in which case we would have reached the totality of urban experience in Shaba (of which “post-colonial experience” would be an aspect).

Semiological analysis then, gives valuable confirmation to our findings in that it provides us with an inverse “reading” of the levels we distinguished when we introduced the notion of a process of generic differentiation. Beyond this, it has a revelatory, critical function in that it exposes a non-obvious fact. Colonial experience, although chronologically a thing of the past, remains an active element of present consciousness. Paintings of colonie belge express the omnipresence of powerful, organized, and bureaucratic oppression of the little man as he feels it now, in a system whose decolonization remains imperfect and which constantly uses the former oppressor as a negative counterimage. Colonie belge is an eminently political genre. It may lack characteristics usually associated with political art (posters especially), such as concrete agitational messages, a clear separation of good and evil forces. Despite this (or because of this?), it conveys a powerful political message. The colony (symbolized by the African policeman as much as by the White) is present now; the little man is still being kicked around, while the society to which he feels close (symbolized by his family and the village) remains as impotent as before.

Interviews with painters and customers confirm our interpretation that colonie belge concerns the present through the past. Here is but one of the many statements that could be cited:

Q: What is the name of this kind of painting?
R: This kind of painting, that is to say, the name of these paintings is authenticité.

Q: Authenticité. Don’t some call it colonie belge? But you thought of it as . . .
R: Authenticité.

Q: How is that, authenticité?
R: . . . our things of old, the ones we used to have.
Q: When people order such a painting, how do they ask for it? Make me a . . .
R: état belge.

Authenticité has been (since 1972) the key slogan of President Mobutu’s politics of cultural independence. It calls for a positive attitude to the African heritage which was suppressed by colonial domination. The meaning given to it by a popular painter is both ironic and profound. True independence must be able to face the shadows of the past.

How does PAS as a visual form relate to verbal expression? In Figure 26 we indicate that relationships between the two may be conceived as levels of metalanguage. This presents little difficulty as long as one considers only the two intermediate levels in our schema. We have already shown that PAS and the genre colonie belge specifically are connected with popular speech through a terminology (terms for materials, techniques etc., cf. Table 1; labels for genres, cf. Table 2). This can be expressed as a relationship, (ER2C)R21E, implying that such a terminology serves to make statements about the elements of the lower system. On a higher level, colonie belge is linked to an (as yet not fully known) body of narrative lore. Remember that the sign of a good painting in PAS is that it “carries a story.” This relationship would then be rendered as (ER3C)R31E, and folklore, or at least a specific kind of folklore (stories about colonial times), could be interpreted as a metalanguage which permits one to speak about representations of colonial experience.

At this point, semiological analysis runs into insurmountable difficulties. If the relations are in fact as shown in our schema, we cannot see exactly how linguistic signs relate to iconic signs unless one subscribes to the untenable assumption that, even on the level of the “real system,” linguistic signs and symbols are meta-signs of iconic signs (this was rejected above). It is equally inconceivable that, on the highest level, “social discourse”—the totality of speaking about life experience in urban Shaba—could be a “metalanguage.” According to Barthes, metalanguage is a decipherer’s language; society “holds the plane of connotation” (1970:94).

An alternative would be to start semiological description on the level of the “real system” with two, not one, systems;
CONCLUSIONS: STRUCTURE AND PROCESS IN PAS

This paper has been an attempt to present as a continuous process and coherent system a kind of cultural expression we encountered in the form of paintings which depicted strange topics, showed up in unexpected places and, initially, seemed to have little significance beyond the charming and endearing qualities that naive painting has for those who have grown tired of "big" art.

We will formulate some conclusions presently, but before we do this, we should indicate that we are very much aware of problems and areas which this attempt does not cover. Some lie beyond our competence, such as a more "technical" analysis of composition, techniques, and materials, and more thorough art-historical comparison. Others simply demand further study of our materials or further research in the field. We had to be selective in choosing only one genre for detailed interpretation. We made little use of recorded interviews and conversations with artists and of field notes documenting the circumstances in which we encountered individual paintings. A questionnaire-based survey among consumers of PAS in nine localities and/or groups awaits more rigorous analysis.

Finally, we must eventually place PAS in a wider context and explore its contrasts to colonial art populaire, and contemporary "academic" painting, its relationships to similar forms in other parts of Zaire and of Africa, and its place among other popular arts—oral lore, popular writing, theater, live and recorded music, and dance. All these are very much alive in Zaire, and many are more vigorous and visible than popular painting, especially to the outsider.

Structures and Contradictions

We maintained that one way in which PAS reveals its identity is its class orientation. In Table 2, we suggested that a definite boundary marks off preferences of the Zairean
middle class (and of the expatriates) against those of the urban masses. Is PAS, then, simply the cultural correlate to socioeconomic structures of the wider society? Is it, since it belongs to the masses, "proletarian art"? As we said at the outset, we do not think that there exists in present Shaba a kind of cultural (and not just socioeconomic) alienation and a kind of antagonistic consciousness which would make "proletarian" a meaningful attribute. If there is at all a process of proletarization, it is an incomplete one, as Mwabila (n.d.) has argued in his recent work on class consciousness in Lumbumbashi.

It is true, however, that socioeconomically, there has always been an enormous gap between the working masses and those Africans who came to occupy managerial or other leading positions in government and industry. Mukenge (1973) has shown that this was the case in colonial times and that it continues to influence, as a pervasive pattern, the distribution of wages and even the size of independent enterprise since independence.

On the other hand, extensive research among wage earners in Shaba convinced us that the objective conditions which separate the masses from the privileged few are not just passively "reflected" in their consciousness. Many workers, craftsmen, and small clerks constantly hope for a chance to accumulate a small initial capital and free themselves from dependent labor. The artists of PAS themselves are but one example of this. Of course, for most people this remains a goal they never attain and is easily transformed into a kind of collective reverie. We think that PAS expressed this in the all-important genre of *mamba muntu*, the mermaid. It is impossible to render the complex meaning of these paintings in a short formula. At this juncture, however, we must briefly speak about the mythical-magical set of beliefs associated with them.

*Mamba muntu* is not so much a person as a generic being which is said to live in many lakes and rivers of the country (although a given account may insist on a specific locality). Sometimes, *mamba muntu* comes to the shore to rest and to comb her hair. The one who is lucky enough to obtain a lock, her comb, or any object associated with her, may expect to see her soon in a dream. He may then use these objects as a pawn and in addition he may have to promise absolute fidelity to *mambu muntu* (to the exclusion of other partners) and silence about his encounter in which case he will become suddenly very rich.24

Whatever the many implications of this story are, as a myth it bridges the gap between absolute poverty and relative ease. It "explains" (of course it doesn't, it only expresses a fact of life) why this society offers little opportunity to work one's way up, and why wealth always appears to come suddenly and in a massive form.

In any attempt to understand the social significance of PAS, the genre *mamba muntu* must play a key role. It is, as we said when we first introduced it, a "totalizing" genre. Yet it is not the only one, nor is it the only one which lends itself to interpretation in terms of a class-orientation. Paintings of the *colonia belge* are less numerous but they, too, are only found among the masses. In fact, we rarely saw any painting of the genres classed as "things past" (cf. Table 2) in middle-class homes. We will have to say more about this later on.

The situation is different when it comes to genres classed as "things ancestral" (cf. Table 2). Two observations can be made. First, the landscapes and some other genres (village life, hunting scenes, perhaps also chiefs and other traditional symbols) are the only works by artists of PAS which may occasionally be sold across socioeconomic boundaries, to the middle class and to expatriates. Second, even if this may be relatively rare, the middle class and the expatriates appreciate the contents of these genres, although they tend to buy their paintings from artists who work in academic and "decorative" styles and cater only to this class.25

If both the formation of classes (and of class ideologies, including aesthetics) and the emergence of PAS are to be conceived as processes, this raises an interesting question. Should the *paysage*, the generalized, exotic, folkloric "African" painting be on a higher level of aesthetic development as (or because) the class that prefers it is on a higher socioeconomic level? Obviously not. Historically, pirogue-and-palmtree paintings were around before the other genres of PAS appeared. This confirms to us that PAS is fundamentally a process of differentiation and that, in this respect, it surpasses the arts of the upper class. It has been creative in that it developed new forms and contents. Urban life in Shaba is richer in visual expressions (and presumably also in topics of discourse related to these expressions) than it was in colonial times. If PAS is accepted as a document, urban mass culture in Shaba shows few signs of impoverishment and alienation.

Processes and Contents

PAS, then, is not a mere reflex or echo of socioeconomic structures. It is a complex process in which a society articulates and communicates its consciousness of its origins, its past and its present predicament. Anthropologically, it is a phenomenon of great importance, a key to understanding culture and ideology in these towns. All this, however, should not create the impression that this art is essentially a concentrated, strained, and organized effort to attain certain societal and individual goals. The painters of PAS are not thinlipped ideologues; they paint to make a living. Their customers are not engaged seekers of deep historical meaning; they buy a painting because there is an empty wall in their living room, because they like what they see, or because they want to spend, finally, a buck on something that is not absolutely necessary for survival. Similarly, that PAS is so manifestly structured in terms of genres and individual efforts at composition, should not project an image of stylistic rigor. PAS is playful and imaginative, it has room for irony and humor. Because it values content more than form and competence, new subjects may be introduced at any time. Anyone may try his luck as a painter, and there are no sharp distinctions between full-time professionals and "Sunday painters." Especially in the workers' settlements, many hold a regular job and derive an additional source of income from painting mermaids, Belgian colonies, and portraits.

These observations may be better understood if we return to our initial thesis: PAS is part of communicative processes in contemporary Zairean society. Within that society, it functions as a vehicle, effectively transmitting messages.
about common understandings and agreements on the meaning of urban life in Shaba. But it also forms and transforms to a considerable extent modes of perception. In this sense, PAS mediates and articulates experiences. We think that it is theoretically important to realize that it is this mediating function, rather than simply its expressive and “signifying” nature, which allows the researcher to enter, so to speak, the system of PAS. This is why we found semiological analysis to be an insufficient epistemological basis for inter-cultural interpretations. Semiology elegantly describes sign-systems that may be presumed to be “given” (and we cannot discuss here the question whether such givenness can ever be presumed, see also note 3). But sign-systems in other cultures are never simply given, they must be translated and it seems to us that only common mediations provide the ground for valid translations.

This is why we proposed to approach PAS like a language with all that this implies—the possibility to describe it in a systematic way, to translate its “propositions,” and to interpret its “texts.” We say “like a language” and use “propositions” and “texts” in quotation marks because, at this point, we hesitate to commit ourselves to a less equivocal position. Three possibilities could be considered, though: “art as language” in a literal sense, “art like language” in an analogous sense, and “art is language” in a metaphorical sense.

The first one—art as language, literally—is represented in Barthes’ Saussurean attempt to understand language as the sign-system par excellence to which other sign-systems, such as iconic systems, would be in a subordinated relation. In view of what we had to say about semiology we must discard this first possibility.

Analogies between art and language can be made in more specific ways and may result in highly interesting heuristic notions. An example is Paula Ben-Amos’ analysis of tourist art (exemplified by Benin ebony carving) in the light of recent insights about structures and functions of pidgin languages. Both have in common that they “originate and function in situations of contact between mutually unintelligible communicative systems” (Ben-Amos n.d.:8). In a way, this is a tempting analogy. PAS is coextensive with the Shaba variety of Swahili, a language which has vehicular functions and is characterized by pidginization (although not a pidgin in itself). Shaba Swahili has provided a medium of communication in a situation of pronounced multilingualism and of contact between Africans and expatriates.

But: PAS is not a tourist art. It is not a “simplified” traditional art form (there was no representational painting prior to colonial contact). Perhaps we should extend Paula Ben-Amos1’ idea and seek our analogy in what linguists have described as creolization (as opposed to pidginization), i.e., a development from a reduced vehicular form to a language which can have the same communicative functions as any other developed language although it may be restricted in use to socially defined situations. This certainly comes closer to our case. However, as long as we cannot draw on detailed linguistic studies of Shaba Swahili, we can expect little clarification from art-language analogies.

What if we take PAS as a metaphor of language? Two specifications are immediately in order: metaphors are not vague, intellectually disgraceful figures of speech—they are among the most creative means to extend the limits of what can be known and said; second, “language,” as it is used here, is not the linguist’s descriptive construct, but rather the act of speaking—production of discourse. As a society articulates its culture through discourse, it may extend and intensify it through metaphorical communication. Visual art may have that function, especially if it is, as we hope to have shown, intimately linked to verbal communication. Metaphors, unlike analogies, are not merely stated; they must be invented, elaborated, and (again unlike analogies) they often have a critical, contentious sting (e.g., when feminists refuse to be the “niggers of this society”). And this, incidentally, is why the colonie belge may convey all forms of oppression, not only those of the past.

If PAS, as a metaphor, is invention, elaboration, i.e., process, what can be said about the directions, or perhaps better: intentions, of that process? There is in recent anthropological literature a study which invites comparison. In his Rites of Modernization, J. Peacock analyzes a form of “proletarian drama” in a Javanese city (1968). In these ludruk plays, actors and audience explore and dramatize life in a modern city against the background of village—and traditional high culture. Here an art form becomes the vehicle of a changing consciousness much as we have claimed it for PAS. This basic similarity could be shown in much more detail. On the other hand, our work has made us somewhat doubtful about the guiding model in Peacock’s approach. Javanese society is seen to be on a linear course of transition from a traditional to a modern situation. Ludruk plays “help,” “seduce” and “involve” participants on the way to modernization (1968:6). Although we cannot do justice to Peacock’s very interesting and detailed analysis of the communicative functions of drama, his general model deserves a critical comment. A decade lies between his and our field research. Many things happened in this period. “Developing” countries have developed in ways that defy linear models of modernization, and theories of modernization have become more complex and sophisticated. In the context of all this, we find that PAS is best conceived, not as a transitional phenomenon but as expression of a synthetic consciousness. Artists and consumers of PAS neither define the forms and contents of this art against a tradition nor toward modernization. Their ordinary existence is in the middle of both, making it a daily task to transform seemingly disparate elements into coherent and consistent action. PAS objectifies achieved synthesis (to which it contributes): it is the medium of a kind and state of historical consciousness in which remote mythical origins, a traumatic past, and a troubled but hopeful present are fused in a vigorous urban culture and lifestyle that has little resemblance to the disturbed, aimless, and degenerate existence that was once thought to be the fate of African villagers moving into town.

Furthermore, because PAS differentiates and articulates contents of consciousness, it should provide a kind of profile of urban consciousness in Shaba. Not all kinds of experiences have crystallized as genres, and those that have, became elements of a system the meaning of which is not simply a sum of the significations of its parts. But an interpretation of the whole system will have to wait until other genres have been examined as it was tried here for the colonie belge. Tentatively, we can say that attention seems to be con-
centrated on mamba muntu and on the category of "Things Past." The former provides a mythical frame; the latter expresses attempts to forge events and experiences of colonization and decolonization into consistent history, a view of the past as it continues to bring forth the present.

NOTES

Acknowledgments. This paper reports on research carried out, in Shaba (Republic of Zaire) between fall 1972 and December 1974. In its initial stage, it was supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (RO-6150-72-149, for research on "Work and Communication among Swahili-Speaking Mine Workers in Shaba [Zaire]"). Later on, we received support from the Rockefeller Foundation Program of aid to the National University of Zaire. Both contributions are gratefully acknowledged. Our special gratitude is due to the artists named in this paper and to many others, all of whom agreed to contribute their works and thoughts with the understanding that we planned to write about them.

1 Most of these publications tend to be general surveys of developments in contemporary African arts and crafts (see Brown, Beier, Ikpako, Mount, Newman, Washington).

2 On contemporary African artists who, by training and artistic expression are within the major European artistic traditions, see the editions of African Arts; on tourist/artport air art as acculturation phenomena, see Ben-Amos (n.d.); Graburn (1964, 1970, n.d.); on contemporary African art as "naive" art, see Die Kunst der Naiven.

3 We think that such an epistemological position will advance investigations of "exotic" art beyond the pessimistic (and nominalist) view recently expressed by Anthony Forge in his introduction to Primitive Art and Society:

"The accessibility of such systems to the anthropologist or other outside observer remains a problem. Most work so far, as indeed much of the work on the interpretation of myth and ritual, has been based on the explanatory power of the proposed analysis (Occam's razor) and indeed, since for the systems to work effectively it is supposed that their operation is not totally conscious to members of the culture concerned, it is difficult to see what other sorts of proof are available..."

[1973:xix].

Our approach is aimed at (emerging) consciousness, and seeks good translations, not valid "proofs."

4 At one time, we considered adopting the attribute "proletarian." For reasons which should become clear in this paper, we think that this would not be a meaningful term. On the other hand, PAS should not be confused with the products of a European-inspired school of painters in this area which came to international fame as art populaire in the decade before independence (1960). See also note 6.

5 Population estimates for 1974, based on older census figures and extrapolation from sketchy surveys of squatters' towns: Lubumbashi 600,000-800,000; Likasi 150,000; Kolwezi 200,000-220,000. These figures exceed the conservative estimates of De Saint Moulin as reported in Monnier (1974). Monnier approaches reality with the population figure for Lubumbashi, multiplied by a rank-factor: 864,000 (1974:285, Table 1). The earlier development of Lubumbashi (then Elisabethville) was studied by Bruce Fetter (n.d.).

6 The names of these artists (Bela, Mwenze, Pili-Pili, Kaballa, Kipinde) are generally associated with that of Pierre Romain-Desfossés, the founder of one of the first and most important art schools in Francophone Africa. Desfossés, a French nobleman, traveller, amateur anthropologist, writer, and marine-painter settled in Lubumbashi (then Elisabethville) in 1844 and established what later came to be known as "Ecole d'Art Populaire Indigène." Desfossés' intention was to create an "authentic African" artistic expression in painting, unhampered by formal training and Western artistic values. He claimed to have provided only the most essential skills and materials to the students, to allow the "genius of the race," the "life force" of the "Bantu soul" to manifest itself. A study dealing with the wider historical and ideological framework of this school (i.e., pan-Africanism, Negritude, Tempels' Bantu Philosophy, post-colonial anthropology, etc.) is planned in the future. Apart from this anthropological dimension, the remaining artists (Mwenze, Pili-Pili) and their work continue to be of great interest to us in and by themselves as representatives of contemporary African art as well as paradoxical counterparts to the genuinely "authentic, popular and indigenous" art form in PAS. In this context, a reference should be made to the fate of this art school. After the death of Desfossés, the school became the foundation for the new Académie des Beaux-Arts, and although the Académie became a regular art school under the directorship of L. Moonens, a Belgian painter, the influence of the Desfossés tradition continued through Mwenze and Pili-Pili, who were employed as instructors at the Académie. The most notable students of this period are Kamba, Mwembia, Muvuma, and especially Mode (Muntu), who recently won a second prize in the African Arts' annual contest (see African Arts, Vol. VIII, No. 2, Winter 1975). On Desfossés, see DeDeken, Mount, Van Herreweghe, Vanden Bossche.

7 Here we are touching on complex problems concerning relationships between social process, artistic form and content, and materials and techniques. But at this point we can do little more than express our awareness of these relationships. We found several recent studies useful, and shall explore them in future work on PAS. Highly interesting comparisons with the subject under study are contained in M. Baxandall's sketch of a social history of Italian Renaissance art (1974). On a more abstract level, we think of the theory of artistic work offered by Hoffman-Axthelm (1974) and of an analysis of art in the context of late capitalism by Holz (1972).

8 We are aware that in art-historical parlance "genre" is not a strictly analytical concept. It suggests a certain kind of topic—"ordinary" scenes from daily life—and a certain style of minor quality with a tendency of repetitiveness. Historically, it is most closely associated with Dutch painters of the 17th century. However, since the origin of "genre" are closely linked to socioeconomic processes of embourgeoisement (see Hoffmann-Axthelm 1974:73), we expect that more detailed comparisons between "genre" and PAS may eventually lead to interesting results.

9 An example is the term paysage (used either in Swahili or in French). It may refer to a genre (landscapes) or to broad stylistic categories (frequently, artists of PAS identify their style as paysage in contrast to decorative and semi-abstract painting which is "art moderne").

10 Our distinction of levels is a heuristic one. It fits conceptualizations of history as they appear in generic labels, and especially in conversations with artists. At this point, however, we cannot claim that our distinctions are in fact culturally and consciously recognized.

11 In Shaba, we found the French expressions sirène and (apparently only in the Kolwezi area) madame poisson. In the Kasai, the motif is known as mumi wata, the same name under which it is popular along the Western African coast. See also note 24.

12 The artists come from Lubumbashi, Kipushi, Likasi and Kolwezi. The fact that we name the artists poses a problem of ethics without respectable precedent. E. H. Gombrich, for instance, offers the following observation:

"It is surely no accident that the tricks of illusionist art, perspective and modeling in light and shade, were connected in classical antiquity with the design of theatrical scenery. It is here, in the context of plays based on the ancient mythical tales, that the re-enactment of events according to the poet's vision and insight comes to its climax and is increasingly assisted by the illusions of art... In the whole history of Western art we have this constant..."

13 Such a definition may seem somewhat unusual, but it is not without respectable precedent. E. H. Gombrich, for instance, offers the following observation:

"It is surely no accident that the tricks of illusionist art, perspective and modeling in light and shade, were connected in classical antiquity with the design of theatrical scenery. It is here, in the context of plays based on the ancient mythical tales, that the re-enactment of events according to the poet's vision and insight comes to its climax and is increasingly assisted by the illusions of art... In the whole history of Western art we have this constant..."
interaction between narrative intent and pictorial realism (1961:131).

Clearly, the paintings of colonie belge show ample evidence for both theatrical and narrative intent.

