

Culture



Marshall SAHLINS, *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities*, Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press, 1981. 96 pp., US \$5.95 (paper)

Pamela Peck

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realities, within and between cultures. He reminds us, again, of our Western predilections to control the unknown and maintain order in the creation of closed systems and to accumulate knowledge within tightly drawn boundaries. Inuit reality and knowledge is opposed to both principles; the primacy of visual and oral modes of communication and the sculptural and print forms of execution emphasise imagination, open systems and permeable boundaries. Halpin's article on the Sasquatch and the Tsimshian monkey mask is one of the most solid contributions to the volume; she is doing an archaeology of Tsimshian knowledge as well as a translation of Tsimshian conceptions. Through meticulous reading of the historical material, a sensitive rendering of the symbolic importance of the mask and an impressive analogic exploration, she concludes that the "Tsimshian have a quite different conceptualization of intermediate human-animal beings than the one we embody in Sasquatch" (p. 226), once again confirming that our knowledge, belief and action are different from theirs.

While the anthropologists are all concerned with locating monsters in the native's language and experience, art and myth, the scientists and journalists are interested in locating the reality of manlike monsters in a more empirical and measurable way. John Green, author of *Sasquatch: The Apes Among Us*, is a journalist dedicated to compiling and examining the accounts of those who have encountered Sasquatch. His contribution to the book is a careful reading of over 1,000 human accounts of eyewitness encounters. The scientists' contributions to the book, Gill's "Population Clines of the North American Sasquatch as Evidenced by Track Lengths and Estimated Statures", Kirilin and Hertel's "Estimates of Pitch and Vocal Tract Length from Recorded Vocalizations of Purported Bigfoot", and Bryant Jr. and Trevor-Deutsch's "Analysis of Feces and Hair Suspected to be of Sasquatch Origin", all perform spectacles of scientific measurement and analysis. These "estimations", "suspicions", and "purportions" leave us no wiser about the Sasquatch, but invite us to marvel at our human forms of analysis. For them, Sasquatch's reality can only be confirmed by examining a specimen, dead or alive.

All of the investigations in the book leave us wondering and give us marvelous food for thought. Are manlike monsters the most current victims of colonialism —where they are appropriated for our ends and not their own? In his thought-provoking Epilogue, Ames asserts "If monsters did not exist we would invent them, because we need them" (p. 301). Fogelson suggests that manlike monsters may be indeed the location of the much sought-after "universal"; that which functions to define what is essentially human by contrast and opposition with what is not. Until we learn their modes and media of communication, their lives and tracks will continue to

be grist for our competitive academic mill. Will the last battle for democracy and freedom be fought on their ground? It is a poet, Margaret Atwood, who explores this question and gives these last words to the Sasquatch, "We will go to another country... until the killers have become the guardians and have learned our language" (p. 314). Is this the next task for the apocalyptic anthropologist?

This book has been well-framed by the editors, leaving the power and ambiguity of manlike monsters intact. It is an anthropological must because it is good reading and good pondering; it is a journey from which one does return, albeit not quite the same.

Marshall SAHLINS, *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities*, Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press, 1981. 96 pp., US \$5.95 (paper).

By Pamela Peck
University of British Columbia

Sahlins' new book on structure in the early history of the Sandwich Islands kingdom (Special Publication No. 1 of the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania) is part of a larger research project designed to culminate in a three volume publication entitled *The Dying God or the History of the Sandwich Islands as Culture* of which volume one is currently in preparation. The present monograph is, in Sahlins' words, a way of looking culturally at history. Its presentation consists of four chapters, the introductory and concluding ones devoted to the theoretical perspective while the data in the remaining two illustrate his ideas about history and structure. The historical example is, as Sahlins allows, an exotic one, having to do with the response of indigenous Hawaiian culture to circumstances wrought by the appearance of Captain Cook as well as later European explorers, traders and missionaries.

Sahlins' stated aim is to demonstrate "historical uses of structural theory". In so doing, he examines the interplay between "structures of the conjecture" and the received cultural order. He also writes about "structures of the long run" and about "reproduction" and "transformation", and just when the theoretical language gets to be too much, he reminds us: "Basically, the idea is very simple. People act upon circumstances according to their own cultural pre-suppositions..." (67).

