

Aesthetic Conversations

The Linguistic data, which I call *Aesthetic Conversations* were recorded on Kitawa in 1976. The conversations have been first transcribed into a written form with phonetic symbols (IPA chart). I would like to acknowledge the remarkable amount of help I have had with regard to the phonetic transcription, from Professor George B. Milner, ~~as well as from Dr Francis Nolan~~ (Department of Linguistics, University of Cambridge). Both the Nowau and the English text have been computerized at the Literary and Linguistic Computing Centre, University of Cambridge. It is a pleasure to acknowledge here the help of Dr J.L. Dawson and his staff (particularly Mrs Cinzia Caballero) for the practical preparation of the texts.

From August 1976 to September 1976 I recorded the speeches of Siyakwakwa Teitei and from September to the end of October 1976, Tonori Kiririyei attended to the conversations, taking part actively in the discussion. The conversations were held in my hut, in the village of Kumwageiya, while those with Tonori were held in his village, Lalekeiwa.

I used an Uher 220 portable tape-recorder, with two automatic tracks and a double microphone which is part of the equipment of the recorder. I recorded 10 cassettes, Basf 70C, with Siyakwakwa, and 3 with both Tonori and Siyakwakwa. This means that the length of each of the 13 cassettes is about one hour and a half.

The texts here transcribed and translated, refer to the three cassettes recorded with Siyakwakwa and Tonori. I have labelled them with the Letters A, B and C.

The role of Towitara Buyoyu in the 'Aesthetic Conversations'

The order of speeches with Siyakwakwa and Tonori follows a linguistic and ~~methodological grid which has been determined by Towitara Buyoyu~~; with whom I had discussed in 1973-1974 a range of matters concerning the technique of carving as well as the aesthetics and the symbolism related to the graphic signs (g.ss.) carved on a lagimu and tabuya. Towitara in our conversations spoke Vakutan, the language spoken in Vakuta, an island in the south of Trobriands, from which came the Kumwageiyans. So, my own use of Towitara's terms earned the disapproval of Siyakwakwa, who in the conversations used only Nowau.

Towitara, who died on May 1975, had used in our conversations two types of language: a) a 'technical' and 'aesthetic' language, that is a language related to the technique of carving, as well as to the definition of some aesthetic concepts which can be related, for example, to our concepts of beauty, symmetry, balance,

technical - skill, descriptive
aesthetic - conceptual

schema, model, reproduction and so on. To define some of these he had resorted sometimes to both 'dead metaphors' and 'living metaphors' (Mooij 1976). The basic concepts of 'schema' and 'expression', for example, were defined by Towitara respectively with a 'dead metaphor' *mwata*/'schema' – and a 'living metaphor' – *migira*/'expression'; b) a 'symbolic' language, that is a language related to the symbolic meanings associated with the g.ss. carved on a prowboard. In using these two levels of discourse Towitara reflects clearly the sharp distinction which a carver makes between the aesthetic appreciation of a prowboard and its symbolic interpretation.

The Language of the 'Aesthetic Conversations'

The language of the 'Aesthetic Conversations' reflects the reasoning followed by a *tokabitamu* in carving a prowboard, as well as the complex relationship between: a) a knowledge of the technique of carving, and b) the ability to speak about that technique, as well as about its aesthetic and symbolic implications.

These types of insight are clearly distinguished by Kitawa carvers, and not possessing one of them does not prejudice the career and the reputation of a carver. For example, Gumaligisa Bela is a good carver but he does not know how to discuss the technique of carving or the aesthetic and symbolic meanings associated with a g.s., while Siyakwakwa is a good cutter of a *kula* canoe, a relatively good carver of *tabuya*, and an extraordinary connoisseur of the terminology and aesthetics related to Kitawa carvers. So, a profound knowledge of the language is regarded as crucial for an understanding of the symbolic meaning of a g.s., as well as of its aesthetic value.

Tonori who acknowledges in some of his remarks that he does not know Nowau, does not speak in the context of everyday Nowau but rather in the aesthetic and symbolic language relating to a g.s. on a *lagimu* and *tabuya*. Yet, the difficulty of understanding and using symbolic language is not typical of Tonori, but is also related to the complex relationship between a g.s. (non-verbal sign) and a word (verbal sign) which labels the former. In fact, when we talk in the *Aesthetic Conversations* about the symbolic meanings of a prowboard, that is, of a visual work of art, we argue first about the meaning expressed by a word, then we associate the chosen meaning with the g.s. labelled with the word. To make explicit this intellectual operation requires a remarkable capacity to understand the complex relationship between a verbal sign and a non-verbal one, as well as a profound knowledge of the symbolism related to the g.ss. carved on a prowboard of a *kula* canoe. This knowledge is typical of few *tokabitamu bougwa* such as Towitara, or of a very gifted mind such as that of Siyakwakwa. A young man, such as Tonori, even if he is a good carver, cannot be expected to have this depth of knowledge.