16 Notice also that all the scenes are set in full daylight. In interviews, several artists said that it is the hour of the morning call when work and punishment were meted out. This explains the presence of a bugler in five of the paintings.

17 These are the pipe, dark glasses, beard, and colonial dress and uniform. We suspect that both the pipe and pipe were more typical of missionaries than of administrators—an interesting way of broadening the symbolic connotations of the white official. We should also point out that pith helmet and shorts have (with rare exceptions among old dignitaries) disappeared in post-colonial Zaire which makes these paraphernalia definitely symbols of the past.

18 The official dates are: Congo Free State 1885-1908, Belgian Congo 1908-60. Among the place names, Kambove, Kongolo, Kasenga, and Kabalo are in Shaba (former Katanga), Dibaya and Mweka are in the Kasai region. Variation and inconsistency of dates and places are again valuable indicators of the processual nature of PAS. History is not simply depicted and reported, it is constructed in each painting as an event. Place names are chosen by the artists, either to point to their own origins and experiences with the colonial system, or to make a painting more meaningful as a “reminder” to customers who come from these regions. Dates do not simply reflect “objective” chronology (whose, the colonizer’s or the colonized’s?) but express meaningful periods. Thus, Ndeze, depending on mood and occasion, may choose to indicate the depth of colonial rule by placing its origins in the 19th century (see Figure 14), or its intensity by identifying the period between the defeat of the metropolitan power in World War II and its formal abdication as a colonial power in 1960 (see Figure 13). Incidentally, 1959 (see Figures 11, 15) is correctly identified as the year when the Léopoldville riots (January 4-6) de facto achieved political independence before it was “granted” on June 30, 1960 (cf. Young 1965:152; his authoritative study should be generally consulted for background information on decolonization and independence). Mutombo, who gives as dates 1914-18 (see Figure 19) is the oldest among these painters. To him (as he confirmed in a conversation), World War I symbolizes the greatest intensity of colonial rule.

19 We do not think that structuralist nature-culture metaphysics is of help in elucidating the processes of PAS. In this respect, our treatment differs from Burnham’s (1971) structural analyses of modern art (also inspired by Barthes, among others).

20 It is a striking feature of political painting in PAS that artists refuse to take sides by depicting one force as evil and the other as good. This is even more evident in genres other than the colonie belge, such as in paintings of war, of rebellion and secession.

21 Already in Rhétorique de l’image R. Barthes suggested that the problematic relationship between image and text might be approached historically through the study of book illustration (1964:43). In PAS, however, this was taken up and developed in a very interesting way by Bassy (1974). His general approach to an integrated semiosemiology of image and text seems to rest on an evolutionary view in which emblematic images where the “figure is its proper noun” (1974:302) precede (necessarily?) modern illustrations which demand a “recourse to the text” (1974:302). Interestingly, his example for a emblematic image is a mermaid (1974:329, Fig. 1). In PAS, “emblematic” images and “illustrations” (of oral texts) are simultaneously present and, more importantly, they are integral parts (genres) of one and the same process. Therefore, we do not think that Bassy has made the case for a rhétorique encompassing image and text. The problem of the constitution of the uniting syntagm is not solved by dividing it into “étapes” (historical-evolutionary stages).

22 We have also consistently avoided raising the question of aesthetics. As regards aesthetic criteria, conscious or non-conscious, operating within PAS, we have ample documentation from conversations with artists and viewers. But, at this point, we are not ready to give a consistent and reasonably complete account. Such an account would have to be based on lexical and semantic analyses of terminologies and concepts, as well as on a more thorough study of sociolinguistic rules that govern communication about PAS. We also think that this must be done before we can consider the aesthetic status of PAS in general (is it “art”? In his review of problems posed by that general question, J. Maquet concludes that there “cannot be an anthropology of art” (1971:17) because the concept of “art” is inseparable from our Western traditions. It remains to be seen whether his own proposal—a kind of transcendental aesthetics combined with a “materialist” model of culture (1971:19f.)—will be accepted.

23 There are two highly interesting studies of African popular culture, one on popular writing in Nigeria (Obiechina 1973), the other on dance societies in East Africa (Ranger 1975), which came to our attention after this paper had been written. Both document striking resemblances (and some revealing differences) between PAS and manifestations of popular consciousness expressed in different media and developed in regions spanning the width of the continent. Especially Ranger’s conclusions (1975:164-166) are remarkably convergent with our own interpretations of PAS.

24 The culture history of mamba muntu is complex, to say the least (see the important paper by Fraser 1972). Undoubtedly, there are links to the West African mami wata. Most of our respondents insisted that mamba muntu paintings were introduced to Zaire by the senegalais, a generic term for West African (Hausa) traders. Another influence may come from literary sources introducing Zairean schoolchildren to the classical Mediterranean motif of the sirène. It could easily be interpreted in the light of Central African traditions about female water spirits and perhaps a kind of werewolf theme—sorcerers changing to dangerous animals (literally mamba muntu translates as “crocodile person”). The closest iconic parallel outside of Africa we know of appears in Haitian popular painting (see e.g., the sirène on p. 101 in Die Naive Kunst, but notice that she is black). Finally, we may mention that the motif persists in Black American lore (see Dorson 1967:250-254).

25 Some of these painters are named in note 6. By far, the most successful painter working at Lumbumbashi and selling mostly to Zairian and expatriate upper crust is Chenge Baruti (formerly B. Berquin). An interesting detail: We never found in PAS the motifs of the bushfire and the ant-hill-in-the-savanna which, probably through the influence of European painters working in the 1950s, became almost obligatory pieces of decoration in colonial homes.

26 In our sample, Laskas (see Figure 17) and Kayembe (see Figure 22) hold full-time jobs as miners.

27 To be accurate, in Elements Barthes speaks about sign systems, and in Rhétorique about iconic sign-systems in general. He does not address himself to the question of how to establish criteria by which some of them could be identified as “art.” For a recent attempt to do this from a semiotic (not semiological) point of view, see Shapiro (1974).

28 The language situation obtaining in Lubumbashi at about the time when PAS appeared was described by Polomé (1971).

29 For recent uses of metaphor in anthropological theory, see Fernandez (1971, 1974) and Wagner (1974).

30 To cite but one example from one area of research—language development—see Whiteley (1971).

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12 To be accurate, in Elements Barthes speaks about sign systems, and in Rhétorique about iconic sign-systems in general. He does not address himself to the question of how to establish criteria by which some of them could be identified as “art.” For a recent attempt to do this from a semiotic (not semiological) point of view, see Shapiro (1974).

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30 To cite but one example from one area of research—language development—see Whiteley (1971).
LIST OF PAINTINGS

(painter, date of acquisition, measurements)

Figure 1 — Kaniga, June 1973, 45 x 70 cm.
Figure 2 — Kalema, June 1974, 57 x 67 cm.
Figure 3 — Matchika, March 1974, 39 x 72 cm.
Figure 4 — Matchika, March 1974, 41 x 72 cm.
Figure 5 — Ngoie, Nov. 1973, 49 x 70 cm.
Figure 6 — Kasongo ka B., Jan. 1974, 36 x 59 cm.
Figure 7 — Matchika, May 1973, 45 x 70 cm.
Figure 8 — Kasongo, May 1973, 46 x 67 cm.
Figure 9 — Ilunga, Nov. 1973, 42 x 57 cm.
Figure 10 — Ndale, Nov. 1973, 46 x 64 cm.
Figure 11 — Tshibumba, Nov. 1973, 41 x 69 cm.
Figure 12 — Kapenda, Dec. 1973, 44 x 60 cm.
Figure 13 — Ndale, Sept. 1974, 48 x 65 cm.
Figure 14 — Ndale, Sept. 1974, 48 x 64 cm.
Figure 15 — Nkulu, Nov. 1973, 40 x 55 cm.
Figure 16 — Kasongo ka B., Jan. 1974, 49 x 74 cm.
Figure 17 — Laskas, Sept. 1974, 44 x 55 cm.
Figure 18 — Kabuika, Oct. 1974, 44 x 60 cm.
Figure 19 — Mutombo, Feb. 1974, 39 x 68 cm.
Figure 20 — Ilunga, Dec. 1973, 47 x 49 cm.
Figure 21 — Matchika, Mar. 1974, 41 x 72 cm.
Figure 22 — Kayembe, Sept. 1974, 30 x 50 cm.
Figure 23 — Anonymous, 1974, 47 x 78 cm.
Figure 24 — Kalema, June 1974, 52 x 76 cm.
ON THE ACQUISITION OF FIRST SYMBOL SYSTEMS

HOWARD GARDNER

I am able to enter into other systems of expression, at first by grasping them as variants of my own, and then by letting myself be inhabited by them until my own language becomes a variant of them.

—Maurice Merleau-Ponty

The Problem: Required to master an unfamiliar ritual, code, game, domain, or field of knowledge, the normal adult may invoke powerful aids. At his disposal are a number of symbol systems acquired earlier in life, including those of natural language, pictorial representation, and mathematics. These symbol systems may be drawn upon freely as the adult seeks to translate the foreign material into terms more accessible to him, or, alternatively, to adapt or impose an already-mastered language upon the less-well-known terrain. Even when such translation is of dubious accuracy, the adult is driven to search for links between symbols already known and a domain in need of conquest.

I focus here on the problem confronted by the individual who is seeking to master a symbol system, but who lacks an already-mastered symbol system upon which he may draw. Such acquisitions are crucial for human beings, whose daily life is permeated, indeed dominated, by every manner of symbol: words, pictures, numbers, works of art, maps, diagrams, models, special codes of assorted design. There has been among scholars increasing interest in the steps by which the young organism masters the dominant symbol system in our culture, that of natural language. And yet, the underlying question of what skills, capacities, strategies, and other equipment must be presupposed for a first symbol system to be mastered, has received little discussion in the psychological or philosophical literature.

The issue posed here has sometimes been side-stepped. It may be held, on the one hand, that symbolization is an inevitable human characteristic, like eating or walking, and should be taken for granted; it may be argued that symbolization is just an elaborated form of contact or communication, not differentiable from the signaling common throughout the animal kingdom, and, as such, unworthy of isolation for special study; or it may be conceded that symbol use is an important human capacity, but inasmuch as it is fundamentally akin to other psychological systems, its study should be collapsed with the investigation of more general principles of learning.

Without restating the case for symbolization, which has been exhaustively set out elsewhere (Langer 1962), let me simply respond to these objections. Perhaps some symbolic capacity is indeed available to infrahuman organisms; in all likelihood the processing of symbols shares features with other cognitive activity. Even so, however, the relative prominence of symbolic activity is so much greater among humans than among other organisms that a qualitative difference in importance seems indicated (see Ploog and Melnechuk 1971). Moreover, whatever parallels symbolization shares with other mental functions does not dim the fact that a number of characteristics of symbols and symbol systems do differentiate them from, say, highly mastered motor skills or enduring traits of personality (see Bruner, Olver, and Greenfield 1966). Finally, and of greatest importance, it is simply not the case that all organisms routinely acquire symbolic capacities. Much evidence indicates that certain symbol systems, say visual language, mathematics, or music, pose considerable difficulties for otherwise normal individuals (see Cruickshank and Hallahan 1975); and even after an individual acquires working familiarity with such symbols, the degree of effort entailed in their use, and the extent to which the individual feels comfortable with them is likely to differ enormously across symbol systems.

This last point motivates much of the present treatment. In the past few years, investigators have become increasingly aware of the great variety of symbol systems which figure prominently in human activity; the disparate media and sensory systems which facilitate comprehension and construction of the world; and, in particular, the reliance of central artistic and scientific functions upon communally-shared systems of symbols (see Goodman 1968). And yet, astonishingly little is known about the way in which these various systems are acquired; the kinds of differences obtaining among individuals in the course of acquisition; the degree of translatability among these systems; the means available to the individual for parrying various symbolic difficulties. Accordingly, I seek here to fix more precisely the nature of this set of issues and to provide some initial empirical suggestions about the acquisition of first systems of symbols. Clearly, any discussion of such vexing questions will be tentative and preliminary, the data still sparse and disputable. Nonetheless, given growing interest in these questions, initiation of a scholarly debate seems desirable.

How, then, to approach this topic? There is, first of all, a small body of relevant literature. Various conceptual considerations should also be brought to bear. But two groups of subjects promise to provide especially powerful insights: young children, who have not yet gained proficiency in any symbol system of their culture; and brain-injured patients who, in seeming defiance of their prior symbolic competence, have been left in a position where they, too, must construct new symbol systems more or less "from scratch." Insights into the processes of acquisition of new symbol systems appear likely to come from these two subject populations.

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22 STUDIES IN THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF VISUAL COMMUNICATION
PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

Before considering the data furnished by these two groups, three brief discussions seem indicated: (1) statement of the point of view adhered to, and the terminology adopted in the following discussion; (2) citation of selected earlier stances on the question under consideration; and (3) a listing of critical issues to which our own research has been directed. Following these preliminaries, we will then review the findings obtained with children and with brain-damaged patients; indicate the parallels and divergences in first symbol use among the two populations; and revert, in closing, to the principal issues of the paper.

Point of View and Terminology:

Symbols are to be considered as those elements which refer to, represent, or denote in some fashion other objects, elements, concepts, or, in certain instances, the denoting element itself. When these elements are organized into some pattern or system wherein the elements occupy a definable and functional relationship to one another, one may speak of a symbol system. The referential aspect of symbol use will be considered its semantic portion; the formal relations obtaining among the symbols within a system will be considered the syntax of that system.

Though (within human society) symbolization occurs almost invariably for communicative purposes, a useful distinction can nonetheless be drawn between communication and symbolization. Communication will consist in the transmission of information from one organism to another, where at least one of the organisms has the intention to convey or infer meanings: if the infant cries and the mother responds by feeding, or if the mother and child eye one another playfully, information may be said to have been intentionally conveyed, and communication will have occurred. Yet, because no independent element represents, by convention, another element, there is on this definition been no symbolization.

Whether symbolization can occur without communication proves a more delicate matter. My inclination is to consider as communicative only such symbolization as involves two organisms intent on transmitting information, and who are mutually engaged in such an endeavor. On this definition, I would exclude transmission of information within mechanical systems, as well as the activities of the solipsistic individual who plays with a symbol system for his own edification alone. However, I recognize the validity of a position which would regard any symbolic message as potential communication.

The distinction between symbolization and communication serves two purposes. It allows us to differentiate the activities of the communicating infant from that of the symbol-using toddler; and the activities of the brain-damaged patient who cannot utilize mediated forms of communication from the acts of the patient who can. Moreover, the distinction proves relevant to a symbolic area on which we will focus here, that of the arts. An individual may devise a symbolic art object which fails to communicate what was intended, or perhaps even fails to communicate anything at all. By the same token, the distinction points up the difference between the child who fails to use a symbol system appropriately, but who nonetheless communicates some information; and the child whose intended communication is embodied in symbolic garb.

I do not argue that symbols constitute a simple and readily defined group, nor that non-symbol use can be handily differentiated from symbol use. If it has confirmed nothing else, our own work documents the complexity of both these issues. It was an understandable, but potentially misleading, practice of many early semioticians to lump together all manner of symbols. However, as Nelson Goodman (1968) has clearly demonstrated, symbol systems differ from one another in the extent to which they resemble a digital or language-like system—as opposed to an analog or picture-like system. Other distinctions also need making: some symbols, like those which figure in music, emphasize a syntactic element; some, as in painting, highlight semantic properties; others, like the literary arts, feature syntactic and semantic properties with allied prominence. Viewed along other lines, symbol systems can be usefully differentiated on the extent to which they draw upon the body itself (e.g., mime, dance, finger paintings), as opposed to “foreign” elements (sculpture, easel painting, instrumental music).

Even as the variety of symbol systems is manifest, the levels of symbol use are multiple. No pursuit is more thankless than the quest for a certain moment in time, a certain point in complexity, which bifurcates the world, one side as symbolic, the other forever barred from the promised semiotic land. Far more fruitful is a search for levels of symbolization. One may, for instance, posit the following symbolic understandings which come in turn to characterize the young child: (1) a single element can stand for some other element; (2) a set of elements can stand for a situation or a composed scene; (3) the same idea or principle can be expressed symbolically in a number of ways; (4) there are symbol systems, which one can use deliberately for certain ends, and which one may alter or create anew. Such levels of understanding emerge at distinct points in the life of the individual and should not be carelessly collapsed into a single skill called “symbolic competence.”

Tensions Within the Literature on Symbolization

Among the rather circumscribed circle of philosophers, psychologists, anthropologists, and educators who have pondered such questions, certain bones of contention have periodically surfaced. Semioticians can be divided, roughly speaking, into those who focus on the individual symbol user, and those who focus on the cultural context within which symbol use unfolds; those who focus on microgenesis (the stages which unfold over a brief compass of time) and those who examine macrogenesis (the evolution of symbolic understanding over the course of years or even centuries); those who investigate the formal characteristics of symbol systems and those who ponder the biological prerequisites or underpinnings of symbolic activity; those who see symbolism as an inevitable emergence, and possibly even an innate human characteristic, as contrasted with those who adopt a more empirical and tentative stance vis-a-vis the emergence of symbolic behavior; those who regard the emergence of symbolic activity as a qualitative leap in individual and
cultural evolution, as compared with those who view semiotic skill as a more natural, gradual, and quantitative transition in the development of organisms.

The contrasting sets of views sketched here are rarely held any longer in extreme form, though their echoes still redound prominently in contemporary writing. While not attempting to mediate directly among the various emphases, we will retain them as background for our own discussion: and perhaps some new clues about where the balance among them should be struck will emerge from our studies of symbolization.

FOCAL ISSUES

While the contrasts just described lurk in the wings of any semiotic study, our research has been directly designed to confront a number of questions concerning initial symbol use. Here these questions will be briefly stated; following a review of the available evidence, some tentative resolutions will be offered.

(A) The Question of Simultaneity

Given that all symbol systems cannot justifiably be lumped into one semiotic mound, the question still remains: Does symbolization tend to emerge at approximately the same time in a variety of media or symbol systems; or is the particular medium of such importance that level of symbolization with one medium in no way predicts one’s accomplishment with other symbol systems? Evidence of an emergence at a given moment of sophistication across several symbol systems would confirm the initial hypothesis; evidence of a staggered or irregular emergence would favor the second.

(B) Order of Emergence

Assuming that all symbol systems do not emerge at the same time, and with the same degree of sophistication, the question arises as to the specific differences in emergences and the factors underlying them. Mastery of A might always precede B, and B always C; in such a case, one would want to know the reasons for this fixed order. However, it might well be that some individuals commenced with one symbol system, others with different symbol systems; and, along these lines, that mastery of one symbol system was more advanced in one individual while sophistication with a second was prepotent in his peer. Again, interest would ultimately center on the causes of this more flexible picture.

(C) Universality of Stages

Any individual, confronted with a new symbol system, might be expected to pass through the same stages en route to mastery. However, some established facts, such as greater difficulty in adulthood of learning a new language, suggest that the individual’s stage of life, his accumulated experience at the time of learning, and the condition of his nervous system, may well govern the particular contours of his symbol use. Whether all individuals master a new symbol system by passing through the same stages in the same order remains to be determined.

(D) Individual Differences and Individual Creativity

Were the experiences undergone by all individuals with all symbol systems identical, were all symbolic products simply replicas of one another, the nature of symbolic processes would assume no greater psychological importance than the processes of digestion or breathing. Yet striking differences are patent among individuals in their symbolic skills and preferences; moreover, certain gifted individuals have the ability to create moving new symbolic products. Just how originality and individuality emerge out of the uniformity of early symbol use still remains an enigma.

(E) Methodological Issues

Questions of method loom large in any study of symbolization. Particularly pressing are the issues of how to determine whether a given behavior is mere imitation, or a “genuine” symbolic act; and whether someone understands a symbolic communication or is merely behaving “as if” he comprehends. These questions gain acuteness when interrogation is precluded as a means of ascertaining the degree of mastery of a symbol system.

Here we touch on the grounds ably surveyed by Roger Brown (1973) in his consideration of the pigeon ping-pong game. May one attribute to the pigeon knowledge of the game of ping-pong if he hits the ball properly across the net, or must he exhibit some understanding of the scoring system and the purpose of the game; moreover, how does one determine whether the pigeon has such an understanding unless he tells you that he does? By the same token, if one has exposed an aphasic patient to a new symbol system, and he now “plays his role” appropriately, can one verify that genuine communication rather than habitual execution of certain actions has taken place? While methodological in nature, these questions invade the essence of the processes we are attempting to elucidate.

(F) Factors Contributing to Symbolic Mastery

That a number of factors (e.g., motor facility, motivation, ability to adopt the perspective of another) all enter into mature symbol use hardly requires argument. Yet a full understanding of symbolic processes can come about only when the precise contribution of these various factors can be fixed with relation to specific aspects of symbolization, to particular kinds of symbol systems, and to specific aspects of communication. A tall order, but no less necessary in need of filling on that account.

These, then, constitute the general point of view adopted here, the background issues lurking in the semiotic literature, and the particular issues to which our own research has been directed. By now, the reader’s desire for data will understandably be flamed; and so with some relief we can turn to our first group of subjects.

SYMBOL USE IN CHILDREN: THE FIRST STAGES

Within a few years, the young child evolves from communication which is entirely unmediated by symbols to communication which utilizes a variety of symbol systems.
He becomes able, over the same period, to appreciate the meanings of these symbols as they are employed by others. Among the systems commonly mastered are natural language and story telling, two-dimensional depiction (as in pen drawing), three-dimensional depiction (as in clay sculpture), and symbolic play (as with hobby horses or puppets).

