

SYMBOLISM

Anthropology 1

SYMBOLS

- A vehicle for cultural meaning
- The arbitrary relationship between a 'signifier' and the 'signified', The connection depends on the social convention (general agreement) or habit.
- The connection is neither physical nor logical, it is only because we decide that the signifier and the signified are connected.

SYMBOLS

- To study symbols can involve studying:
 - the meaning of words
 - the meaning of actions
 - the meanings of objects in a culture.

SYMBOLISM

- Ways to study symbolism:
 - Examine a particular symbol and the different meanings that are attached to it in various cultures
 - Study the thing, idea, or concept symbolized and the different symbols used for it.

COLOR SYMBOLISM

- Red
- Green
- White
- Black
- Yellow

ANIMAL SYMBOLISM

- Owl
- Lion
- Eagle
- Dog
- Cat

TOTEMS

- Social groups or clans can be represented by a totemic animal
 - Birds
 - Fish
 - Animals

Number Symbolism

- One
- Two
- Four
- Seven
- Nine
- Thirteen

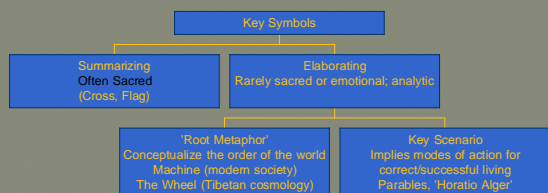
SYMBOLISM OF THE NATURAL LANDSCAPE

- Flowers
- Rivers
- Mountains

KEY SYMBOLS

- Each culture has its 'core' or 'key' symbols; expressed in the public system

CLASSIFICATION & FUNCTION OF KEY SYMBOLS



SUMMARIZING SYMBOLS

- The category of sacred symbols (in the broadest sense)
 - includes objects of reverence and/or catalysts of emotion
- Serve to compound and synthesize a complex system of ideas under a unitary form.

ELABORATING SYMBOLS

- Provide vehicles for sorting out complex and undifferentiated feelings and ideas
 - makes them comprehensible to oneself
 - communicable to others
 - translatable into orderly action
- Accorded central status in the culture on the basis of their capacity to order experience.

ELABORATING SYMBOLS

- Root Metaphor
 - Valued as a source of categories for conceptualizing the order of the world.
 - Examples
 - The machine
 - symbolizes modern, efficient, mechanized society
 - the wheel in Indo-Tibetan cosmology
 - symbolizes forms and processes of life, space and time
 - cows for the Dinka of Africa
 - cattle color influences vocabulary, and division of meat among members—reflects status in society, "the people are put together as a bull is put together."

ELABORATING SYMBOLS

- Key Scenario
 - Implies clear-cut modes of action appropriate to the correct and successful living in the culture.
 - How success is defined, and given that what are considered the best ways of achieving it.
 - Example
 - In the US success = wealth and power
 - pulling yourself up by your own bootstraps
 - single-minded hard work...



Rite of Passage

• Communal ceremonies to mark the stages of people's life; tell the person that something important is happening to their status.

Rite of Intensification

- Celebrated at points in the yearly cycle
 - Planting
 - hope for good crop
 - thanksgiving
 - Rituals as valued-end states and effective means for achieving them are dramatized for all to see.
 - Can include individualized elements of rituals: objects, roles, action sequences insofar as they epitomize the ritual as a whole.

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