From a theoretical stance, Sahlins' concern seems to be that structural theory continues in its opposition to history. In his view, structuralism, based on Saussure's model of language, favours synchrony over diachrony and system over event.

“Some might think”, he writes, “that what is lost is what anthropology is all about”(6). For while structural linguists went on from Saussure to transcend the opposition of history and system, structuralism entered anthropology “with its theoretical limitations intact”. Sahlins argues that one can determine structure in history and *vice versa*.

I am somewhat puzzled as to why Sahlins, distinguished scholar that he is, devotes such excellent data and critical analysis to an argument demonstrated by K.O.L. Burridge in his *Tangu Traditions* well over a decade ago. In his 1969 monograph about a New Guinea highland people, Burridge writes about “the putting on of the new man” and explores social change by “entering a conversation” between Tangu narratives and other aspects of their culture. “And since a conversation implies a dialectic, such is the pattern of presentation and argument” (xviii). Nor was Burridge the pioneer in this effort to incorporate structure and history. E.E. Evans-Pritchard, in *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica* (1949), wrote what he described elsewhere as “one of the few genuinely historical books written by an anthropologist” (1961: 13). Indeed, that statement appears in a paper called *Anthropology and History* in which the author outlined the importance of incorporating the historical perspective in anthropological analysis.

Surely Sahlins knows all this. Perhaps he feels that the point has not yet been driven home and that another concrete example will help us to see the familiar anew. Whatever the case, I think that Sahlins, like Evans-Pritchard and Burridge before him, is making a strong case for a method to *describe* structures of *subjective* orientation to the world in order to better *explain* features of the *objective* world. In other words, he is presenting an argument, unwittingly perhaps, for incorporation of a phenomenological perspective in anthropology. (Evans-Pritchard’s writings, in general, reflect such a perspective and I suspect that Burridge is an undeclared phenomenologist.) And such an argument would indeed be a welcome one. For while the debate about structure and history has been more or less resolved, there is still much to be said about what might be gained from a phenomenological anthropology.

Carol SHEEHAN, *Pipes That Won’t Smoke; Coal That Won’t Burn, Haida Sculpture in Argillite*, Calgary, Glenbow Museum, 1981.

By Donald H. Mitchell
University of Victoria

Carol Sheehan has given us a handsome exhibit catalogue that agreeably manages to be much more than a simple guidebook. It is, in fact, a beautifully presented study of the evolution of a remarkable Northwest Coast art form —Haida argillite sculpture— from its probable beginnings at the start of the 19th Century to the present.

The study owes much to Wilson Duff’s insightful and creative mind as Sheehan tells us at the outset. From the title (reflecting his fascination with paradox) to the periodization of style developments (stages of “sense” and “non-sense” in the art), this debt is strikingly evident to any who knew Wilson or his work. But Duff wrote none of the text and we have Sheehan to thank for so faithfully and successfully conveying his imaginative interpretation of the art.

The comparatively brief and rapidly-changing argillite carving tradition of the Haida is presented as four distinct style segments, the first three of which are after Kaufmann (1969). Apart from a fourth, recent period, what is added to Kaufmann’s thorough exploration of style development is historical context for the observed changes.

The four periods (the existence of some overlap suggests they are really “stages”) are identified and described as follows:

Period One (1800-1835): Haida Non-sense. The carving on objects (mainly ornately worked pipes of various forms) largely conforms to the conventions of Haida sculpture but “images on these pipes resist interpretation by classical Haida iconographic conventions” (p. 79). It is argued that the articulation of traditional figures and other elements does not make sense because this was from the start a trade or souvenir art, not produced for the Haida themselves.

Period Two (1830-1865): White Man’s Non-sense. Pipes continue as the principal items produced, but they are now decorated with themes from Euro-American culture: ships, sailors, tailored clothing, and such exotic animals as chickens, horses, and monkeys. During the period, faithful replicas of western material culture (knives, forks, cups, plates, and flutes) appear, most often decorated with circles, compass roses, or floral motifs. There is an impression that in many cases the white man and his ways are being mocked. (It is certainly tempting to so interpret the panel pipe fragment illustrated on p. 24. In the manner of human figure and bird as conventionally represented on the traditional raven rattles, a sailor reclines on the back of a chicken).