Using two separate populations, we have been charting the unfolding of these symbolic capacities. We have observed one dozen subjects, ranging in age from three to five on a cross-sectional basis, and we are currently working with a larger and older population of 45 five- to eight-years-olds. Each subject has been required to perform four different tasks, employing each of four separate media. One task being probed across media is "spontaneous" creation: the child is asked to tell a story, make a drawing, sculpt what he wishes out of clay, or enact a "scene" with two blocks which can "stand for" characters. A second task involves completion: the subject is provided with the beginning of a story, drawing, etc., and then asked to devise an appropriate ending. A third task features assembling: the subject is furnished with a large number of elements which could potentially be arranged into a symbolic product—lines of a story, parts of a drawing, pieces of clay, segments of an action sequence. The final task, again probed with all four symbolic media, involves copying: the child is exposed to a finished product (story, drawing, etc.) and asked to duplicate it as best he can. Findings obtained from youngsters aged three to eight are providing detailed inventory of the range of symbolic products which can be elicited, under various circumstances, from normal children.

Competent participation in these tasks is not possible until subjects have achieved considerable symbolic mastery. Insight concerning the very first stages of symbol use requires a much younger group. Moreover, if the texture of developmental process is to be conveyed, it is advisable to follow the same subjects over a period of time. We have, accordingly, undertaken a longitudinal study in which we are following five first-born middle-class infants from the first year of life for at least the following two years.

These studies are still continuing and earliest findings have been reported elsewhere (see Gardner, Wolf, and Smith 1975; Wolf and Gardner 1976). Let us therefore focus on the implications of the evidence as it pertains to the principal theoretical issues outlined above.

(A) The Question of Simultaneity

Our cross-sectional study provides unequivocal evidence that symbolic development is of separate pieces. The same individual stands at different levels of sophistication, depending upon the symbol system being sampled. Many children can tell complex stories before they can represent the simplest human figure in drawing or clay; the opposite profiles of skills characterizes certain other youngsters.

This said, we should add that each level of symbol use seems to entail certain prerequisites; once these prerequisites have been fulfilled, symbolic growth proceeds apace across a variety of media. For instance, the pivotal appreciation that one element can systematically stand for some object or referent seems to depend upon emergence of at least two prior capacities: (1) ability of child and caretaker to communicate in a reciprocal manner with one another; (2) appreciation that objects exist in time and space even when out of sight—the well-known object concept described by Jean Piaget (1954). Symbolic use awaits these milestones: once achieved, the child's level of symbol use is likely to advance across different symbol systems.

By the same token, subsequent levels of symbol use may also await certain milestones. For instance, there seems to come a time, often around the age of three, at which the child first appreciates that a set of symbols can relate to one another in a manner analogous to a set of objects in the real world. A correlative realization, at a still later time in childhood, signals that a particular symbol can be looked at in a variety of ways; one may attend to its surface characteristics and its non-literal meanings as well as to its referential properties (see Silverman, Winner, and Gardner 1976). Again, once achieved, this realization may yield rich dividends across a variety of symbolic media, as when the child comes to comprehend the concepts of style or metaphor in a number of art forms.

(B) Order of Emergence

A fixed order of emergence among the various symbol systems seems unlikely, and the achievement of mastery of individual symbol systems most certainly differs widely across children, as suggested in Figures 1 and 2a,b. We find some youngsters to be inveterate verbalizers: their use of language is extremely advanced; and they tend to respond verbally at every opportunity, even when only a non-linguistic response is appropriate. Others among their peers are wedded with equal strength to visual-pictorial and spatial-gestural means of expression; such visualizers or non-verbalizers explore with enthusiasm the visual and design features of a medium, resist formulation in language, experiment continually with visually-regulated schemes. Not surprisingly, relative to linguistic accomplishment this latter group is much more advanced in its two- and three-dimensional visual depiction.

Whether, despite these obvious differences in skill and "richness" of symbol use, a regular order of emergence may obtain among symbol systems remains an open question. Our general impression is that the child advances first with those symbol systems which highlight motor patterns such as symbolic play, and whose early stages incorporate normal bodily actions (such as waving one's arms back and forth in the case of drawing). In general, progress in use of a symbol system occurs rapidly, especially in the case of language. Yet, certain symbol systems, for example those used in music, seem to differ dramatically across youngsters in both the time of their original emergence and the rate at which they unfold. We feel, overall, that the order of emergence across symbol systems, while reflecting some regularity, has not been fixed by some inviolate rule.

(C) Universality of Stages

A converging body of clinical and experimental evidence challenges the assumption that a symbol system is always learned in the same way, irrespective of the age or prior experience, or cultural context of the subject. It may well be the case, on logical or psychological grounds, that certain
steps in symbolic mastery must occur in a certain order. And yet, evidence on learning by older normal individuals and by brain-damaged adults suggests different approaches in learning a symbol system reflecting the individual's facility with diverse modes of cognition. As a consequence of these diverse approaches, the texture of mastery of a symbol system differs among such subjects. We find, for instance, that in learning new gestures, dance steps, or musical passages, adults often "lean upon" linguistic or other symbol systems which have already crystallized. Such encoding may shorten and sharpen the task; but if the coding should highlight irrelevant or incidental properties of the new system, while obscuring its more salient or defining characteristics, these bootstraps may ultimately strangle the learner.

(D) Individual Differences and Creativity

Our studies have documented the enormous individual differences among symbol users as young as two and three years of age. In addition to the intriguing dichotomy between verbalizers and visualizers, other differentiae have emerged. Youngsters can be classified as relatively person-centered or relatively object-centered; as adopting a planning or a playful approach to tasks; as advancing from one to another symbolic stage at a steady and regular rate or as progressing more quickly, more slowly, or at a more irregular pace. Some children tend to feature trademarks, fixed schemes, or themes in their works, while the work of others is relatively bereft of such characteristic features. There are, finally, "self-starters" who tend to commence symbolizing without prompting and are motivated to continue on their own. There are also subjects who, while pained when confronted by an unstructured task, may well succeed more efficiently and with greater success when asked to finish up or to copy another's product. We speculate that such "self-starters" have a greater potential to become practicing artists; their "completing" counterparts may be better suited for editorial, performing, critical, or audience-member roles.

Examined separately, these dichotomies (and others like them) may appear interesting but not especially revealing. Combined, however, these resulting clusters yield new insights about the nature of individual accomplishment in the symbolic realm. No two individuals achieve identical scores on this raft of dimensions: and each score which departs from the mean contributes to a final product which may possess remarkable distinctiveness and value.

In this summation of individualizing factors may lie a clue to the cognitive and affective components of symbolic activity. Nearly any work can be considered on a purely structural or formal level: the number of elements in the work; the extent and appropriateness of their organization; the manner in which they are mapped onto a field of reference. This approach taps what is often termed the cognitive level of the product, or the producer. Of equivalent import are the idiosyncratic features, the particular stylization and style of the work, the special emphases, details, and expressiveness, which command attention. These identifying marks stem less from any single dimension cited above than from a combination or interaction among them. Distinct or even unique symbolic creations may be viewed as the products of individuals, such individuals presenting profiles which differ on the dimensions listed above. Those works
which become especially treasured may be those which, however conceived, nonetheless can speak to individuals whose own profiles of psychological dimensions differ significantly.

All this is somewhat apart from the question of intentional efforts to achieve originality or arrive at one's own style. At that stage of life where our attention is focused, differences emerge from the child's non-conscious use of the symbolic media.

(E) Methodological Issues

Examined in isolation, a legitimate symbolic product may not readily reveal its distinctiveness from blind imitation or from an unmediated communicative effort. However, by judicious use of contextual information and by clever use of experimental techniques, the analyst may achieve a reliable degree of confidence about the extent and level of symbolic achievement.

Consider, for instance, a circle with two lines dangling underneath it, produced by a three-year-old subject. Should this be considered the depiction of a human being or simply a geometric form with two straggling lines happening to fall underneath? On its own one might hesitate to consider this scribble as a symbolic representation. If, however, one encounters a variety of other drawings produced at the same time; one overhears the child's comments while making the drawing, or in response to questioning; or examines the order in which the parts were made and the degree of determination which characterizes the whole effort; or notes in the vicinity some forms to be traced—then a more judicious decision about the status of the product becomes possible.

Experimental interventions can also provide helpful information. For instance, consider an assessment of the level of symbolic play. Should the child simply mime a model's behavior, conclusions about symbolic competence are risky. If, however, the child treats the model's behaviors as a point of departure for his or her own appropriate elaboration, then an inference of some symbolic sophistication can justifiably be drawn. Inclusion by the child of other individuals in the realm of the symbolic play, as well as involvement of objects which can potentially assume symbolic significance, may also testify to symbolic competence.

Examination of a subject's strategies can provide a fresh perspective on assessing symbolic competence. Some subjects are especially likely to attain a higher level of symbolization at times when they return to familiar themes, or territories—be these physical or psychological. Such "known locales" appear to stimulate a flight of inventiveness. Other subjects amplify their symbolic products by "verbal romancing"; this elaboration of a product through storytelling signals an incipient awareness that a product is not successfully communicating within its own symbolic language.

Certain strategies or practices seem to be nigh unto universal among children: among these are the principles according to which early stories are constructed; the ways in which clay is initially molded; the "faces" of first drawings. When these emerge in their usual order, one may infer that symbolization is following its normal course. When, however, a product appears at a time, or in a context, where it is not ordinarily expected, this serves as a signal that a fresh form of symbolization (or perhaps a variety of non-symbolization) may have emerged. Our studies suggest that within each medium, a child typically passes through a number of stages. Originally, he simply manipulates the potentially symbolic material; next, he makes an organized but non-referential product of some sort; finally, he matches the symbolic product to elements, referents, or emotions in the world, thereby achieving genuine symbolization. So long as this particular course is being followed, conclusions can be drawn with some confidence. If, however, a child who has not yet manipulated materials seems to be effecting a match to the world, the analyst is well advised to exercise caution before inferring symbolization.

(F) Factors Yielding Symbolic Mastery

The relation among the various factors which contribute to symbolization is extremely complex and until now only modest progress has been made in unravelling them. Our tentative conclusions will be best stated later on, in conjunction with findings about symbol use among the brain-injured. It does seem approbate to note, however, that some aspects of symbol use proceed with a speed, accuracy, and comprehensiveness, that is staggering to behold. After witnessing one child after another acquiring a series of grammatical morphemes in the same order, or passing through highly akin stages of musical or pictorial development, or exploring with great intensity and depth the realms of drawing or storytelling, one may well conclude that the human brain is predisposed to proceed in this way; and that "language," "music," or "visual-picturing" devices may be "set" or "predisposed" to go off on their own, with but scant attention to various "real-world" factors. Perhaps various coding capacities possessed by the young child help him to impose structure and coherence upon his early symbol use, particularly its syntactic facets; perhaps, indeed, biological constraints render certain syntactic and semantic relations highly probable, others highly unlikely.

SYMBOL USE IN BRAIN-DAMAGED PATIENTS

There are many etiologies of brain damage, and many forms of injury even within the same disease process. As the brain is highly differentiated and patterns of injury are varied, efforts to generalize across brain damage and brain-damaged patients should be regarded with suspicion. Moreover, each individual's developmental history is unique; and so the same objective brain damage may evoke varying results across patients. All the same, consistent and revealing regularities between types of brain damage and resulting behavioral sequelae have been verified in the century or so of neuropsychological research (see Gardner 1975).

In right-handed individuals, the use of language and language-like symbol systems is the particular province of the left hemisphere, whereas pictorial and visual-spatial forms of knowledge have a relative (though not an equally pronounced) proclivity for the right hemisphere (again in right-handed persons). This fact in itself undercuts the assumption that all symbol use is of a piece in the brain-injured person, and, by extension in the normal person. Yet surprisingly little has been established about the fate of
non-linguistic symbol systems in the brain-damaged individual.

It is known that individuals can sustain a severe aphasia and still paint competently; that individuals with left-hemisphere disease are able to "read" pictorial presentations; and that different facets of musical capacity are implicated by each hemisphere. For instance, perception of timbre and tone seems to be associated chiefly with the right hemisphere, sensitivity to rhythm is more prone to be lateralized to the left hemisphere. Individuals who become aphasic lose the ability to communicate with related language-like systems, such as gesture, sign language, or morse code; and, given sizable brain damage in either hemisphere, the patient tends to become "concrete" in his behavior and understanding; grasp of abstract concepts proves difficult, independent of whether these seem to be mediated verbally.

At the Aphasia Research Center at the Boston Veteran's Administration Hospital, we wondered whether individuals who were severely aphasic—such that they could neither understand nor produce comprehensible language—might nonetheless be able to acquire a language-like symbol system with which they could then communicate effectively. These were patients devoid of demonstrable symbolic capacity; ones who could communicate in only the most primitive ways—by screaming, pointing, or, perhaps, pulling. Conspicuously lacking were customary substitutes for language, such as the ability to visually depict a desired element, or to express meaning through gesture. By and large, these patients showed depressingly little inclination to communicate, although, of course, one could never prove that they were devoid of all semiotic functions.

As a way of confronting this question, we devised a new visual symbol system called VIC (for Visual Communication). In this "language," messages written on cards were laid down from left to right, each card standing for the equivalent of an English word, particle, concept, or sentence mode. Sample VIC symbols are depicted in Figure 3; specimen message types are cited in Table 1. As an introduction to VIC, patients observed accomplished VIC users employing this system; then the patients were gradually drawn into the VIC conversation. Our goal for the first phase of the project was to enable patients to master three basic aspects of communication: (1) carrying out commands issued to them (e.g., pick up the glass of water); (2) describing actions executed by another (John is shaking the fork); (3) answering questions (Who picked up the spoon?). Of the initial patients enrolled in this research-therapy program, several had to be dropped because they could not learn to associate a card to an object, and others had to be terminated because of medical complications. Of the remaining eight, all mastered some aspects of the language, five eventually passed through the "bare bones" described above, and two have achieved a somewhat greater command of VIC. The latter patients were able to express sample requests (I want a cookie), describe their feelings (I feel sad), and use the VIC cards spontaneously and productively.

For all its imperfections, our method of exposing severely aphasic patients to VIC does provide an opportunity to study how an adult deprived of conventional symbol systems acquires a new one; to determine the degree to which he understands the nature of the system; and to contrast the behaviors and capacities of brain damaged adults with a group of normal, non-symbol using infants. We will now review the results of our project (cf. Baker et al. 1975; see also Gardner et al. 1976), drawing as well on other empirical studies, as they pertain to the principal issues raised above.

(A) and (B) Simultaneity and Order of Emergence

In the case of focal or limited lesions, symbolic capacities can break down in a variety of ways. It is worth noting, however, that in the wake of more generalized brain disease such as certain forms of dementia, a somewhat more regular order of breakdown may occur among symbol systems. For instance, the ability to draw with some accuracy is relatively fragile, whereas ordinary language functions usually prove more robust. In a limited way, then, at least a modest regularity of breakdown among symbolic capacities may occur, one which may signal the relative complexities of these systems. However, contrary to the passionate claims of some, it is erroneous to speak of a general decline of symbolic capacity, at least in cases of focal brain damage. The ability to master VIC displayed by certain severely aphasic patients is in itself decisive confirmation of this fact.

(C) Universality of Stages

Our research, and other studies as well, suggest that the older an individual becomes, the more difficult for him to
acquire a symbol system. An aphasic patient still in his twenties can expect to re-acquire natural language quite well and may with relative ease acquire a new symbol system: aphasics with comparable pathology at age 60 encounter far graver problems in recovery and in new learning. Whether differences in flexibility are qualitative or quantitative is difficult to determine; but, in my view, there may well be a qualitative shift occurring between the middle years of childhood (during which an individual can lose an entire hemisphere and yet master symbol systems) and middle adulthood (where even a limited amount of damage in the dominant hemisphere suffices to produce a permanent aphasia). These different recovery trends probably reflect basic reorganizations in the brain, ones correlated in some manner with the advent of adolescence; conceivably, however, the very mastery and consequent overlearning of a symbol system during early adulthood may complicate the learning of new symbol systems later on. Evidence bolstering this assumption comes from the tendency of older individuals to suffer relatively greater impairments following focal lesions and relatively milder impairments following "patchy" lesions; and also from the fact that certain varieties of aphasia, which feature fluent speech and an effortless parroting of over-learned phrases, are encountered only among post-puberty patients.

One other factor is worth noting. Focal brain damage is most unlikely to impair the individual's ability to make his way about the world. Those individuals who learn VIC seem to be those able to draw on their experiences gained over a lifetime; those who have marked difficulties tend either to remain wholly within the system (learning a pointless game), or wholly within the "world-space" (ignoring the new symbol system), without effecting the translation between the two. Whether or not they can utilize knowledge for symbolic purposes, both these groups differ from the young child. The latter subject has many fewer experiences on which to draw; and even these are less well-established and reliable. Moreover, the young child has but a simple model of communication on which to draw; the brain-injured patient has, in the past, been involved in a variety of communication systems which, even if remembered only partially, should nonetheless retain some salience.

(D) Individual Differences and Creativity

The distinctive life histories of each individual, coupled with the limitless variety of possible brain lesions, insure that the pattern of symbolic competences and deficiencies is never identical across patients. Contributing yet further to differences among patients are two factors bearing relatively less weight among children: (1) the attainment by some adults of certain specialized, highly developed skills, which may buttress the individual against certain forms of brain damage (for instance, an individual skilled in "speed" or "sight" reading is less likely to be impaired by aphasia than one who relied primarily on auditory input and oral rehearsal in decoding graphical materials); (2) strong personality or motivational factors. Given two patients of equivalent background and lesions, one a highly motivated person, the other relatively passive and unmotivated, the former is likely to fare better in rehabilitative efforts. These factors combine to ensure a gallery of differences among the victims of brain disease.

While differences among individuals are certainly preserved in brain damage, the possibility for creations of some distinctiveness and interest is definitely minimized. This situation suggests that differences in brain injury do not in themselves suffice to produce interesting differences in symbolic creation: such highly personal and significant products are far more likely to emerge when a healthy brain is working to its full capacity. The diseased brain has as its primary task coping with the daily presses of life; possibilities for involvement in symbolic inventiveness or novelty are greatly reduced. Indeed, a major problem in implementing VIC is the relatively reduced level of interest and motivation encountered among brain damaged patients. Success in VIC is most likely within that cadre of patients who remain "bright-eyed" (see Velletri-Glass, Gazzaniga, and Premack 1973), and who engage in games, humorous exchanges, eye-to-eye contact, and other signs of a continuing communicative engagement—though not lingering symbolic competence—with the events and persons of their environment.

(E) Methodological Questions

For the reasons already suggested, determining the extent
of the patient's symbolic and/or communicative involvement in VIC is a tortuous matter. With the young child, motivation and capacity to communicate seems relatively straightforward, but mastery of the symbol system is in dispute. For their part brain-damaged patients seem able to enter into the "rules" of the exchange with relatively little difficulty: in many situations they behave in ways highly appropriate to the situation. And yet, occasional complete lapses and total misunderstandings, coupled with a reluctance or refusal to employ the symbol system outside the usual training room, calls into fundamental question the extent to which this culturally-defined system is in fact functioning as a communication mode.

For experimenters, normal controls, and other "observers," VIC's potential functioning as a substitute communication system had been self-evident. And yet our research team was soon confronted with a conundrum: How do you convey to an individual that certain elements are designed as symbols in a communication system, if no alternative way remains of communicating anything to him? The difficulty of saying, in effect, "Look, here, VIC is a language," provides the best evidence that the brain-damaged patient resembles the asymbolic child. After all, the average adult could simply be told, in one or another way, that objects, whether or not the cards even match the objects; card in an utterance to a card in their response; erroneously forward, but mastery of the symbol system is in dispute. For culturally-defined system is in fact functioning as a communication mode.

The strategies of the aphasics patients are revealing. They feature the partial, and often inappropriate importation to the VIC sessions of a raft of earlier schemes. At times VIC patients place cards in their mouths; put them on top of objects, whether or not the cards even match the objects; tend to manipulate objects idly when they have no grasp of the utterance; confuse the cards with the object; match the card in an utterance to a card in their response; erroneously assume that all utterances fall into a certain syntactic frame (Agent-Verb-Object); search for non-VIC cues to guide their symbol use; and so on. Revealingly, several patients have evinced a particular fascination with one of the VIC objects, an empty glass; in a manner reminiscent of the toddler's "fixed idea" or "familiar territory," these aphasics return almost involuntarily to the glass irrespective of its appropriateness to the VIC scenario. They will confuse objects with glasses, stick objects into glasses, lift glasses along with each requested object, shift the glass from hand to hand, and so on. Whether reflecting a desire to "do something," or a primitive "modal" (Gardner 1973, Ch. 3) attraction to the tangible, inviting vessel-And-hole, this inappropriate perseveration signals that a patient has, at best, a very partial grasp of the rules of the symbol system.

What evidence, then, can indicate that the communicative potential of VIC has been grasped? Spontaneous yet appropriate use of the symbol system is the most reliable indicator. And yet, just because spontaneous utterances can occur only in the absence of an experimental cue, these are unlikely to emerge. This result stands, of course, in striking contrast to that obtained with most children, for whom spontaneous use of the symbolic medium is an early and constant companion. In lieu of spontaneous use of VIC, less direct measures of competence are necessary. Relevant data can be gained by altering the customary form of an utterance (e.g., asking the patient to inject the pencil into the fork, rather than into the glass); removing a command or question so the subject cannot simply copy it; inverting the customary order of words in a question while still retaining the question mark; making a foolish error and evaluating the patient's reaction; introducing a new participant into the conversation and noting whether the patient can readily "converse with" and include in his descriptions this additional figure. To the extent that these "tests" are "passed" by the patient, incipient symbolic awareness may be assumed; to the extent that they engender difficulties, or evoke irrelevant responses, VIC seems to be functioning as a ritual or game, rather than a viable communicational system.

Some of the strategies used, errors made, and stages traversed, en route to VIC mastery, have been isolated. These trends supply additional evidence for evaluating the patient's mastery of the system. Should his behavior prove consistent with earlier patients, one can assume that he has attained the level of mastery of early VIC communicators. If, on the other hand, he violates the typical error, strategy, or stage patterns, one is put on notice that something irregular (or precocious) may be at work. As Figures 4 and 5 show, the errors made in the course of VIC reception and production are quite similar across patients, despite their sometimes dramatic differences in overall performance level, speed of progress, and nature of brain injury. At least among adult aphasics, the factors surrounding the mastery of a new symbol system seem to be operating in a similar manner.

(F) Factors Yielding Symbolic Mastery

The various factors affecting early symbol use in children are also manifest in brain-damaged patients, but the relative contributions of each may differ. For instance, while motor difficulties pose minimal obstacles to children, they present persistent difficulties for brain-damaged patients, most of whom are paralyzed. Surprisingly, however, the paralysis per se does not produce the difficulty; rather, the culprit is apraxia, (see Geschwind 1967), a difficulty in voluntary control of movements which leads to a performance other than that which the patient intends. Lamentably, these praxic difficulties are not readily corrected, and so the patient may find himself repeatedly intending to do (or say) something, while something quite apart results. The greatest tact and patience may be needed to overcome these praxic difficulties and to ascertain the actual level of the patient's sophistication.

Motivation is another pivotal factor in symbolic mastery. In general, most normal youngsters are sufficiently motivated; however, brain-damaged patients, either because of age, personality change, or sheer effects of cortical injury, very often appear to lack the will or desire to enter into and master a new activity or system. Insufficient motivation, like apraxia, can of itself be so overwhelming that failure to symbolize results. Here, then, are areas where the child is better served than the brain-damaged patients.

On the other hand, the brain-damaged patient also has some advantages. As indicated above, he has available and may draw upon a lifetime of experience. Principles, strategies, or clues learned during these years may put him in good stead as he tackles a new task. For instance, even if he can no longer symbolize, he knows, upon entering the room, that a task lies in front of him, that he is expected to behave...
RECEPTION ERRORS

Figure 4 - pattern of errors in comprehending VIC messages committed by five patients who mastered the basic components of VIC: a "proper name" error involves a confusion among individuals present in the therapy setting; an "object" error involves a confusion among physical objects; a "verb" error involves the patient's performance of an action other than the one that has been signalled; a "grammatical morpheme" error involves a confusion among prepositions or conjunctions (e.g., confusing "pencil in cup" with "pencil and cup").

ON THE ACQUISITION OF FIRST SYMBOL SYSTEMS
one site might, in theory, be able to master new symbol systems not dependent upon that area, in practice a selective sparing of symbolic fluency is exceedingly rare. Perhaps the injured brain must attend primarily to its (and the patient's) own well-being; there is a resultant turning-in toward more conservative functionings, a lessening of interest in the novel events of the external world.

Assuming that the young child can enter at all into a symbol-learning system, he is likely to acquire the system more readily than the brain-damaged patient. The brain-damaged patient stands out primarily in his potential for using general knowledge about the world and deploying certain well-established schemes. Only if the particular system in question is consonant with the adult's earlier schemes and strategies can this capacity be turned to advantage.

It should be noted that studies thus far undertaken involve only a limited amount of immersion by brain-damaged patients in the symbol system. A total immersion over many months in the use and practice of the symbol system might yield more dramatic results.

Parallels in Stages of Symbolization

Over and above the differences detailed, suggestive regularities can be found in the particular stages through which children and brain-damaged persons pass. Indeed, one can discern some dozen steps shared by child and brain-damaged symbol users.

As an example, we will consider the phases through which the child and the adult brain-damaged patient pass as they encounter visual symbols. We have deliberately chosen tasks of some distinctiveness, so that emerging parallels may prove revealing rather than trivial. In the case of the child, we will focus on his progress as he learns pictorial representation (cf. Figures 6a-e); in the case of the aphasic patient, we consider a specimen sequence in the mastery of VIC. Some of the steps attained can be expected to occur with other populations and other symbol systems, but others are clearly restricted to the examples at hand.

1. Use of Primitive Bodily Schemes. In new symbol users, potential symbols are first mapped onto the area of greatest familiarity and knowledge. And in the case where there exists no extant symbol system, the mediator for new symbols becomes the body. The brain-damaged patient will place the card in his mouth or clutch it with his hand; the young child will take the marker and place it in its mouth, even as he may eat clay.

2. Use of Old, but more Neutral and Less Oral Schemes. The brain-damaged patient is likely to clutch the VIC cards, then move them back and forth on the table. The child will move a pencil back and forth in the air, or touch it alternatively on and off the paper.

3. Detection of Potentially Symbolic Elements. The VIC patient notices lines and ideographs on the cards and begins to realize that they bear significance in the use of VIC. The child commences attending to the strokes made by the marker, begins to make characteristic shapes, and becomes disturbed if the marks fail to appear when he wields the pen.

4. Referential Relations Appreciated: The Birth of Symbolization. The VIC patient is able to match an ideographic representation with an object in the world (often this step is accomplished immediately, in which case earlier experience has short-circuited the first few stages). The child can now regularly produce certain forms, such as a circle or square; more crucially, he becomes able to relate these forms to objects in the world. Eventually, his own marks—such as the “tadpole” in Figure 6c—also come to stand for persons, animals, natural and man-made objects.
Naturally, these realizations represent crucial stages in the evolution of symbolization. Before, there was neither symbolic reference nor the possibility for symbolic communication. Now, the whole world of reference becomes accessible to the symbol user. Yet at this point, in the absence of an ancillary symbol system, it is often difficult to assess whether the symbol user is conscious of the relations between symbol and signified, whether he appreciates the distance and distinction between them. A challenge for succeeding periods is the emergence of increasing distance of the vehicle or symbol from the element or object which it signifies. To the extent that the child or patient confuses the referent and its vehicle (patting the depicted cat; talking to a drawing), the relation of symbolization has not been fully achieved. Yet, even advanced adults seem to maintain a lingering trace of the early link between symbol and object—and in the arts, this surviving primitive tinge may offer exciting allusive possibilities (see Gardner 1970).

(5) More Elaborate Referential Relationships. Now an array of symbols comes to stand for an array of objects in the world. The VIC patient can himself combine or can appreciate the concatenation of a series of nouns; the child can also handle references to more than one element.

(6) Appreciation of Syntactic Relations. No longer restricted just to object names, the patient can appreciate utterances in which an actor acts out an action, or an object receives an action. He has proceeded from mere naming to the propounding of propositions. The young child can now map a series of objects arranged in a configuration onto some sort of visually depicted situation—the picture can “tell a story.”

(7) Incipient Sense of Composition. The brain-damaged patient has now attained familiarity with a set of sentence frames by which utterances can be constructed; that is, he possesses the mold for basic linguistic structures (e.g., actor-action-object) into which appropriate aliments can be supplied. The child no longer draws on elements in a haphazard fashion; rather, as can be seen in Figure 6d, he so arranges them that their relationship with one another becomes comprehensible to others.

(8) Use of the Medium with Reference to the Other Individuals. Until referential aspects of the symbol system have been mastered, the symbol system is used by the individual in a relatively self-centered manner. Once some distance has been achieved, however, the individual increasingly takes into account the state of knowledge of other individuals; he begins using the symbol system in such a way that their knowledge can be increased. Egocentrism declines; communicative use of the symbol system has been enhanced.

(9) Generative Use of the Medium. A gradual explosion occurs in the number of elements and relations which can be encoded within the symbol system. No longer restricted to a few spare substantives and actions, the individual becomes able to express a whole variety of propositions. The VIC communicator assimilates new nouns, and begins to utilize those morphemes which modulate meaning. As is evident in Max’s “busy” drawing (Figure 1), the drawing child now possesses “basic schemes” which can be combined to represent new elements and new relationships; both his drawings and his perception of displays may achieve an increasingly narrative tone.

(10) Interest in the Properties of the Medium. With greater mastery comes increased understanding of and distance from the medium. Once it was used in a reactive and unconscious fashion; now the individual becomes aware of the elements—what they can and cannot express—and assumes a more active role in experimenting with media possibilities. The VIC communicator tries to express new ideas and relations, including ones never before modeled in VIC. Experimentation occurs with word play, word meaning, word order. By the same token, the child begins to explore the design properties of the medium: what can and cannot be accomplished in drawing. He is no longer limited by the uses he has seen or by his knowledge of the world; the limitations of the medium itself constrain his performance.

(11) Achieving Effects, Stylization. The individual now uses the symbol system in a way which reflects his own ideas, preferences, and feelings. Previously he tended to resemble other individuals; he was passing through a universal set of stages, a progression reflecting the demands of the medium, the physical limitations of his body, the cognitive predilections of his nervous system. Now he begins to place his own mark on the medium, not only in the subjects treated but also in the manner in which he treats them (cf. Figure 6e). He experiments with those effects which prove especially meaningful to him. The VIC patient too evolves his own method of aligning the cards and his own characteristic style of “speaking.”

(12) Use of a Medium to Express One’s Feelings and Ideas to Others. While stylization may seem a self-centered activity, use of the medium to express to others one’s favored ideas and feelings is a more public matter. These need to be conveyed in such a way that the distinctive elements, as well as the more common properties of the language, can be grasped by an audience. In the case of VIC the patient now achieves precision in the use of cards for communication of his own wants and feelings; in the case of the painting child, the capturing of emotions, feelings, and concepts now becomes possible in the language of pictorial depiction. Such effective communication of one’s own thoughts can never be autistic of course; the communication must remain ever sensitive to the rules of the symbol system, the conventions of the culture, the context of the utterance, the knowledge possessed by the audience. Like the effective artist he must wed his personal vision to a publicity-interpretable symbolic vehicle.

I must stress that the foregoing has been, in at least two ways, an idealized list. First and most important, only the opening stages, perhaps through the eighth, have proved accessible to the VIC communicators and drawing children in our studies. At most, slight glimmerings of the later stages can be discerned in the symbol use of the most precocious communicators. The list therefore includes what is likely to happen in future symbol use, in addition to what has already
been observed with our subjects. (And, given our small population, these speculations must rightly be viewed with suspicion; perhaps, for instance, the later stages of the series may prove impossible for most severely aphasic adults to achieve.) Second, to the extent that it possesses validity, the scheme of symbolization outlined pertains especially to two symbol systems in two populations that have rarely been contrasted: VIC with brain-damaged patients, drawing with normal children. In all probability, a different sequence would characterize other populations and alternative symbol systems.

Nonetheless, the clear parallels found in the use of symbol systems among decidedly diverse populations are encouraging. Either in the nature of early symbolization, or in the nature of novice symbolizer, a certain logical progression obtains: from manipulating, to making, to matching, to medium sensitivity, and, ultimately, to mastery. Perhaps, with certain subjects or certain symbol systems, some of these stages can be eliminated or collapsed; however, it seems unlikely that the overall order would be fundamentally different. And if mastery of any new material were regarded as, in a certain sense, a task in constructing a new symbol system, this check list might suggest the optimal (or necessary) course through which any learner must pass.

Depending on the task administered, different aspects of this progression, and distinctive profiles of achievement, will be attained. For example, the patient's competence and apparent symbolic mastery of VIC will appear greater if he is simply executing a command than if he has to describe an action or answer a question. By the same token, the varying tasks and media used in our developmental studies also highlight different capacities. "Spontaneous" tasks, for instance, induce anxiety in some subjects but superior performances among "self-starters." Copying and assembling tasks elicit a relatively higher level of symbolic mastery. Certain media also tend to evoke a characteristic symbolic performance. A child working with clay is likely from the start to produce little "balls" and "snakes"; the toddler at the easel is likely to persist longer in "pure marking" or "pure makings," before moving on to depictions of the world.

Different tasks also can highlight the extent to which a particular subject favors one over another symbolic medium. In tasks of symbolic play, those children with a verbalizing disposition are likely to accentuate the "story" part of the drama; those with a visualizing flair are correspondingly likely to enact gestures with the figures, while restricting their verbal output. In one sense, these considerations only underline the obvious lesson that the analyst's assessment of symbolic competence is a function of the kind of tasks imposed on the subject. However, the deeper point is that one's assessment of symbolization is likely to attain accuracy only to the extent that diverse tasks are sampled under disparate contexts.

**OUR ISSUES REVISITED**

We have searched for insights about symbolic competence by focusing on the asymbolic individual bent upon mastering a symbol system. We have designated two populations which lend themselves to study; we have discerned instructive parallels and differences among them.

We also sought evidence which might modulate among various tensions in the literature on symbolization. And we have confirmed the important role played by cultural setting in symbolic mastery, while indicating as well the effect of age of the individual and the condition of his brain. We have encountered parallels in macrogenetic processes, such as those governing the stages of a child's drawing, and macrogenetic processes, such as those involved in acquiring a new symbol system over a few weeks in adulthood. We have witnessed a logic in the unfolding of symbol systems, while considering as well the influence of biological factors. And while confirming the human proclivity to engage in symbolic activity, we have challenged the notion that any normal human can master any symbol system with equal ease or proficieny, let alone that individual beset by brain disease. Finally, we have discerned both the continuities in acquisition of symbolization, as the individual passes gradually through a dozen stages of mastery, as well as the leap-like steps entailed in the first referential use of the symbol, the awareness that the symbol system has communicative as well as game-like properties, and the ultimate ability to attain distance from a symbolic medium and to deploy it as a means of expressing one's most treasured feelings and thoughts.

What, then, of the principal issues toward which our discussion has been directed? Let us, one by one, revisit each.

(A) The Question of Simultaneity

There seems to be scant justification for the assumption of a single symbolic capacity which, having emerged, extends equally and readily to all manner of symbol systems. Some individuals will acquire one symbol system with great ease, while experiencing extraordinary difficulties with a second; precisely the opposite picture obtains with other persons. The most that can be said is that certain cognitive prerequisites underlie any kind of symbol use; only in this sense is talk of a central symbolic capacity justified. The literature on brain damage supports this finding, for a substantial percentage of brain-damaged patients have one symbolic system vitiated while others remain substantially intact (Gardner, Howard, and Perkins 1974).

(B) Order of Emergence

On the question of whether symbol systems are mastered in a fixed order, the evidence remains less conclusive. Still, it is our impression that there exists, at best, only a rough metric; those symbol systems which require little "real-world" knowledge and rely heavily upon bodily schemes, emerge relatively early; those which rely upon considerable knowledge and high-level cognitive operations, and which require the use of tools and mediating objects removed from the individual are somewhat more tardy. The strong differences between left- and right-hemisphere patients, and between child verbalizers and visualizers, suggest that differential neural organization may account for possible differences in the order in which symbol systems emerge, and the richness with which each is realized within a given individual.
(C) Universal Stages

There may be certain steps through which everyone utilizing a symbol system must pass. However, it makes a critical difference whether a symbolizer, or an individual devoid of symbolic experience, is learning the symbol system. One’s previous history in the world, the schemes at one’s disposal, the strategies employed also are relevant. Finally, the age of the individual and the health of his brain affect the manner in which and the ultimate extent to which symbolic mastery is attained.

(D) Individual Differences and Creativity

Creations of great individuality and power are more likely among children than among brain-damaged adults. In addition to the factors already cited, this difference in creativity seems to reflect levels of motivation and the extent to which old habits are firmly entrenched. In order to achieve individuality, one must have some mastery of a symbol system but also some new meanings to express. The freshness with which one conceives the ultimate difference whether a symbolizer, or an individual is capable of expressing new meanings to those who are using it largely in an imitative, ritualistic, or game-like manner. However, attaining distance from one’s symbolic activity is a gradual and lengthy process, and so it is unlikely that a specific point in time can be isolated at which “symbolic understanding” first occurs.

(E) Methodological Issues

In the absence of the subjects’ own testimony, no foolproof method exists for determining the extent to which symbolization has been mastered, or the degree to which the communicative and symbolic aspects of a medium are appreciated by its users. And in the absence of an alternative symbol system for communication, the only possibilities for inference open to the scientific observer are incisive observation and imaginative devising of tasks. A judicious combination of these methods should factor out those persons sensitive to the symbolic power of the system from those who are using it largely in an imitative, ritualistic, or game-like manner. However, attaining distance from one’s symbolic activity is a gradual and lengthy process, and so it is unlikely that a specific point in time can be isolated at which “symbolic understanding” first occurs.

(F) Factors Yielding Symbolic Mastery

We have suggested throughout that symbolization requires a raft of factors, which in various ways interact with one another. We are not yet prepared to issue a formula for this mastery, although Table 2 indicates our preliminary guesses as to the relative importance across specimen symbol systems of such factors as motor mastery, syntactic understanding, semantic understanding, meaningfulness of single elements, extensive “real world” experience, specific brain regions. This list represents a kind of initial assessment of the respective challenges which assorted symbol systems might pose for various populations. And, in addition to the factors cited in the table, there is a further trade-off in our particular populations between rich experience in the world, and well-established habits, on the one hand, as against potential for discerning syntactic patterns, high personal motivation, and freshness of outlook on the other.

In pondering the differences between the normal child

| TABLE 2 |
| FACTORS INFLUENCING THE MASTERY OF SYMBOL SYSTEMS |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Music</th>
<th>Language/Literature</th>
<th>2-Dimensional Depiction (e.g., drawing)</th>
<th>3-Dimensional Depiction (e.g., clay)</th>
<th>Gestural and Bodily Representation</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motor mastery, limb control</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syntactic factors (organization of units over time)</td>
<td>+</td>
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Key: - = not important  + = important  ++ = very important
and the brain-damaged adult, one encounters clues regarding the optimal mastery by the individual of any new area of knowledge, whether or not such knowledge is purely symbolic in nature. While both experience and freshness, motivation and knowledge are to be desired, what is clearly optimal is a workable ratio between the two. Without experience, freshness is likely to lead to vapidity or incomprehensibility; without freshness, experience is likely to lead to repetition, stereotypes, and rutted behavior. It is not enough to know how to use a symbol system; one must want to be able to communicate with it and one must have something worth communicating. Finally, one needs the capacity to look critically at the created product and determine whether, indeed, its intent has been effectively framed within symbolic conventions so that the other individual can attain it. If one could wed the freshness, computational power, and the desire for rich exploration of the child, with the strategies and experience of the older person, and if these could be housed inside the skin of a motivated individual with ideas to express, and with a healthy brain in which to express them, one would construct the ideal communicator, be he or she an artist, scientist, politician, or saint. Perhaps by “framing” this individual on either side, the child and the aphasic patient make their special contributions to the elucidation of communicative efforts of all varieties.

NOTES

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Musical symbols, which are apparently non-referential, appear to pose problems for this formulation. If, however, music is considered in its broader symbolic aspects, the general point of view is supported. For music is as capable of expressing meanings (e.g., the aspects of the world captured in program music, or the expression of emotional forms), and of referring to aspects of itself, as other, more obviously representational systems (cf. Howard 1973a, 1973b).

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A GUNMAN IN TOWN!
CHILDREN INTERPRET A COMIC BOOK

MICHAEL J. PALLENIK

In 1974 Worth and Gross proposed a hierarchic and developmental model of interpretive strategies in communication situations or events. This paper describes some investigations of children's understanding of certain visual events—comic books. Ten children in each of three grades (third, fifth, eighth) were interviewed individually about a "story" from a "Western" comic book currently on the market (see accompanying illustrations). They were shown the pictures frame by frame. After each frame three basic questions were asked: (1) What is happening? (2) How can you tell what is happening? and (3) What will happen?

Worth and Gross (1974) divide the class of sign-events (i.e., those events to which we assign meaning at a given moment in time, tacitly or otherwise) into three types: natural, symbolic, and ambiguous. Knowledge of social context determines in what class a sign-event will be understood; no particular, physical sign-event is, by necessity, of one or another type.

Natural sign-events depend upon our knowledge of physical laws (e.g., clouds often cause rain) or cultural rules.

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of social stereotypy (e.g., Rolls-Royce equals wealth) for their meaning. The meaning of symbolic events depends upon our knowledge that they are produced purposely in order to convey meaning. Meaning is implied by an articulator, and inferred by an interpreter. Whereas natural sign-events can depend upon our knowledge of social or personal stereotypes, symbolic events depend upon our knowledge of shared conventions. Symbolic meaning is always social. Sign events are ambiguous when we do not know whether they are natural or symbolic. We must then assess their status and determine how we will treat them. Of particular interest in dealing with how children interpret comic books is the fact that some symbolic events lend themselves to being treated as though they were happening naturally.

The conventional story type of which the comic book used here is an example, has three major aspects: elements, contiguity, and structure. A "story" is made up in part of recognizable, meaningful elements (e.g., good guys, bad guys, guns, stagecoaches, etc.). The meaning inferred from these elements in a story is determined conventionally. However, insofar as the elements used in a story are also meaningful if encountered in social reality, their interpreted meaning may be either conventional or natural. Conventional-symbolic meaning and social-natural meaning can overlap.

The elements of a story are ordered by contiguity and structure: some elements occur together; others follow or precede one another. Elements are meaningful because they are ordered in a particular way. Interpreting a story entails not only assessing the meaning of particular elements ("He is a bad guy because he looks mean and is shooting all around"), but also putting elements together in space ("The doll is in the store that the gunman is in") and in time ("... and the townspeople were afraid and no one would face him, and then he went into a bar...") to form a narrative.

Structural relationships exist between noncontiguous elements. Moreover, a pattern or sequence of elements can be related to other patterns or sequences which come earlier or later in the story. Structure is, if you will, the architectural blueprint for the story. It allows for the story's completion by building relationships between the beginning and ending, among variations on a theme, and so on. Thus, if a gunman, as at the beginning of the comic book, is about to wreck a store which sells dolls, and later a good-looking man drives into town to buy his daughter a doll, the two events are structurally important because they are necessary for the story to end.

Research based upon the above theoretical constructs (Worth and Gross 1974) and using various media has focused on four basic questions: (1) How is the choice of interpretive strategies affected by the natural or symbolic status of the event that is to be interpreted? (Messaris 1972, film; Pallenik 1973, videotape); (2) How does training in a symbolic mode affect the choice of interpretive strategies? (Wick 1973, writing; Messaris 1975, film); (3) How are interpretive strategies altered by the external context or form of a symbolic event in a single medium? (Kenworthy 1973, writing, e.g., the same piece of writing as a letter, a book review, part of a novel); and (4) How do the various strategies for recognizing and interpreting elements, contiguity, and structure change with age? (Harlan 1972, slides; Murphy 1973, slides and stills).

These studies have indicated that: (1) the interpretation of natural and symbolic events proceed along different lines—the former generally involving an assumption of non-intentionally communicated behavior on the part of the actor, the latter, an assumption of an intention to communicate; (2) the recognition of some basic elements, contingencies, orders, and structures in a pictorial medium as a story probably appears well before the second grade; (3) from the second grade to adult, variations in interpretive strategies can, in part, be ascribed to an increasing ability to pick out or recognize complex relations among various types of elements, orderings, and structures; (4) variations in interpretive strategies may also be ascribed to the contexts in which a symbolic event is embedded; (5) one may want to talk about a qualitative difference between strategies used by untrained and trained interpreters; and (6) the model of natural-attributional versus symbolic-inferential interpretive strategies is particularly suited to the analysis of how we view
WHAT CAN WE DO? ANY OF YOU MEN WANT TO FACE HIM?

THAT'S A CRAZY QUESTION, BILL! WE AIN'T GUNFIGHTERS! WE WOULDN'T STAND A CHANCE AGAINST TRIGGER-HAPPY BRADY!

AS BRADY ENTERED THE STORE AND BAR, THE TOWNSFOLK WHO HAD BEEN HIDING THERE CAME RUNNING OUT THE BACK DOOR... ALL EXCEPT CLEM FOSS WHO OWNED THE STORE!

RUN YUH CHICKEN-HEARTED RABBITS! AIN'T NO ONE IN TOWN MAN ENOUGH TO STAND UP TO TRIGGER BRADY!

OUTSIDE, THE TOWNSFOLK TIMIDLY CROWDED AROUND THE DOORS, PEAKING THROUGH, ANGERED YET FASCINATED BY THE COMPLETE LAWLESSNESS OF THE GUNMAN!

MEANWHILE ON THE ROAD NEAR TOWN, ERIC MACKLIN, A SMALL, HARD-WORKING FARMER, WHO RAN A FEW HEAD OF STOCK, DROVE TOWARD TOWN WITH HIS WIFE AND DAUGHTER...

OH, DADDY, I CAN HARDLY WAIT! DO YOU THINK MR. FOSS MAYBE SOLD IT SINCE LAST YEAR?

I... I THOUGHT MAYBE YOU'D LIKE A LITTLE REFRESHMENT, TRIGGER! AIN'T NO USE BUSTIN' UP THE STORE!

TRYIN' TO BUY ME OFF, HUH? BUT IT AIN'T GONNA STOP ME FROM WRECKIN' THIS PLACE!

THEY SMILED BECAUSE TODAY WAS AN EVENT, LITTLE MILLIE'S FIFTH BIRTHDAY... AND THEY WERE DROVING INTO PINE HOLLOW FOR HER PRESENT!

I TOLD HIM TO HOLD IT FOR ME! KIND OF HARD FOR POOR FARMER FOLK LIKE US TO GET MONEY TO SPEND ON A DOLL! BUT YOUR MAM AND I SAVED IT FROM GRAIN MONEY, AND YOU'RE GON' TO GET THAT DOLL!
Let's see you stop me, Clohopper! Reckon I'll have to! Don't think I'm a violent man! I'm just a peaceful farmer...

And I hate to do this...

Why yuh crazy dirt-digger! I'm gonna ventilate yuh, till yuh won't hold water... But I made a promise to my little girl... to buy her that doll...

A man's always got to keep his promises no matter how hard it may be, or he ain't a man!

...An' I gotta keep that promise! Cause she's a sweet little child an' she's had her heart set on that doll for more than two years!

Macklin threw the gunman on his horse and handed him back his guns. For a second the old evil glitter came to Brady's eyes as his hands touched the walnut butts! But the gunman had met his master and lowered his head...

Don't give him his guns...

He won't use them on me! Now ride out, mister, an' don't come back! We don't want your kind here, 'cause we're peaceful folk, not fightin' men!

Please, Macklin, take the doll! I don't want...

No, sir, Mr. Foss! I don't want nothin' for nothin'! Sorry I had to act so bad in front of all you people but I just couldn't let that man spoil my little Millie's birthday!
pictorial media which can be “realistic” and therefore understood either in terms of the social world depicted, or of the people who are doing the depicting, or both.

WHY COMIC BOOKS—AND HOW

The work I am about to describe differs from previous research on several points. Viewers in previous studies were shown an entire story, film clip, piece of writing, etc., and then interviewed. In this way, questions about what an interpreter thought was happening at a particular time or what he thought would happen were either lost to the interviewer or depended upon the memory of the respondent. It was difficult to discuss how children or adults interpreted, misinterpreted, sought, lost, missed, or retrieved a story’s elements as they occurred, and the effect of these possibilities upon the overall interpretation. In an effort to approach some of these questions, I broke the story into its most apparent units (the individual comic book frame), and interviewed children after each unit was presented. In doing so, the question “what do you think is going to happen?” was added to the general interview schedule shared with other studies (“What is happening?” “How do you know?”).

I chose comic books because the stimulus had to be short enough so that a presentation and interview could be accomplished in 45 minutes to an hour. Unlike film and television, comic books are also quite portable and the presentation easily controlled. I chose Westerns because that genre is well-known to children and therefore provides a manageable stylistic frame.

I chose the children and conducted the individual interviews with a view toward the widest possible variety within a single age group. The 30 children came from the same parochial grade school; ten children from each of three grades (third, fifth, and eighth; ages 7-8, 10-11, and 12-15, respectively). The sample is about equally balanced in each grade for sex and race (Caucasian and Black). Also, I interviewed one or two Puerto Rican children in each grade. In talking to the children and their teachers, it was clear that there was a wide range of reading skills in the sample, and that the children came from various socioeconomic sectors. While some differences between the children within a single grade do appear, the sample is too small for firm analytic distinctions regarding their use of interpretive strategies. The basic approach in this study was to try to find interpretive strategies shared by the children in a single grade.

The structure of “A Gunman in Town!” is complex, using three separate but interlocking devices for presenting information. A narrator (who is not a character in the story) speaks in marked areas within frames when: necessary background information is presented (e.g., #1); there is an abrupt change of location (#9); a full pictorial presentation of behavior is uneconomical (#6, 15, 23); all the necessary information cannot be imparted by dialogue (#9, 11, 15, 23); or characters are not speaking (#7). With the exception of frame #7, each frame also contains representations of speech by characters—seen (#1) or unseen (#17). Each frame also contains figural representations and what might be called an angle of depiction (e.g., from above—#1, 23; from below—#2, 8; close-up—#10; from a distance—#9).

We would expect a child familiar with Westerns to anticipate an eventual confrontation between the gunman and some type of hero. Information appears throughout the story to foreshadow and explain the impending conflict. The bar/store which the gunman enters is named in frame #5; the doll first depicted in frame #7. In frame #9, the narrator notes that the Macklins are driving to town, and Little Millie, in the same frame, states that Foss’ bar/store is the specific destination. In frame #10, the narrator and Macklin set up the doll as a central object in the story, and Macklin’s face clearly indicates that he possesses heroic stature. The doll is reiterated in frames #12-22. It is possible for the child to be well-informed about the nature of the impending conflict by frame #10, and certain of it by frame #12—the midpoint of the story.

Time and space are telescoped to varying degrees. Recognition of relationships between elements across presentational modes is crucial for understanding the story. There are invisible but implied sequences between frames and internal sequence within frames. It is often necessary to read the words in a frame to understand the affective states of the characters (e.g., #3, 15). It is a convention in comic books to place the individual who speaks first within a frame on the left. It makes for some peculiar re-positioning between frames (e.g., #16-18), but it can be necessary in order to understand the meaning of a frame. For example, if the speeches by the storeowner and farmer in the last frame are not read with the convention in mind, it is quite easy to view the sequence as Macklin putting his money back into his wallet after the storeowner refuses to accept payment.

THE CHILDREN’S INTERPRETATIONS

When the interpretations given by the children in all three grades are looked at, it is clear that there are no large qualitative differences among them. There are no great leaps forward or backward; there are only small jumps. All of the children recognized “A Gunman in Town!” as a Western. They knew the story was made up and had no problem in saying why they thought so. From the beginning, they all knew that the story would end, and with few exceptions how it would end: the gunman would lose. None of the children attached any importance to or expressed any interest in who the producers of the story were although all of them were quite interested in discussing named comic books and television programs and the characters who populate them.

None of this is surprising. The children are dealing with a well-known comic book and cartoon genre. Still, there are differences among the children in the ways they move through and interpret the story. The differences may not be great, but they are, I think, important.

Children in the three grades differ in the proficiency with which they handle the elements of the story. The last frame of the story provides a useful overview. To understand that the farmer pays for the doll, the child must know, at least tacitly, that the key is the order of speakers. The farmer pays because he speaks last. Of the seven third graders who knew that payment for the doll was an issue in the story, only two said that the farmer paid. Fourth fifth graders and seven eighth graders said he paid.

When we ask what the children do when they are given a new frame, a different pattern arises. Fifth and eighth graders...
are distinguishable but basically the same; third graders appear qualitatively different. Both fifth and eighth graders, on the whole, seem to be reading at a fairly advanced level. They differ in that eighth graders will generally read all of the copy of each frame, while fifth graders usually read the first line or two of the copy that appears most important (usually the first speaker's verbal balloon) and then glance at the rest. They would continue reading if the first line or two indicated that important information followed. (I suspect that eighth graders would have read less and scanned more had many of them not treated the interview situation as a test.)

Unlike the older children, third graders found reading difficult; many found it a chore. Even the better readers had to puzzle out some words. Third graders were likely to focus their energy upon the pictorial component of each frame; they would frequently skip verbal material, particularly in "action frames" and in those "talking heads" frames which were expected, i.e., which came at a point when the child believed a character needed to talk to someone or think about something privately.³

It is easy to be misled here, to notice that third graders are not proficient readers and then to treat this as a trivial aspect of what these children do when they read comic books. The danger is to think that the child doesn’t know what he’s doing, that he doesn't know he's having trouble. The third grader can tell when things are not making sense to him or her. One third grader had a sensible story going sans farmer and doll, but then came upon some troublesome information:³

(3)8#12 Q: What about him, is he afraid?
A: No.
Q: Why not?
A: It looks like he's thinking.
Q: What's he thinking?
A: He's thinking that ... (reading) ... he's thinking ... is this all one story?
Q: Why, don't you think it's all one story?
A: No.
Q: Why not?
A: Cause he's talking about a doll ... and they're talking about something else.

The story which this child had constructed up to frame #12 did not contain a doll as an important element. In reading the copy of frame #12, the child recognized that a doll was being discussed. This information was problematic to him: he recognized that the doll was not just being introduced into the story at this point. The child entertained the possibility that he was dealing with two stories, not one—either what he thought was one story was really a hopeless jumble of stories, or he had missed information about the story or stories that would have made the doll understandable. The difference between older children and third graders is not simply one of proficiency; older children approach the story knowing they can read it, third graders know they may not.

Third Graders: Genre as “World-like”

The third grader approaches the story like a puzzle: all of the pieces are there, but the picture will emerge only when he has ordered the pieces. It is his job to make the best sense he can out of the pieces. In attempting to put these pieces together, third graders are often forced to take rather extreme measures; sometimes they may even appear to be telling different stories at different times.

When a third grader reads a frame, he will often find unanticipated information, having missed the prior information with which it interlocks. Third graders often do not know how or where to locate such missed information, so they will devise a formulation from available data and hope that later frames will confirm it. In making a formulation, the third grader will revise his sense of what has been happening and may also revise the new information to improve its fit. In later frames, he will now search for elements that will clearly confirm or deny his new formulation. However, if additional unanticipated information is chanced upon later in the story, the child may effectively be back at square one. In a sense, unanticipated information is the most important aspect of story interpretation for the third grader; an entire story will be revised on the basis of it:

(3)8#9 Q: So you think it's a sheriff who's coming to town?
A: Mmmh.
Q: What's going to happen?
A: He's gonna try to get him but maybe he won't get him, maybe he'll have to get out.

(3)8#10 A: Looks like he's the sheriff ... (reading) ... oh, it's his fifth birthday.
Q: Whose?
A: His.
Q: How can you tell?
A: Cause it says his fifth birthday ... he looks more than five.
Q: Anything else happening?
A: Well, he's thinking of what to do ... maybe since he's gotten older that maybe he could become a sheriff or something ... and if he does become a sheriff, he's thinking of what to do.
Q: So do you think he's a sheriff, or, is he a sheriff?
A: He's not a sheriff.
Q: What do you think he is?
A: Well, I think he's a boy ... and he's gotten older and since he's gotten older ... somebody could pick him as a sheriff.
Q: How old do you think he is?
A: ... Twenty.

(3)8#11 A: ... I think he's twenty-five now, he's got kids.
Q: What's happening?
A: Or ... I think that maybe now he's the sheriff and he's coming to town with his family to get him, maybe they called him up and they're glad to see him.
Q: How did they get in touch with him?
A: They called him up.
Q: Did they use a telephone?
A: Not the kind you pick up ... like you hold it like this (demonstrates a crank telephone).
Q: Ever see one?
A: On TV.

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Concentrating upon the pictorial material, third graders' statements appear to be stereotypic on two counts. First, much of this particular story is located in the lexical stream; missing it makes the story appear more stereotypic. Bad guys are bad because they look bad; good guys are good because they look good. Second, as information is continually being missed, their explanations do not appropriately depend upon the interlocking elements in the story. Rather, the third grader will draw upon his knowledge of the social world or the genre to explain or fill out the story. The knowledge which the third grader draws upon is usually in stereotypic form, and appears without qualification as a rule or norm:

(3)6#9 A: (reading) ... People who are on a farm they coming in there, a man, and a daughter coming in there and the little girl said that maybe they won't have no sense to be there anymore... and I think that they are coming in there for something to git... maybe they gonna drive there and give some... maybe they selling potatoes, or maybe they gonna git some potatoes because they live on a farm... because on a farm you-all got to give away all your stuff, and you won't have nothing... you'll give all your stuff away to people that need something but you-all be poor by yourself.

Q: How do you know?
A: Because on a farmer's... they have to... give their stuff back... they got to give their stuff to other people who don't have nothing... and they'll be left poor by theyselves... I wouldn't be no farmer.

Nonetheless, third graders' statements are not entirely stereotypic. Their descriptions of what is happening and their predictions of what will happen can be quite specific—oftentimes more specific than those of older children. This suggests that the relevant unit for third graders is not the story so much as the genre.

Third graders seem to approach the genre as though it were "world-like." The genre is not, for them, composed of conventional elements, sequences, structures, narrative devices, plots, and so on. They seem to see it as a world populated by particular kinds of people (good guys, bad guys, sheriffs, farmers, women, and children) who act toward one another in particular ways (by killing one another, by sheltering one another, by being afraid or fearless) and in particular places (in town, on a road outside of town, in a saloon). The third grader does not exactly mistake a genre or a story for reality, either past, present, or future (although this can happen); he seems to give it a special time and place in his imagination.

I would argue that, in part, the third grader is able to construct a comprehensible story from partial information because he treats the genre as world-like. Data to support this contention is extremely sketchy—there is a danger of over-interpretation—but I think the following observations lend support to it.

Third graders will frequently describe the story's action in terms of the medium they know best—usually television. There seems to be little separation between media, so that a third grader will sometimes describe the action in a way that is inappropriate to the medium. For example, they will take a dialogue which is presented in two verbal balloons and describe it in terms of back-and-forth verbal patter:

(3)9#16 Q: Which do you think is going to happen?
A: Uh-huh.
Q: Why not?
A: He's kind of afraid to, like, to shoot anybody cause he might get in bad trouble.
Q: How would he get in bad trouble?
A: Like if a sheriff from another town hears about it even though they're not allowed to go to another town to get anybody, he might go over there and tell him to get out of that town and go somewhere else.
Q: How do you know that a sheriff from another town isn't allowed to come over?
A: Cause that's what they... I seen that in a movie, like the sheriff in one town tried to go over to another town to settle something cause the sheriff was away and he got in jail cause he wasn't supposed to come over... cause they had this guy... well, his friend, the sheriff's friend was supposed to take care of him, but he wasn't cause, you see, the sheriff's friend was always drunk, so he wasn't doing such a good job.

Just because there is no sheriff in the town is no reason to say there is no jail:

(3)8#16 Q: Which do you think is going to happen?
A: Put him in the jailhouse.
Q: Do you think there is a jailhouse?
A: Mhm.
Q: Why do you think there is a jailhouse?
A: Cause every town should have a jailhouse... in those days.
Moreover, third graders seem to have difficulty recognizing impending closure. Although they sense that a fight is coming as quickly as do the older children, and they know that, the gunman must lose in the end, they are less likely to see the farmer as the vehicle of that defeat. At best the pair are seen as evenly matched or as the gunman having a slight edge. If the farmer were to lose the fight, they would expect the story to continue until someone else came along to finish off the gunman. Even after the gunman has lost the fight, third graders can see the story continuing into an indefinite future:

(3)1#23 Q: Why are they giving him back his guns?
A: They’re giving them back... I don’t know... but I know that all the guns are empty... no bullets.
Q: How do you know that?
A: Cause if they did have bullets, he would shoot him right now.

(3)9#24 Q: What’s gonna happen?
A: They’re probably gonna ride back home... then probably the bad guy come back again.
Q: Why do you say that?
A: Because, like if he waits for two years... like as soon as they go, he might hide somewhere and soon as they leave... a far, far distance like he can’t seem even with binoculars, then he’ll go around there, then he starts shooting the town up.
Q: Do you think he’ll win then?
A: No.
Q: Why not?
A: Because like, somebody that, that he couldn’t, somebody probably snuck out and call the guy and he probably, then he probably drop his guns and run.

Although the particular story ends, third graders seem to view the story world as continuing. Likewise, although a particular story or even medium may be seen as unrealistic or unnatural, the story world is viewed as essentially real and true on its own terms.

Fifth and Eighth Grade: Contiguity and Structure

If third graders seem to view the genre as world-like, fifth graders seem to view the story as a pattern and sequence of elements. The story is seen as particular and contiguous. Eighth graders share these characteristics, but also tend to move back and forth between their knowledge of conventional genre structure and the particular story before them. Fifth graders, on the other hand, seem to be more constrained by discrete story moments. Attention is given to the narrative details as they are presented.

Because the fifth graders pick up more detailed information as they go than do the third graders, their explanations appear less stereotypic—the particulars of the story explain the events. This also enables them to integrate and anticipate events more quickly and with greater precision, often five or six frames ahead:

(5)7#10 Q: What’s going on?
A: The guy bought into the store and get a doll cause it’s her birthday.
Q: Who’s holding the doll for him?
A: The storeman probably... and they was poor farmers.
Q: What do you think is going to happen?
A: He’ll probably see the guy shooting... messing up the place and then shoot the little girl’s doll baby and then he’ll probably hit the guy or kill him (action six frames ahead).
Q: Why do you say that?
A: Cause the guy probably be in the store already by now and he say he going to wreck up the joint so he’ll probably shoot the doll babies and things.

The importance of sequence to fifth graders is seen most clearly when they are asked to predict what is going to happen. Each frame can be said to imply something about future developments—either short or long term, or both. Whereas eighth graders make long-range predictions with a view toward how the story will end, fifth graders concentrate upon short term action sequences.

When eighth graders see the wagon approaching the town in frame #9, they are likely to talk about the story’s conclusion:

(8)9#9 Q: What do you think is going to happen?
A: Well, now probably the guy’s coming to visit him will probably fight him.
Q: Who do you think is going to win?
A: Probably that guy right there.
Q: Why?
A: Cause it has to end eventually.

(8)2#9 A: Well, the small farmer comes into the act... the farmer’ll probably stop him.
Q: Why do you say that?
A: Cause he’s just now getting into the story while he’s terrorizing the town... so he’ll probably be the hero for the day.

Based on their knowledge of the gunman, fifth graders are likely to talk about the effect he might have on the family:

(5)2#9 Q: What do you think is going to happen?
A: They’re probably going to find out that the robber’s there... they’re going to be afraid too.

(5)7#9 Q: What do you think is going to happen?
A: He’ll probably see what’s happening and then he’ll get all excited.

One fifth grader did discuss the end of the story at the ninth frame:

(5)9#9 Q: What do you think is going to happen?
A: He’s going to ride in and see the gunman and probably run him over.
Q: You mean he’s going to run him over with...
A: No, by accident, he’ll probably run him over.
Q: Why do you say that?
A: Because he probably won’t be looking and he’ll be going through town, boom, boom, boom, and then he’ll just come riding by . . . and hit him, I guess.

None of the eighth graders seemed innocent enough of the conventions of Westerns to think that the story could end with the farmer accidentally running the gunman down with his wagon.

Even if the eighth grader is unsure in the ninth frame, his predictions about the end of the story will generally be definite by the tenth:

(8)6#9 A: See, here comes the guy that’s gonna stop him.
Q: How can you tell?
A: Because it always happens in comic books . . . (reading) . . . that the farmer . . . no . . . ya . . . I think he’ll stand up to him.

(8)6#10 Q: What do you think is going to happen?
A: I think he’s gonna get into a fight with the . . . trigger-happy Bill, whatever the guy’s name is.
Q: How can you tell?
A: He looks like . . . it always happens in comic books.

Note in the above example, however, that the child had recognized the introduction of the hero without having read the copy or seen the hero’s face. His expectation at the ninth frame was based solely on the figural depiction and its location in the story.

In succeeding frames, eighth graders’ predictions tend to be one of three types. First, they may simply repeat their predictions from the ninth and tenth frames: the farmer will fight the gunman and win. This type will usually end with the farmer’s entrance into the bar/store (frame #15). Second, eighth graders may also predict the next frame or an action sequence. This type may occur between the tenth and fifteenth frames, but is more likely after the farmer enters the store:

(8)9#16 A: Brady’s saying he’s gonna shoot up the doll and Macklin says don’t shoot up that doll, wait a minute cause I’m gonna buy that doll for my little girl.
Q: What’s gonna happen now?
A: He’s probably gonna turn around and say something like don’t tell me what to do something like that and they’re probably going to get into a fight.

Third, eighth graders may make predictions about how the fight will be conducted that are not based upon extending an implied sequence but are the consequence of eliminating possible outcomes at higher levels of structure. The question of who will beat the gunman has been answered; the issue is how will the farmer beat him:

(8)6#15 Q: What’s going to happen now?
A: He’s gonna get into a fight with the other guy and they’re gonna . . . say, have a gun-battle . . . they’re gonna go in the street.
Q: Does he have guns?
A: No, the other guy’s gonna give him one . . . or maybe they’ll wrestle . . . cause he’ll say I don’t use guns.

This prediction is not sequential, but structural; there is nothing in frame #15 implying how the fight will be conducted. In a similar vein, eighth graders will often make two predictions at once, both at the same level of structure, but one having already been eliminated:

(8)9#11 A: They’re probably going to fight.
Q: How can you tell?
A: Well, cause it’s gonna have to fight eventually cause the guy’s gonna have to leave eventually.
Q: Why does he have to leave eventually?
A: Cause the story has to end . . . and they can’t leave the guy.
Q: What’s gonna happen?
A: He’s probably going to get into a fight with him, either that or he’s just going to go in and get the doll and walk out again.

Eighth graders do not totally eliminate structural endings but they do treat some as more remote than others. No fifth grader did this.

By the tenth frame, fifth graders are also likely to say that the farmer may fight the gunman:

(5)2#10 Q: What’s happening there?
A: Well, it looks like that’s the little girl’s father . . . or something.
Q: How can you tell?
A: It looks like he’s the brother because he’s younger . . . and it’s a little girl . . . and I think he’s going to try to kill the robber.
Q: Why do you say that?
A: Well, he looks real strong . . . and he looks like he’s going to save the town.

However, while fifth graders will say that the two may fight, eighth graders will say that the two will fight. Eighth graders’ justifications may include explicit references to the fact that the story has to end; fifth graders will rely upon how the farmer looks. Where eighth graders make structural predictions, fifth graders, in succeeding frames, will often respond with “I don’t know” or “I can’t tell from this frame.”

The fifth frame—showing the gunman entering the bar—lends itself easily to the question, “What is going to happen?” When fifth graders are asked this question, they will tend to respond with what they think the gunman will do because he is the focus of attention:

(5)9#5 Q: What do you think is going to happen inside?
A: He’ll probably push the bottles off the shelf.
Q: Do you think anyone will stop him inside?
A: I don’t know . . . throw a glass of beer in his face.

(5)6#5 Q: Do you think anything is going to happen inside?
A: Yeah.
Q: What?
Eighth Grade: Genre as Conventional

Like younger children, eighth graders see the story as grounded in the genre. Unlike younger children, they explicitly see the genre as conventionally ordered. They acknowledge that some of what happens in a story is part of the nature of storytelling, either in general or specific to a genre.

Eighth graders will explicitly use a presence/absence principle. If the storyteller had wanted to say something different, then what appears in the story would be different:

(8)6#5 A: He’s going into a bar, shooting down the windows and now everybody’s saying now anything can happen... like maybe the bartender’ll get mad, and maybe he’ll start shooting.
Q: So what do you think is going to happen?
A: Maybe the bartender’s gonna start shooting, if he’s a good shot, otherwise they’re gonna be in trouble.

(8)1#5 A: Well, he probably meet up with a drunk that probably got faith while he’s drunk... not why he’s going into the saloon... and that’s when they probably have somebody to go against him, the drunk probably don’t know what he’s getting into cause the guy just blast him away, and then he probably get mad cause some nut coming up to try to stop him and he probably just wreck that place too.

Eighth Graders, on the other hand, will look toward the end of the story:

Once the story is seen to have a conventional structure, it is possible for an eighth grader to say that the story ends well for a reason:

(8)6#23 Q: Why do you think they have the farmer giving the guns back?
A: There has to be a moral to the comic, they can’t just keep the guns... then all the little kids, they’ll keep the guns, they got to make it so they all say, Wow! he’s my hero, and now we’re gonna give everything back if someone hits me with it.

(8)8#24 A: Comics, they just make up all kinds of stories to make young kids happy and keep reading stories about Western... I guess the kids happy... it’s like on TV they say that... a monster picture and the guy wins... they like the guy that wins... and this like shows... he won the fight... like him... and comic books about it.

And that categories of stories can be put to different purposes:

(8)1#24 A: Cause when I was younger many times I used to read... I read a couple of stories like this before... I can make up a good one like this too... like it just come the thoughts, you just make it up... like some kind of makers got different thoughts... some comic makers got love stories like, others got cartoon stories... like that Spiderman story, that Dick Tracy story, Charlie Brown and others got like these stories, like these interesting stories you can read like, stories that you ought to think about sometimes. Like most of the time I put all the good ones together and you know all the funny ones... you know... when I get thinking I read the interesting ones that something that makes me think on.

There seemed to be two major types of interpretive styles among the eighth graders. When these children did not find the story compelling, they tended to use a flat style of interpretation. This flat style is a refinement of the fifth graders’ contiguous approach: the child pays close attention to the events which have happened, processes them, and then waits for more:

(8)4#6 A: And they say right here... that Tiger Brady telling them to run... and he saying ain’t no man gonna stand up to him.
Q: What do you think is going to happen next?
A: I don’t know... I got to read that first.

Eighth graders using a flat style focus upon the story as an object to be perceived, decoded, and understood as it unfolds. The elements of the story determine what is to be thought at each point in time. The child assumes that all necessary information is or will be presented, that it will be presented bit by bit, and that all one has to do is understand.
what has happened and wait for the rest.

The difference between a flat style and a contiguous approach is that the former includes a relatively self-conscious form of waiting while the latter does not. Fifth graders seemed to be involved with the story; it was fun and they liked it. The flat style user is not involved with the story and does only what is necessary to do at the time. When he makes a prediction, it will be a crystallization of what he is supposed to think at the time, and no more. He is more sequential, consciously waiting to respond with “I don’t know” or “Let’s wait and see” to requests for predictions. These predictions, while sequential, are also structural. It almost seems that the child actively restrains himself:

(8) 7#9 Q: What do you think is going to happen?
A: Just gonna go there and they’ll see what’s happening.
Q: And then what?
A: I don’t know.

(8) 7#10 Q: The farmer wants to get his daughter for her birthday a doll... they’re driving into town to get it.
A: What’s going to happen?
Q: What’s going to happen?
A: I don’t know.
Q: Do you have any idea where the doll is?
A: Probably in the store where the bar is too.
Q: Why do you say that?
A: Cause in the other picture there was a doll sitting on top... I guess it was a cabinet or something.

(8) 7#11 Q: Does the farmer know what’s going on in town?
A: No... cause nobody told him yet cause he just got into town.
Q: What do you think is going to happen?
A: He’s going to drive right into the middle of it.
Q: What do you think’ll happen after that?
A: I don’t know.

(8) 7#12 Q: The guy’s telling him that they better get the little girl and the mother into a building or something so nothing’ll happen to ‘em... and the little girl says she still wants her doll... and the guy says that you’ll still get it.
A: What do you think is going to happen?
Q: What do you think is going to happen?
A: He’s gonna fight the guy.
Q: Why do you say that?
A: Cause he’s saying that you’ll get your doll and the only place he’d get it is from where the guy’s at right now.

When an eighth grader was involved with the story, (or the interview), he used an expansive style.5 The style is nicely brought out by the fact that comic books are schematic. In using an expansive style, the eighth grader plays against the schematic order of the story. The principal characteristic of the style is an interest in filling in the blanks; the eighth grader creates a world around the story (but not one which makes up for missed information, as with third graders). The elements of the story are seen as limiting one’s ability to fill out a narrative world:

(8) 2#17 Q: Why is he going to shoot the doll before he shoots the farmer?
A: He shot everything else up in the store but the doll... shot the doll up to get that over with, then he’ll shoot the man.

In order to produce this answer, the child must know that, vis-a-vis the structure of the story, the time dimension between frame #7, when the gunman says he’s going to wreck the bar, and frame #16, when he’s about to shoot the doll, is ambiguous. As long as the essential order of the story is kept intact, an ambiguous piece of time is open to interpretation. Moreover, the presence/absence principle need not apply because the gunman’s actual target practice is not structurally important beyond his attempt to shoot the doll.

When an eighth grader using an expansive style is asked to make predictions, the world which he invokes becomes clearer to see. The eighth grader’s expanded world will usually rely upon personal knowledge of what reality is like. Whether or not the town does anything about the gunman is more than just structurally important. A real world can be built upon it:

(8) 1#4 Q: How can you tell?
A: Cause in the poster, there’s one guy saying... wouldn’t anybody in the town stand a chance against him... what he was trying to say that there ain’t nobody faster than him in the town... they probably sooner or later try something.
Q: Do you think there’s a way to stop him?
A: Ya... I think the way to... look... the way I see it... one of them gonna die probably two... but all of them got guns... they just surround him... or hide... and when he comes in to wreck more part of the town... they just blast him.
Q: How do you know they have guns?
A: Mostly... they would have guns... one reason why they got guns because most of them, they got faith... and so they try to protect their homes, robberies in the town... so they got to have something on them.

(8) 1#5 Q: What’s the bartender who got the heart probably cause it’s his own bar... but the rest they probably so shaken up that they
runs out the back door... but I say if I was the bartender too, I'd stand there and try and back up my bar... no wise guy gonna come in... just shoot his guns... that ain't gonna scare me cause I probably got one too.

CONCLUSIONS

The data indicate that all of the children had a basic knowledge of the elements, contingencies, and structure which comprised "A Gunman in Town!" along with some recognition of the genre. The children know pictures "tell" a story. With few exceptions, they know how the story is going to end: the gunman will lose.

Each of the children did introduce aspects of his social world when commenting upon the story. However, they tended to restrict their use of "real world" knowledge to occasions when they either were at a loss to explain the action from elements within the story (third graders) or felt that the story's structure had left the matter open to interpretation (e.g., expansive style). By and large, the children were more likely to explain and predict from the elements of the story or their knowledge of the story-type than from a knowledge of social reality. This was not surprising given the comic book medium.

The development from third to eighth grade can be seen as an increasing ability to encounter a story as a story, as something made up. Criteria for identifying "storyness" became more sophisticated. Third graders said the story was not real but this depended upon the medium: because the comic book is drawn, the story is fabricated—although it could happen. Eighth graders went beyond the medium; "storyness" depended upon the identification of a conventional story structure. It permitted certain elements to be seen as improbable:

(8)6#24 Q: Do you think comic book stories like this are real?
   A: No.
   Q: Why not?
   A: Cause that wouldn't happen, the guy would... the guy would have shot him, cause he hit him with his hands, and he would have shot him.
   Q: Is there anything else which isn't real?
   A: Well, I don't think the guy would go so far to get his daughter a doll.
   Q: Why not?
   A: I don't know, would you try and get yourself killed just to get your daughter a doll... I'd go somewhere else.

Improbability depended upon the child's sense of how the real world works and his knowledge that the story was conventional. The doll was not viewed as an improbable element until it was understood structurally, as a vehicle for ending the story. To risk one's life for a doll is improbable in reality and is, therefore, clearly made-up.

To recognize that some elements are improbable by identifying them with a conventional structure does not make all elements suspect. Eighth graders' recognition of conventional structure can be seen as growing out of prior (e.g., third graders) treatment of the genre as world-like. It is against this "world" that conventional structure seemed to develop. But this derivation may be only partial.

The recognition of conventional structure seemed to develop because: (1) with age, the child becomes more familiar with the "ways" of story-types and social reality so that comparisons can be made; (2) by the eighth grade, the child has mastered the recognition of elements and contingencies; and (3) a concern with endings seemed to run through all of the children's encounters with the story.

Although the concern with endings must be treated with extreme caution (since a strong influence was necessarily exerted by the question, "What is going to happen?") it suggests that the improbability of the events in the story was perceived and interpreted in terms of the author's attempts to resolve the story according to the conventions. The machinery which eighth graders saw was the mechanics of closure. An eighth grader could note that the ending was unrealistic, and yet accept the premise that a town without a sheriff invites trouble. The premises apparently remain unquestioned even though they may be quite familiar (e.g., the sheriff has left town; the sheriff has just been killed)—and therefore part of a definition of conventional structure—or surprising (e.g., the hero is a farmer and not an honest, wronged gunslinger). A recognition of conventional structure did not seem to supplant the world-like aspect of the genre; it developed out of it. This world-like aspect may endure because the child cannot necessarily learn from the story or the genre that an event or premise which is symbolically probable can be naturally improbable. There is an outside source of information for this to occur.

The boundaries between an imaginative world and social reality can remain porous so long as the child does not chance too often upon conflicting information. Moreover, the child has little reason to question a story in its own right since the stories which he interprets will generally be authored by adults. Much of his social knowledge is given to him by adults and parallels popular story morality; and his sphere of personal experience is, relative to adults, limited. Without discrediting outside information, then, the child might not learn to understand story structure as conventional, intentional, and symbolic.

NOTES

1The 24 frames of "A Gunman in Town!" were separated and pasted onto individual cards. The child was handed the frames one at a time, and questioning was begun whenever the child gave some indication that he understood the frame and was ready to talk about it. Frames which had already been discussed remained in view and within easy reach so that the child could refer back to previous frames whenever required for understanding or discussion.

2Research of this type faces some major problems. The person interpreting the interviews is also the person conducting them. Theoretical bias can operate in both the interpretive and interview situations. I can only say that I recognize the problems and have tried to report the study as accurately as I could. Also, the effects of the interview situation must be gauged. When a black, eighth grade female responds with "I don't know" to a question put by an older white
male, is it that she doesn’t know the answer or that she won’t give the answer at this point in the negotiations? Recognizing that the same answer to the same question about the same comic book frame may nevertheless mean something different in each case, interviews were conducted in a looser manner than would otherwise be warranted. While the basic questions remained the same for each frame and for each child, sometimes certain questions were dropped and others added to gain an adequate sense of the child’s interpretation.

3 While film, television, and comic books are all mixed media, film and television generally mix the pictorial with the aural, and comic books mix the pictorial with the written. Since mastery, or the achievement of transparency, occurs later in written than in aural codes, this is likely to alter the interpretive strategies children use in encountering a comic book story. Any generalization from what third graders did with “A Gunman in Town!” to what they would do with a film or television program must be undertaken with extreme caution. The data are suggestive of a development but are not definitive.

4 Examples drawn from the interviews will be preceded by an interview code. The number enclosed in parentheses refers to the grade level of the child interviewed. The number following the parenthesis refers to the order of the child’s interview. Finally, the number following the “#” sign refers to the frame discussed at that point of the interview. Thus, “(3)8#12” translates as the eighth third grader interviewed, talking about frame #12.

5 Among the eighth graders, females tended to use the flat style, while males tended to use the expansive style. The story is oriented toward males, and the expansive style is more apparent among them. However, females sometimes employed an expansive style when some element in the story seemed to be important to them, and males would use a flat style when the action did not seem interesting. The two styles of interpretation were not consistently used by either sex or any particular child. Interest in or involvement with the story seemed to be a better determinant of which style would be used.

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THE PROXEMICS OF DANISH DAILY LIFE

JUDITH FRIEDMAN HANSEN

Proxemics, the study of the structuring and interpretation of space in human social life, has caught the interest of researchers in a variety of disciplines. In a recent survey of the field, Watson (1974) notes the diversity of contributions thus far, but laments the paucity of studies of specifically cultural systems of proxemic behavior. Edward Hall, the foremost architect of proxemics as a researchable domain, has called consistently for such studies. Analysis of the complex dynamics of spacing in daily life within particular cultural milieux is an essential cornerstone for crosscultural comparison of communication process.1

Several theoretical frameworks provide partial perspectives on this problem. Cognitive anthropologists such as James Spradley, for example, have studied space as a semantic domain and as a behavioral setting. In his analysis of tramp taxonomies, Spradley (1970) showed that subcultural definitions of physical and social spaces are directly associated with behavioral strategies, and that intercultural discontinuities in these definitions in combination with differential status and power among interacting groups have critical consequences for the strategies adopted by both. John Bennett (1969) in his study of an agrarian region in Saskatchewan used an expanded cultural ecological model to explore the definition and use of environmental features by the region's inhabitants, suggesting further analytic links between these microprocesses and macrostructural development within an ecological niche. In some respects, both these approaches resemble a third, that of symbolic interactionism. Eclectically melding insights from transactional psychology and Schutzian phenomenology with a focal orientation to the socially constructed character of cultural reality, symbolic interactionists like Herbert Blumer (1961) have formulated a relatively broad framework for the analysis of microprocess. Rather than taking cultural definitions and interpretations of experience for granted as parameters of analysis, many symbolic interactionists ask instead how these shared understandings are generated, sustained, and modified in the course of daily life. In the view of these investigators, it is not enough to establish that a pattern of behavior obtains; the crucial question is, rather, what complex processes result in an interplay of observable behaviors such that participants and/or observers infer “patternning” in a given context. From this perspective, analysis of contextual features as perceived by participants is requisite to an adequate understanding of the phenomenon under study.

In light of the manifest concern with symbolic aspects of interaction, it is not surprising that much research reflecting this theoretical stance has concentrated on linguistic and paralinguistic transactions. Methodologically, verbal communicative behavior is far more easily recorded in the detail necessary for intensive analysis than is the dense stream of nonverbal behavior. Equally important, however, has been the implicit assumption that language is the symbolic mode of communication par excellence in human society. By extension, other communicative modes are often ignored as a-symbolic or of peripheral symbolic significance or are treated as subordinate structural analogues of language.

Use of a less restrictive model of communication, on the other hand, allows us to redress our traditional neglect of the dynamics of situated multichannel communication. Worth and Gross (1974), for example, have outlined the bases of

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Figure 1 —caption for cartoon is as follows: "We appreciate God's Gifts. Danish love of food it's called—but it's simply that we make sure in a discreet way that nothing is wasted in a world where food is scarce in so many places." Note restaurant service on platters rather than individual plates, quantities of food, accompanied by beer and snaps (akavit) and manifest enjoyment of the feast. Absence of chairs at front of table is of course a function of the requirements of drawing, not a "realistic" reflection of table arrangements. (From How to be a Dane by Bo Bøjesen, 1960.)
such a model in their discussion of "symbolic strategies." Concerned with the fact that human experience is always mediated by interpretation, they posit a developmental-analytic hierarchy of types of recognition (and articulation) of meaning in perceived events along with types of interpretive strategies used to order and respond to them. "Communication" they define as "a social process, within a context, in which signs are produced and transmitted, perceived, and treated as messages from which meaning can be inferred" (Worth and Gross 1974:30). "Meaning" may be purely signatory—as when we simply recognize an event, thereby attributing to it a place in the scheme of things. Or it may be symbolic, i.e., recognized as of possible communicational significance. In the latter case, we add to recognition an assumption of intentionality in the event's production/transmission, an assumption that the event has been constructed by an intending other (1974:27). The dynamic of the model resides in the dialectic relationship posited between acts of articulation and acts of interpretation: "We articulate in terms of the subsequent interpretations we expect, just as we imply only in those terms which we can expect others to use when they infer." Meaning thus inheres not in signs but "in the social context, whose conventions and rules dictate the articularcy and interpretive strategies to be invoked by producers and interpreters of symbolic forms" (1974:30).

That an analytic framework of the sort suggested by Worth and Gross, Blumer, and others is essential to the study of proxemic processes in context, I have argued elsewhere (Friedman Hansen n.d.). In the present essay, my intention is to present a case example of its application within a particular cultural milieu. My initial premise is that fruitful development of the concept "proxemic behavior" must go beyond programmatic definitions, unsituated crosscultural surveys of proxemic interactional styles, and analyses of small group interaction which leave unexamined the cultural matrix in which they are embedded. Specifically this requires holistic integration of data on cultural definitions of space, settings, and social relations; attitudes and values with regard to them; and behavioral strategies used in light of them. By treating the multiple facets of proxemic process, along with the context in which this is embedded, as constituents of a single gestalt, we can more readily apprehend their integral relationship in the life world experienced by participants. In particular, we acquire the means to explicate the processes which generate in an ongoing dynamic the types of "acts," "actors," and "settings" which comprise the etic units of our analysis.

From this perspective, the study of human communication as Worth and Gross define it becomes synonymous with the study of human symbolic interaction. Only by taking into account the intricate interplay of communicative channels and modes in the orchestration of messages; the meanings verbalized and nonverbal, implied and inferred; and the strategies of interpretation and response used by participants, can we approach an understanding of social life. In Denmark, as in other societies sharing in the Northern European cultural heritage (cf. Watson 1970), the primary communicative channels are visual and aural with secondary emphasis on the tactile and relatively minor dependence on other channels. Yet to understand visual aspects of communication we must examine them within the embedding context of simultaneous message transmission via other routes. In analytic terms, we may say that particular channels predominate in particular situations, settings, or microcontexts. But we must remember that the experience of participants is usually not differentiated in this way. Behavioral strategies, therefore, are rooted in the holistically apprehended context and require for their elucidation equally holistic analytic techniques. Within the constraints of a single written text I shall, of course, be able only to present a profile of the less complex features of this whole; a more complete treatment is in preparation.

THE ECOLOGY OF DANISH SPACE

Danes frequently remark that Denmark is a little country among the world's nations. The connotations of this comment include more than physical dimensions. Their relative powerlessness in international politics and economic dependence on world markets, for example, is often implicit, as is the awareness that their language and culture are shared by an infinitesimal proportion of the world's people. Yet as often as this smallness is noted as a fact of life to be dealt with, equally frequently is it voiced with evident affection. What lies behind the words is a complex of cultural values which reflect a preference for surroundings that do not dwarf human actors, for spaces that are easily comprehended by the perceiver.

In spite of its agricultural base (nearly three-quarters of the total land area is under some form of agricultural exploitation), Denmark is becoming increasingly industrialized and markedly urbanized as well. Farming itself has been industrialized to a considerable degree, and rural young people seek better opportunities in towns and cities. Both population growth and demographic redistribution have expanded small towns into significant population nodes, and welded outlying towns into metropolitan suburbs. Further, an extensive communication network of roads, railways, ferries and mass media link all parts of the country, facilitating the obliteration of rural-urban contrasts (cf. Anderson 1967; Bidstrup and Kaufmann 1963). At the same time, few Danes have fully severed their emotional and social ties with their rural roots. Not only have many Danes recent historical connections and living kin in rural environments, but they retain an abiding love of "nature" as well. Vacation homes in more or less rural settings are owned or rented by a rather large proportion of the population and used where possible for weekend retreats as well as longer vacation periods. Those without access to cabins of their own often visit friends or relatives who are more fortunate in this regard. Some rent garden plots, available in or near urban areas, from the government. Another not uncommon vacation option is to enroll in a short course offered for this purpose by a rural folk high school (similar in some ways to a community college), thus combining intellectual stimulation and sociability with bucolic surroundings.

In daily life, however, the physical spaces in which Danes spend most time are workplaces and homes. It is the latter setting which will serve as our focus here, since it is the scene
of interactions which Danes tend to value particularly highly. Virtually 80% of the city's population live in multiple family dwellings. Moreover, of the 520,000 households in the greater metropolitan area, nearly 70% occupy three or fewer rooms, and nearly 40% have only one or two rooms (Danmark Statistik 1969). The way in which this available living space is dealt with likewise reflects a distinctive orientation, one which extends beyond the elements mentioned earlier, to a complex of assumptions and values concerning the relationship between space, objects, and people.

OBJECTS, SPACES, AND PEOPLE CULTURAL ORIENTATIONS

In order to understand Danish attitudes toward physical space and proxemics, it is necessary to analyze certain key concepts in some depth. Prime among these is the notion of hygge. Hygge denotes a particular valued state of existence, one which most Danes consider to be typically (even quintessentially) Danish. In its adjectival form, hyggelig, it is also one of the most commonly invoked descriptive terms. Elsewhere (Friedman Hansen 1974), I have discussed its ramifications for the cultural whole of which it is a part. For present purposes, I will concentrate on those aspects which bear directly on the relationship among objects, spaces, and people.

In a general sense, hygge denotes comfort, coziness, cheerfulness, and friendliness. To be in a situation characterized by hygge is to be in a state of pleasant well-being and security, with a relaxed frame of mind and open enjoyment of the immediate situation in all its small pleasures. It is a state one achieves most often with close members of one's social network—with one's family, extended family, and friends. Although it is by no means tied exclusively to a specific setting, it is strongly associated with one: home. The epitome of hygge is hjemlig hygge, homey hygge. Danes often characterize themselves as home-loving in comparison with other Europeans, and it is interesting in this regard that the atmosphere in a public restaurant or inn will frequently reflect a distinctive hyggelig homey hygge. Danes tend to value particularly highly the unchanging stability of old furniture and old heirlooms. Genealogical tracing, which is common, focuses not on a potential relationship with famous or powerful persons but on the concrete details of family history. Informants took pleasure in showing me the house in which they or a parent or grandparent had grown up or in recounting the history of an antique cabinet or heirloom utensil they possessed. Objects, places, events, and memories are for him likely to derive from these early experiences. Hygge, as Karlsen (1965:83-84) puts it, is essentially conservative. It thrives among the unchanging stability of old furniture and old habits.

"Familiarity," however, connotes far more than simply "the habitual state of affairs." To grasp its full significance in the present context, we must consider certain features of Danish "temporal space," i.e., attitudes toward experiential time. Danes appear to be more actively aware of the historicity of phenomena than Americans. Even among the young, there is widespread interest in Danish history coupled with considerable affection for antiques and heirlooms. Genealogical tracing, which is common, focuses not on a potential relationship with famous or powerful persons but on the concrete details of family history. Informants took pleasure in showing me the house in which they or a parent or grandparent had grown up or in recounting the history of an antique cabinet or heirloom utensil they possessed. Objects, places, events, and relationships are typically associated with known traditions or historical contexts in which they are embedded. Invocations of these associations add depth to their enjoyment in the present.

This orientation to the past is complemented by a readiness to commit oneself to spontaneous involvement in the present moment. To resolve this apparent paradox we must inspect another concept, that of minde, memory or
recollection. One of three terms commonly used to denote an act of recollection, at mindes (the infinitive form) connotes not merely bringing back into one’s thoughts, but recalling a fact or event embedded in a memory of its contexts, its atmosphere and associations. A minder (pl. minder) is a keepsake, a souvenir, a memento; it is a reminder of past experience in its experiential quality. A minder is a treasure, brought out periodically to be fondled and enjoyed anew. Encapsulation of present experience intensifies the present moment with an awareness that it will be tomorrow’s memory. Thus scrapbooks and photographic records of memorable occasions are virtually universal in Danish households and frequently consulted, tangible expressions of the interplay between past and present. Moreover, slides and home movies are often shown in contexts associated with hygge. Serving as a symbol of experiences shared with other participants or as a “conversation-piece” for sharing in the present moment, these visual records are used to enhance the sense of embeddedness with which viewers invest their relationships to one another.

It is in this sense as well, then, that familiarity contributes to hygge. Reminiscence can accord a belated aura of hygge to experiences which were of more mixed quality at the time. Minder can also be vehicles of present hygge, framing the moment with the warm and secure comfort of happy memories. Skou (1965:22-24) writes of her canopy bed as "memorable" occasions" as a special and particularly hyggelig refuge after a long day’s work:

I lie and look around the room which holds so many minder of people who have been close to me. Pictures and photographs and books speak their silent language and strange objects tell of travels and manifold experiences. The hearth’s reflection on the ceiling and walls illuminates all the things in the room and calls up minder. It is hyggelig to lie in the twilight and immerse oneself in the minder of many rich and happy years.

The stable predictableness of a hyggelig situation, the element of moderation, excludes hygge from "grand occasions" or events marked by uncertainty such as birth. Celebrations of holidays and ritual occasions such as birthdays and confirmation, on the other hand, can be and ideally are hyggelig as well as festive. Christmas represents the greatest concentration of concern with hygge in the Danish calendar. December is the darkest month of the year in Scandinavia: in Denmark this means that there are only seven hours of gray light between sunrise and sundown. Christmas thus constitutes a festival of light and an antidote to the depressing gloom of the season.

Indeed, light and darkness play a definite role in the perception of hygge. Neither total darkness or stark light is hyggelig: moderation again defines the desirable range. Contrasting the traditional brick house with windows cut into the thick wall with modern glass-faced dwellings, Danish architect Arne Karlsen (1965:79) points out the effect of the two structures on lighting.

The great jump between the light intensity outside and inside was softened [in the brick house] by reflection from white-painted woodwork and light edges. In the room behind the glass facade [on the other hand] the overarching sky dominates the whole room. The room gets its color from it. Golden and friendly in the mild morning and evening light of a sunny day, over-poweringly white with hard shadows when the sun is at its height, and cold and sharp on a winter day with gray diffuse light. Piercing on a gray day with snow. Uhyyggelig.

Subdued lighting and candles (“living lights”) are typical accompaniments of hygge. Fluorescent lighting was seen by informants in contrast as cold, non-hyggelig. Skou described above the pleasure of lying in the half-dark or twilight as the fire cast its light on minder-decked walls. This time of day, known as mørkning or tusmørke (twilight) is commonly felt to be a special and particularly hyggelig part of the day. “To
hold "mrkning" or to watch it darken, is an activity somewhat akin to our watching the sun go down. The Danish emphasis is not, however, on the dramatic brilliance of the sun setting on the horizon, but on the subtler shifting of light and darkness.

Another lighting effect traditionally associated with hygge is the circle of light cast by a hanging lamp. Surrounded by darkness, the light embraces the activity, event, or assembled group, thereby enclosing the focal area against the darker periphery. The note of closure here is an important constituent of Danish attitudes toward space, a pivotal nexus between visual and other communicative channels.

With respect to physical environment, most Danes would probably agree that open countryside is not hyggelig, whereas a bounded clearing can be. Karlsen observes:

We know from old towns that it can be hyggelig to wander up narrow streets and across small squares overlooked by close-knit rows of house fronts, shifting from sun to shadow. It can be hyggelig to walk in quiet streets and among many people in busy shopping districts. But wherever one wanders, one must feel secure, if hygge is to accompany one.

It is difficult for most of us to sense hygge of any kind among colossal things. The dispersed town with sprawling highrise mastodons can have a dramatic silhouette and be rich in sculptural effect, but residents who walk through the streets of the abyss can find hygge only inside their own front door. Only spaces—inside or out—which are in reasonable proportion to an individual's own dimensions can effect the emergence of hygge. The unhhygge room—and mystery writers' favorite setting—is traditionally the English hall with high ceilings, open roof construction, the stairs, galleries, and innumerable openings to endless dark hallways [Karlsen 1965:76-77].

In fact, the smaller the scale the better. Many of the old farm houses and some town dwellings are quite small relative to contemporary body-builds and construction practices, with low ceilings (from about five-and-a-half to six-and-a-half feet high), small rooms, and small windows. A few houses remain, still occupied, which are virtually miniature in size, and are considered especially hyggelig by both their inhabitants and Danish tourists.

Closure as an aspect of hygge, therefore, involves size and boundaries. Both elements are perceived as contributing to one's sense of security. A space with clear-cut boundaries, framed by regular walls and easy to glimpse to its furthest corner feels safe, suggest Karlsen (1965:78), because one can perceive its secrets in one glance. Moreover, he continues, in fortunate instances the calmness of form can encourage calmness of mood. In the "open plan" of construction, where spaces flow into one another without clear transitions, providing an infinite series of perceptions to one who moves through them, this security is often lost. As a result folding screens have been reintroduced to create enclosed spaces in the "dwelling aquarium," and fireplaces have become necessary as focuses of hygge. The family clusters around the fireplace, backs turned to the open spaces, when it wants to...
have hygge. Thus, notes Karlsen (1965:78):

He who seeks a hygge/sitting place in aloneness must find himself a nook from which the field of vision is limited, and where the walls stand close behind his back.

One Danish woman, married to a sailor who was away from home for months at a time, lessened her feelings of loneliness by making herself a hyggekrog (hygge-nook). Fashioning curtains out of open-weave material, she hung them around one corner of the apartment when her husband left for ship duty, and used the nook for evening reading and knitting in his absence. On his return, she took the curtains down and enjoyed the whole apartment with him. In another case, an elderly couple had built a "hygge-corner" in their living room, a raised platform about thirty square feet in expanse set before a small window. Here stood a small round table and two chairs, enclosed by a low wooden balustrade.

The notion of protective boundaries also reflects the value for undisturbed involvement in the present moment of hygge. One would not ordinarily speak of hygge with strangers or even acquaintances. It is a state most often linked with one's circle of close friends and family. The feeling of protectedness within hygge's embrace tends to carry with it a sense of being provided for, of having one's basic creature comforts satisfied. Both these features thus contribute to relaxation and commitment to the event itself, as well as to the sense of social, physical, temporal, and experiential boundedness associated with it.

The implications of this concept for Danish social life can be highlighted by a brief consideration of strategies typically associated with it. How does one create hygge or insure its presence? To some extent, furnishings traditionally associated with hygge can help to encourage it. Flowers, candles, tablecloths, food, and drink—these are among such conventionally helpful items, and are commonly used in this way. And yet in and of themselves such objects have no particular power. Rather their presence represents the intent and effort of the host or the responsible individual to create a menneskevenlig (person-friendly or person-welcoming) milieu. Such a situation is related by Skou (1965:26) as she reminisces about her younger days on tour with her actor husband.

One of the young actresses... understood how to create hygge wherever she was... with just a few possessions... A pretty silk spread decked the table on which stood a bouquet of flowers and a bowl of fruit. On the night-table, the white cold marble top of which had also been covered with a piece of silk cloth, stood a photograph. These small things had transformed the room from a grim and impersonal space to a hyggeps place to spend time.

One indication of the importance of the techniques for creating hygge is the amount of space which family- and women's-magazines devote to their explication. At the same time it is generally agreed that hygge can not be directly "constructed" without precluding its emergence. As the author/poet Tove Ditlevsen (1965:17) notes, hygge “is a fickle guest which comes when it suits it and most often when no one has called for it.” Indeed, she continues, “if someone names its name,” to exclaim “Ih, hvor har vi det hyggelige!” (Oh, what a hyggelige time we're having!), this signals its absence, for it implies a degree of evaluative detachment which is antithetical to the involvement which generates hygge.

As I have said, a setting conducive to the emergence of hygge typically provides for the comfort of participants. Comfort and its corollary of relaxation are most easily achieved in a familiar context, especially one's own home. In the less familiar environs of another person's home or a public place such as a restaurant, ease is encouraged by a sense of personalization in the surroundings. Thus it is more hygge to sit in a living room which is clearly being lived in than in a perfectly appointed living room such as might be found in a furniture exhibition. "The room which holds so many minder" to which Skou refers is quite common in Denmark. While the walls and table tops of older people are massed with photographs and other mementos of a lifetime, younger people tend to display somewhat fewer of the minder they keep. Typically, however, enough are evident that an entering visitor is immediately aware of the personal-historic atmosphere of the living space. A room without these accretions of living is uninviting, both because it is impersonal and because it suggests a lack of involvement on the part of the inhabitant with common human experiences.

Furniture displays, particularly of living room suites, typically attempt to offset the impersonality of a display by placing a bottle of liquor on the coffee table; two or more glasses casually grace the table, and an open pack of cigarettes frequently completes the picture of studied hygge. Moreover, paintings, common in homes of all classes are more frequently originals, often done by a relative, than prints.

Restaurants are likewise subject to these values. A hygge restaurant is one which suggests by its interior that it belongs to someone, that someone takes pride in or has affection for its furnishings. Thus antique copper cooking utensils or porcelain pieces or apparent souvenirs commonly line the walls of restaurants and help to dispel the sense of eating in a public dining room. Likewise the most common types of restaurant china are heavy duty versions of two of the most popular Danish porcelain patterns.

Familiarity in settings other than one's own home is increased by virtue of fairly standard choices both in hospitality and in utilization of living space. Ideally, Danish living space includes an entryway, a living room, a dining room, bedrooms, and a balcony. In fact, the housing situation is too tight to provide many Danes with this ideal. Many rooms, therefore, must serve multiple functions; for example, a living room may be a bedroom at night, or a bedroom both dining room and study by day. The essential point is that this living space is rather compressed, and exploitation of this space for all family activities requires maximum flexibility of furnishings. It is noteworthy under the circumstances that the minimum furnishings are as standard as they are. A couch flanking one wall, facing a narrow low table approximately its own length over which a low-hanging chandelier casts a circle of light is typical. One or two other comfortable chairs are set in corners of the room or in convenient spaces along the walls. In addition, one may expect to find a television or radio, a small bookcase, and similar vehicles of leisure activity. The living room and the entryway are typically minimum units of Danish living space; at the same time, they are the primary "public areas" involved in informal sociable interactions. Despite the emphasis on shared food in Danish hospitality, kitchens typically constitute work areas but not living space.
Thus whereas Italians, for example, use the kitchen as a primary locus of informal interaction, the living room serves this purpose in Denmark.

Another feature of hygge, closely related to the elements of relaxed warmth, closure, and interpersonal commitment to the ongoing interaction can be detected in the nature of tables used as foci of sociable gatherings. While the relative narrowness of coffee and dining room tables in part reflects the exigencies of compressed living space, it also facilitates eye contact among participants; the vast majority of home-based sociable interactions involve use of one of them, most often the coffee table. Even when a meal has been served at the larger dining table, dessert and coffee are served at the smaller one. I discovered an amusing sort of confirmation of this analysis at a furniture exhibition: a table about 40 inches square with two half-moons cut out of opposite sides, such that the distance between two people seated in the niches was reduced to about a forearm’s length (just close enough to link arms in a toast)—and labelled a “hygge-table.”

**PROXEMICS OF DANISH INTERACTION**

In the preceding section we surveyed some of the fundamental parameters which serve to orient Danish utilization of physical and interpersonal space. It remains to show more specifically how these affect behavioral strategies in everyday life.

Proxemic relations among strangers display a limited range of acceptable body contact according to context. Where two strangers maintained relatively close physical proximity over a period of time, as would be the case for instance on a crowded train or bus, direct body and eye contact is eschewed. In a crowded shop, on the other hand, people frequently bump into others unintentionally; such a brief intrusion on personal space is rarely acknowledged either verbally or kinesically, and appears to be of no moment. In open squares where people sit conversing or watching the passing array of humanity, visual intrusion on personal space is minimized as well by an apparent avoidance of concentrated attention on any particular stranger.

Between individuals who are engaged in direct face-to-face communication, however, three elements seem to comprise the minimal definition of mutual orientation. These are the greeting and parting ritual of shaking one’s interactant(s)’ right hand (accompanied by verbal formulae), maintaining direct eye contact during conversation, and when in a group of more than two persons, referring to any other individual present by name rather than by a third-person pronoun (i.e., “he,” “she,” “they”). The first “rule” is not without exceptions: in a shop or restaurant, for example, patrons usually do not shake hands with service personnel unless they have developed a personal relationship in the course of repeated interactions. In most cases, verbal greetings suffice. “Professional” service relationships, however, generally do entail handshaking; a visit to a doctor or insurance broker or what have you, where the individuals are engaged in a more “personalized” service transaction, is always initiated by this ritual contact.

For the present analysis, I would like to concentrate on the class of relationships which are of most significance to Danes themselves: those with kinsmen and friends. In these cases the three base elements, although they remain salient, are integrated with more varied and elaborate modes of proxemic orientation. The most striking synthesis is visible in sociable gatherings, i.e., situations in which participants come together to share leisure hours. Such occasions typically also represent the epitome of hygge.

As a prototype of sociable interaction, let us consider a typical gathering at home of close members of a social network. When a guest arrives, the host greets him or her at the door, shaking hands and expressing pleasure at the guest’s arrival. In the entryway the guest thanks the host for the invitation, leaves his coat on one of the hooks that line the wall, offers any gift he has brought, checks his appearance in the mirror, and proceeds into the living room. Here the newly arrived guest greets any prior arrivals, shakes hands with them, and (frequently upon invitation by the host) sits down.

Given the limited spaces with which the average Dane has to work, one might expect participants in a gathering to make maximal use of the living room area, to luxuriate, perhaps, in what space there is. In practice, the very opposite occurs; the gathering clusters around the coffee table in the circle of light cast by the chandelier. After guests have begun to arrive, the dispersed chairs are moved over to the table, enhancing the sense of special coming together implicit in the definition of the interaction. When all guests are seated in a cluster around the table, the host(s) offer food and drink. If guests have been invited for a meal, they will generally be offered a pre-meal drink here (such as sherry) and return to this area after eating for coffee and any further refreshment.

What happens if guests are numerous? Logically, a cluster might be expanded to accommodate more participants, several clusters might be formed, or a different spatial arrangement might be used. In practice, the cluster will expand up to the maximum number of chairs which can be squeezed closely around the one table, generally a maximum of eight or ten.

If the number of guests exceeds this potential, multiple clusters (usually including from four to seven members) are formed and mechanisms of social circulation are brought into play. Although multiple clusters tend not to be as stable in their personnel as a single cluster, they are generally considerably less transient than typical groups at large American parties. This relative stability is facilitated, again, by the furnishing: in their concern for all aspects of a guest’s comfort, Danish hosts will provide a seat for every guest and if possible small tables as well. At the same time, each participant expects and is expected to circulate at least to the extent that he chats with every other participant before the evening is over.

Parties involving close relatives and friends are most often small enough to permit a single focused grouping, and this arrangement seems to be the most popular. An aberrant instance from my fieldwork will help to illustrate the way in which these background features of successful gatherings are interrelated.

On the occasion of his birthday, Hr. P. invited his immediate extended family for an evening celebration. In all there were 14 guests, including siblings of his wife and himself, their children and grandchildren, and assorted
spouses and myself. In order to retain the unity of the gathering despite its size, the host pair had set another low table end to end with the coffee table and covered them both with a single tablecloth, so that guests were as usual clustered around a common locus. Hr. P., who values hygge and festiveness as highly as any Dane I know, attempted to draw the group together by rising to make a welcoming speech and toast, but it quickly became apparent that the usual sense of unity and mutual commitment to the gathering as a whole was not emerging from the interaction which followed. After refreshments had been consumed, he tried a different strategy, inviting the men into another room to drink and chat for a while—a common practice among his own age group. The younger men, however, preferred the mixed company and declined to join him and his brother-in-law, thereby undercutting his new effort to create hygge by splitting the group into two smaller sections. Most guests remained seated around the long table, but interaction was largely fragmented among sections of the formal cluster. Neither the hosts nor the guests considered this to be a “successful” party.

The structure of the evening’s interaction was a product of a number of factors in addition to sheer numbers. But in independent conversations afterward with the host and several of the guests, I found general consensus that the possibility for a successful party was rendered remote in any event by virtue of its size. As one guest put it,

> If they wanted to have all those people over to celebrate, they should have asked half of them one evening and half the next. Then it could have worked.

Whatever the setting of sociable gatherings—be it home, hall, park, or ferry—interaction clusters form, around a table if one is available. The characteristic proxemic density of these clusters, by which I mean the proximity of participants to one another, can be cast into relief by comparison with typical living room arrangements in the U.S.A. Americans typically use furniture to define a room’s perimeter, and once placed it is not considered movable for the temporary purposes of interaction. Consequently, participants generally sit several feet from one another and, except at mealtimes, are not focused on a common table. Moreover, if the number of guests exceeds the number of readily available chairs, the American response tends to be a stand-up cocktail party in which guests feel little mutual commitment to the gathering as a whole.

The value placed on hygge clearly bears on this tendency to cluster spatially. In its aspects of coziness, of relaxed enjoyment in the warm aura of friendship or in the familiar security of kinship, the value placed on hygge reflects this desire for closeness, physical and emotional. The chandelier which lights the area in which the clustered group sits is commonly the sole or the strongest light in the room, visually circumscribing the cluster and defining it as a unit. Likewise, the table around which participants gather unites participants in a common focus, both proxemically and behaviorally.

Eye contact constitutes a further mechanism of inclusion. Sustained eye contact, far more typical in Danish interactions than in American, is encouraged by the proxemics of Danish interaction. In this connection Byrdal (1964:23) advises hosts that “not-so-wide tables are preferable to very wide tables—for people come in better contact when the distance between them isn’t so great.” During conversation, sustained eye contact is an indicator of full involvement both in the immediate exchange and with the individual concerned. It achieves ritual status in certain traditional behavior such as toasting where etiquette prescribes that, as the individual raises his glass in the toast, each fellow participant be acknowledged by a slight nod and direct eye contact held for several seconds, before the drink is actually consumed. As the glass is set down, this ceremonial acknowledgment is then repeated around the cluster. In fact, where only two persons are involved in a toast, eye contact may be maintained throughout, even while draining the glass.

Even among fairly intimate friends or kinsmen, however, actual body contact is usually not actively sought in the course of interaction. A cluster may require that people sit shoulder to shoulder, thigh to thigh, but if sufficiently few
participants are present, they are likely to space themselves more liberally. This facilitates visual orientation and indicates its primacy over tactility. At the same time tactile contact is not necessarily eschewed. Two ceremonial forms are particularly common. In the one, participants link arms around the cluster while singing traditional drinking songs more or less in unison, swaying left and right in time with the music. In the other, again a two-person toast, two individuals link arms with their elbows resting on the table as they raise their glasses and drink from this position. Both cases represent expressions of mutual involvement and solidarity. More casually, individuals (usually men) will occasionally put their arm around another person’s shoulders (usually a woman) and hug them slightly in a gesture of affection. These tactile displays are predominantly side to side; when face-to-face, they generally involve only arm or hand contact. While some women hug others of both sexes front to front upon parting, this appears to be relatively uncommon and, in any event, limited to the very closest of friends and relatives apart from the nuclear family. Hand-shaking, on the other hand, is universal, with no differentiation according to sex or closeness of relationship. This last ritual of greeting and parting formally signals entry into and exit from immediate mutual involvement.

Clustering in sociable interaction involves more than a particular pattern of using physical space, whether “object-space” or interpersonal. Hygge is part of a larger orientation to the interaction as a whole entailing a variety of behavioral strategies. Briefly, it reflects the tendency to interact with primary regard for the uniting aspects of the situation, to cluster around a common focus, spatially, socially, and psychologically.

Hospitality, both as hostmanship and as guestmanship, centers around the two basic orientations of hygge and festlighed, i.e., the tendency to define occasions as festive. Thus the host will strive to provide maximum physical comfort for his/her guests in a setting which encourages relaxation and mutual involvement. The festive definition serves as a means of intensifying participants’ enjoyment by manifestly distinguishing the occasion from more routine activities and encouraging an extra measure of indulgence on the part of both host and guests. Both hygge and festlighed are nurtured by the relaxed thoughtfulness of host and guest. As a host seeks to provide for the comfort of his guests, so it is the responsibility of guests to come ready to enjoy, to have set aside external concerns for the duration of the interaction.

When refreshments are served, the host will expressively invite guests to partake of food and will subsequently offer a welcoming toast if there is an alcoholic drink. These ritual expressions which signal the sharing of food and drink emphasize the unity of the guests by pointing up their gathering around a common board. Platters of food are likewise passed from person to person around the table rather than servings dished up from a single location being passed to individuals. Where several courses or rounds of food are involved, each person is expected to share in each round in affirmation of the cluster’s unity. For example, at a New Year’s Eve party I attended, several rounds of small open-face shellfish sandwiches were followed by a round of little cheese sandwiches. In this last set was included one piece with crab rather than cheese—so that the one participant who didn’t like cheese might also share in the round.

Conversation, too, contributes to the atmosphere of inclusive mutuality, via implicitly acknowledged strategies of verbal interaction. A strong cultural value on egalitarianism, for example, is clearly expressed in such contexts, both in habitual patterns of modest presentation of self and in teasing sanctions directed at participants who appear to be taking themselves too seriously. This helps to prevent the potentially divisive effects of hierarchical structuring. Competitiveness is likewise discouraged. In both cases, negative sanctions typically take the form of humor, i.e., teasing and jokemaking directed at the offender.

Sociable gatherings constitute for members of a network both a major source of pleasure and an important means of affirming these social relationships. Because the success of such an occasion for a participant lies in the mutual enjoyment generated by the interaction, the focus is on
sustaining a maximal level of pleasure in an atmosphere of warm relatedness. Thus conversation tends to be general and inclusive, and participants visibly cooperate to shore up a weakening conversation or heighten the pleasure of a good one. Transient side conversations occur, but if the group seems to be moving too far from a common focus, the host or another participant is likely to introduce a new topic or toast, reinvoking all members of the cluster as a whole.

CONCLUSION

The proxemics of interaction in a sociable gathering thus has multiple aspects, linking what might be termed physical, social, psychological, and cultural space. The physical space in which interaction takes place is initially defined by the environment of objects, particularly but not exclusively the furniture which locates participants in a circle around the table. Accentuating the closure of the grouping in a home setting is the low-hanging lamp which casts an embracing circle of light. However, this object space is not merely a background feature, constraining or facilitating behavior. Along with interpretive and behavioral strategies, it represents acts of choice on the part of human actors and a bundle of symbolic messages which affirm or modulate interactive expectations themselves. In this brief essay, I have been able only to outline the communicative load.

What is critical for the present argument, however, is (1) the integral relationship of what we commonly term “settings” with the symbolic strategies utilized “within” them; (2) the complex interplay among communicative modalities; and (3) the implications of analytic dissection. The concept of hygge nicely illustrates the problem. As a concept it is objectified primarily by native observers who are sufficiently detached from their cultural milieu that they choose to write about “what everybody knows.” Yet even extended exegesis of its semantic implications, while interesting, does not account for its cultural significance. Only by treating it in vivo, as it were, examining its role as a nexus among multiple communicative modalities and as a pivot for diverse behavioral strategies—only in this way are we able to illuminate adequately the lived reality it is presumably our goal to explain.

Upon such a foundation, more detailed analysis of communicative process, proxemic or otherwise, may fruitfully be constructed. The absence of “natural” context, as both Watson (1972, 1974) and Hall (1974) recognize, is the “nagging, seemingly insoluble difficulty involved in cross-cultural proxemic research in a laboratory setting” (Watson 1972:449). Yet both have chosen to sidestep the problem in favor of rigorous control on observation. The danger in this choice is that, while variables may be more readily controlled under such circumstances, the underlying goal—that of understanding human communication in daily social process—may be controlled into inaccessibility. Similarly, exclusive focus on any single communicative channel or mode risks simultaneous obfuscation of the dense (often tangled) load of messages actually in circulation among participants.

Clearly, the simplification generic to analysis serves important purposes, not least in aiding us as observers to disentangle the complexity with which social life confronts us. My concern here is simply that the analysis remain grounded in the experience of participants. Hymes (1972:19) speaks to this point when he cautions that:

An observer may be able to obtain a wealth of information [for example] about the inhabitants from their house. What portion of its manifest features is information from them, in the sense of expressing choices they have themselves made or accepted, is problematic without inquiry, as is the portion so treated by receivers of the messages, present in the house in capacities normal to the culture.

Having established the interconnectedness of modalities within normal cultural contexts, it becomes possible to proceed with more specialized strands of analysis such as the structure and interrelationship of particular codes, the development of interpretive and behavioral competence, the strategies of code manipulation, and so forth.

The place of visual modes of communication in Danish life, for example, may be examined more intensively by research on such topics as the codes used in production of “home” and professional photographic/video media, personal dress, preparation and presentation of food, or furniture-making and other utilitarian arts. “Danish furniture” is renowned: non-Danish consumers often have a rather stereotypic image of its characteristics, and numerous books have been written about it as an art/craft form. The codes which inform its design, however, cannot be understood without reference to the complex cultural values salient to the designers, as well as to strategies invoked by them to realize, manipulate, and modify these values. Such a study would also expose the relationship between the codes used by designers and those used by the range of Danish consumers in evaluating and utilizing the articles produced.

That elucidation of visual or other modes of communication depends on thoroughly situated analysis is perhaps patent. Certainly this proposition receives extensive programmatic assent. What remains is to proceed with research oriented by it. It has been my purpose here to exemplify, if sketchily, one direction that properly contextual research ought to go.

NOTES

1 Many reasons for its neglect thus far can be adduced. Among the most central, however, are these. First, proxemic behavior is situated, context-specific behavior and as Hall (1974) has underscored, we have not developed adequate tools for analyzing contexts of human action. Second, most students of sociocultural process have accepted as unproblematic our cultural dichotomies between “subject” and “object,” “person” and “thing,” “action” and “setting.” Third, nearly all proxemic research thus far has been informed by a model of communication which obscures the generative dynamic of contextually situated behavior. (By this I mean the fact that social interaction generates, sustains, modifies that which we perceive as “pattern” in behavior or “social organization”—and that this is the dynamic of social life.) As a result we have failed to develop an analytic framework which adequately acknowledges the human activity implicit in the very existence and definition of “physical” features of settings and, at the same time, conceptually integrates such features (e.g., the structure of visual space) with behavioral process. Space is significant in communication precisely because its usage is communicative in and of itself and because it influences communication via multiple channels in its role as “setting.” These issues have been dealt with more fully in Friedman Hansen (n.d.).

2 The field research on which this report is based, conducted from August 1968-August 1969 and May-June 1972, was supported in part by USPH Training Grant GM-1224 and a Summer Faculty Fellowship
provided by Indiana University. All statistics are as of 1969 unless otherwise noted.

3. *At huske* is most commonly used for everyday acts of remembering or for remembering concrete things. For example, "Remember to write!" "He has lived here as far back as I can remember." *At erindre* frequently has an aspect of reminiscence. *Erindre* denotes recollection, especially of personal biographical experiences. One would be likely to *huske* yesterday, but to *erindre* one's fifth birthday. Examples of usage for *at mindes* are: "He reminds me of his father" (i.e., he suggests his father); "I'm reminded of that time we were together." Noting the distortion which tends to mar memories of one's childhood, Gjedde (1962:32) comments:

But about the fragments [of memory] that I am speaking of here, this holds true: one can never say 'I husker clearly'; one can only say 'I mindes vaguely.' But what vigor there is in this obscurity!

4. Danes, and no doubt other Scandinavians, are acutely aware of the hours of light throughout the year. Frequently described as "sun worshippers," they do in fact hunger for the sun during the many dark months of fall and winter. The newspapers and some calendars indicate the daily hours of sunrise and sunset, and these tend to be mentioned in casual conversation. The longest day of the year, the twenty-fourth of June, is blessed with 17½ hours of sunlight. By September twenty-third, there are an equal number of hours of light and darkness, and the light hours steadily diminish in favor of darkness to the seven hours mentioned above. The twenty-second of December is truly a day for rejoicing, since from this day the light hours once again begin slowly to gain in number.

5. *Uhygge* is literally un-*hygge*. But can mean this to the extreme: uncanny, creepy, sinister, or gruesome are among the word's range of meanings. Both meanings are implied in this quotation.

6. The Danish word *rum*, here translated as space, means also room. In the latter meaning, which is probably the more correct translation, the word implies emptiness and impersonality. A room per se could be termed a *rum*; but a room that serves a function would generally be referred to by a more specific name. The two main types of *rum* in Danish living space, *stue og varele*, represent respectively rooms in which one spends the bulk of one's waking hours—the living room and dining room—and rooms in which one performs more peripheral functions, particularly sleeping rooms. A hotel room, as in this example, would be known as a *varelse*, inasmuch as its primary function is for sleeping. In its transformation, however, it approaches being a *stue*—"a hygge*lig* place to spend time." According to Aage Salling (1964:58), a *varelse* is a room in which someone "dwell*. Thus neither the bathroom (badvarele) nor the kitchen (køkken) is a *varelse*.

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REVIEWS AND DISCUSSION


Reviewed by Howard S. Becker
Northwestern University

Bill Owens works for the Livermore (California) Independent. In that capacity he photographs the people of the community the paper serves, producing pictures they see in the hometown paper’s next edition. He photographs their homes, their yards, their parties and other leisure activities, their voluntary organizations and meetings, their hobbies, their civic activities, their children, pets, and possessions. He has used the entire his newspaper job gave him, and the equipment he used for it (a large press-style camera and fill-in flash), to make the photographs that appear in these books.

Our Kind of People concentrates on public matters, the meetings, members, and social affairs of a wide range of clubs and organizations—everything from Kiwanis and Rotary, through the Masons, Elks, VFW, AAUW and Soroptimists, to the Cub Scouts, Blue Birds, and John Birch Society. The pictures look very familiar. Both the lighting and framing use the same conventions to describe the same kind of subject matter as the high school and college yearbook. You see the standard shots of club officials, in full regalia, standing amidst their organizational paraphernalia (Figure 1). You see the standard “informal” shots of members serving meals, awarding prizes, dancing and partying, and engaging in the club’s characteristic activities (fashion shows, bingo, sports, whatever). You even see the standard shots of the carefully set table of party food, and of the guests eating it. If Livermore had a yearbook, Our Kind of People would be it.

I don’t want to give the impressions that these photographs are amateurish. On the contrary, they are artfully made, each image containing, carefully stowed away within the outlines of the frame, a large amount of information about what’s being done and the people who are doing it. Owens handles compositional details carefully and unobtrusively, so that we see what he sees without any “arty” mannerisms making us aware of how he directs our attention.

The analogy to the school yearbook is less apt for Suburbia, the earlier and somewhat more intimate book. The students who appear in yearbooks don’t yet have homes and families of their own to be photographed. Still, the pictures have that look of being casually posed, of being naturally artificial. People assume the stylized formal poses conventional to the genre (e.g., the dozens of family photos, in most of which the male has his arm around the female), but they do so with the knowing grin that suggests they needn’t be too careful about how they look because, what the hell, it’s all in the family, isn’t it?

Not all the pictures in Suburbia have that quality. A number of people hint at another kind of complicity with Owens, intimating that between them they know something the other residents don’t, whether it’s the sexual freedom of the couple with mirrors all over their bedroom ceiling, the alienation of the couples who say they are hiding (what?) behind the suburban mask (Figure 2), or (most touching) the young Caucasian woman in curlers holding an Oriental baby who says, as she contemplates her disordered kitchen, “How can I worry about the damned dishes when there are children dying in Vietnam?”

In either case, the people cooperate in making the pictures, secure in the feeling that those who see them will interpret them in the “right” way. They know that what they mean as a joke or say with irony or show tongue-in-cheek will be understood as they intend, because they know that the viewers are themselves. Just like the college yearbook, the hometown paper circulates essentially among like-minded people—if for no other reason than who else wants to see our Fourth of July block party or the annual bridal-gown fashion show of the Valley Christian Women’s Club (Figure 3). Everything shown will be judged by the appropriate standards shared between those in the picture, those who see it, and the photographer. In fact, the three roles are almost interchangeable. Hundreds of people and groups appear, Owens and his extended family among them.

If Suburbia and Our Kind of People exhibit, both in the way they were made and in the way people cooperated in making them, the characteristic features of a community creating mementos to be shared and enjoyed within its own boundaries, then we can understand the quite different reactions they have provoked since publication. The intellectual and artistic communities to which books like this are presented (and who surely furnish the bulk of the audiences for exhibits like the one at San Francisco’s DeYoung Museum in which some of these photos appeared) typically take this material as the latest highbrow denunciation of suburban Middle America. The publishers quote a New York Times review: “What we have here is a bourgeois hog heaven.” Both the pictures and the text (made up of people’s comments on their own pictures) seem to highbrow audiences to provide, naively, all anyone needs to justify condemnation of a crude, uncultured, grossly materialistic, foolish way of life. What else could “hog heaven” mean?

That reaction, however, provoked a counter-reaction among documentary photographers, visual anthropologists, and others who worry about the relations between societies and the people who come from outside to study and report on them. The reaction was not so much to condemn Owens as to try to settle the question of his intentions, apparently on the premise that the important thing was whether his heart was in the right place. Photographers and anthropologists share a concern for whether the dignity of the subjects of the pictures has been respected. Did the photographer allow people to present themselves as seems most suitable to them, allowing them to conceal what they feel to be inappropriate, unworthy, or unrepresentative? Or did the photographer search out hidden and shameful aspects of their lives, things they would prefer that no one else see? A grave difficulty for anyone concerned with ethnography of documentation arises here, for a complete record of a way of
life must necessarily contain what people would prefer it not contain. Otherwise, the project degenerates into public relations. It is often taken as obvious that one should respect the dignity of subjects, but that is only conditionally true, the condition being that the respect is for their full humanity, what is blameworthy as well as what is praiseworthy.

In any event, commentators have had a hard time deciding whether Owens has been respecting the dignity of suburbanites, as he has insisted, or exposing their worst faults to public ridicule (as has seemed obvious to so many commentators). You can't find the answer in the pictures or text. They seem neutral on the matter, showing what they show in a way that provides evidence for either conclusion. The clue to the answer, I think, is the resemblance to the college yearbook noted above. Insofar as the pictures are seen by members of the community pictured in them, the same community the photographer belongs to, the pictures do respect people's dignity. Whatever looks undignified will be understood not to be the whole story about those people, but rather the special aspect of oneself as "just folks" appropriately revealed to one's peers on such occasions. The pompous organizational poses will be interpreted not as clues to essential character but as a convenient convention with which to record materials historically important to the community. Community people can add whatever information the pictures lack, on the basis of personal knowledge and experience with those pictured.

Conversely, when people from outside the community, and especially people from a somewhat higher class and brow level, see the photographs, they add the missing information on the basis of second-hand sources at best, sheer prejudice at worst. The pictures are sufficiently selective in what they show that they allow all kinds of inferences about what is not shown, or could never be shown but would necessarily have to be inferred: the basic character of the people and the basic quality and themes of their culture and communal life. If you have already absorbed the standard intellectual put-down of suburbia (as I plead guilty to having done), it is very easy to find in Owens' book all the ammunition you want: men whose stomachs spill over their belts, presumably because of the beer and food we see them downing; women in curlers, in hair styles and clothing that seldom penetrate university life; homes furnished in quintessential "bad taste"; reactionary politics, gun lovers, anti-abortion fanatics, swimming pools, suburban sprawl, and Little League sports. You can also find the negations of all these, but it is easy to write those off (as some of the people themselves seem to) as exceptional cases that don't require revising our conclusions.

The point is that the pictures change their meaning when the viewer has no personal experience of what he sees with which to fill in the information that cannot be shown but must be inferred, no personal acquaintance against which he can check the global cultural and characterological generalizations the photographer suggests. This will not be news to those who take an anthropological view of visual experience, or should not be. If more people took that point more seriously we would be spared unending debates over such insoluble questions as the "real" meaning of ethnographic photographs like Owens'. Owens' pictures are both respectful and condescending, sympathetic and contemptuous, depending on who is looking, where, and when. Those who know the social world they picture well can fill in the full story that would prevent simple condescension; those who don't will do better or worse at this depending on the depth of their cultural knowledge and sensitivity.

The best use to which we can put Owens' two books is to stop worrying over these moral questions and treat them as the simple ethnographies they are. They contain a wealth of information, as Owens intended they should, about suburban people and lifestyles. They cover a wide range of subjects, although work, religion and politics are conspicuously absent. As ethnography, they remain pretty much at the level of cataloging culture traits, an activity that anthropology left behind years ago. The sequencing of the images, far from suggesting or embodying any comprehensive understanding of community life, relies chiefly on repetition or irony (e.g., a Nativity scene, live children playing the parts, with a picture of a group of anti-abortion pickets on the facing page) to provide continuity. That problem—their sequential possibilities of the photographic book to convey theoretically interesting statements—seems to me the next big problem visual social science must solve. The contemporary flood of ethnographically oriented work by photographers, of which these books are a part, will probably not be much help with that problem. In the meantime, they provide good examples of how to pack single images with large amounts of theoretically useful information.

Figure 1  "The Masons is the oldest fraternal organization in the world. We believe in God, Brotherhood and charity. We stick together and stay middle-of-the-road. As a Mason you are never down and out. There is always a brother to help you." (From Our Kind of People, © Bill Owens.)
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