Thus, one of the lessons which can be learned from an analysis of the *Aesthetic*

Conversations is that the knowledge of carving a prowboard is separate from the knowledge of the symbolic meanings associated with it, and separate also from its aesthetic appreciation.

The texts

I have deleted from the Nowau text my own part in the conversations, because I judged it more important to establish clear sets of Nowau conversation than to 'correct' my Nowau which, at the beginning, was faulted by many lexemes borrowed from Towitara Buyoyu, as well as from Boyowa. The use of Boyowa lexemes sometimes caused perplexity to Tonori. The presence of Siyakwakwa, who translated all Boyowa terms into Nowau, was decisive.

My pronunciation of Nowau was also affected by alveolar (lateral/approximant) and palato-alveolar phonemes, which characterize Boyowa, than by velar, uvular (both fricative and approximant), and glottal phonemes, which characterize Nowau.

My remarks in Nowau are fully included in the original cassettes which are part of my Ph.D. Thesis (c/o School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London).

I have also removed from the text in Nowau all allomorphs, such, for example, as *lube gu* which sometimes is uttered *luba gu*. I have tried, also, to respect in both the interlinear — see my original Thesis — and free translations the use of 'dead' and 'living' metaphors, borrowed from Towitara, which I discovered were ignored by Tonori but not by Siyakwakwa. This obstacle made it advisable to make frequent use of the same metaphor, even if in a different context.

In the interlinear translation each Nowau lexeme has always been translated by a fixed correspondig English lexeme, avoiding all its synonyms, so that the computer could be able to read the frequency of each lexeme.

In the free translation in English I have tried to do justice to the 'sense' of each set of remarks, taking into account the context in which it had been uttered, together with the cultural background which characterizes the language of Kitawa carvers, as well as the colloquial form of their speech.

Symbols and notational conventions

Nowau text

- / a) plural, both in verbal and nominal forms, e.g. *i livala/sa*
- b) a verbal reduplicated form, e.g. *li/livala*
- c) a nominal reduplicated form, e.g. *bogi/bogi*
- d) between an auxiliary verb and verb-stem, e.g. *ta/maya*

aesthetics & symbolism related in language

... interruption, pause or colloquial form
 () 'reconstructed form', e.g. (to)-*kabitamu*
 link-vowel, e.g. *i sekaîmu*

SG, n⁰ Speaker Giancarlo, order of speech
 SS, n⁰ Speaker Siyakwakwa, order of speech
 ST, n⁰ Speaker Tonori, order of speech
 STO, n⁰ Speaker Togeruwa, order of speech

English text (free translation)

... interruption, pause or colloquial form
 () alternation, accepted by Nowau speakers
 (()) 'inserted' by the ethnographer
 [] referred to the context

Nowau Text

Conversation A

*SS, 2.

Avei kumila?

*SS, 4.

Bougwa ku reka? Bougwa ku vitoka tulosila biga mkosina katupoi ni nukwai mu. Gera, desi, yeigu ba nukwa, ké? Gera, biga mkona wara, yoka kaiga mu sitana, kaina i taboda mtona, ee yeigu ba li(Vala)/livala, bi reka ee igau bi mapu. I katupoiê mu, ee biga, avei tuta nû ku kauri buwa, mimilisi buwa ni sekaî mu, bougwa ku kauri? Ee bougwa ku mapu, mu teitu, avei teitu mimilisi buwa ni sekaî mu, bougwa ku kauri buwa ee bougwa ku mapu. Kaina bougwa ku nukoli kaina gera. Ee tuveira, aveira ni sekaî mu, nû ku kauri? kaina kada mu, kaina nubaî mu, kaina tama mu? Ee, igau, bougwa ku mapu, bougwa ku nukwa: aveira ni sekaî mu buwa nû ku kauri?

*ST, 5.

Tabu gu ni sekaî gu, buwa na kauri.

*ST, 7.

Kurina.

*SS, 8.

Tuveira ni katupoiê mu: mtona bougwa tokabitamu bougwa, kaina?

*ST, 9.

(To)kabitamu bougwa.

*SS, 10.

La dala?... kala kumila... kala kumila aveira? Ee amaiyaga ra? Ku livala! Gera mwau mkona. Kulabuta!

*ST, 12.

Kulabuta, kabata.

*SG, 359.

Good. Is it possible for you as for Siyakwakwa, to draw the designs first on the wood, with a pencil for example (with something that leaves a mark), and then to carve them?

*SS, 360.

Wait for me to ask him in a way that he can answer and tell you what you want to know. I'll ask the question in such a way that what you have in mind will be clearer. ~~Is it possible for you [Tonori] to give shape to the *lagimu* tracing the designs first, using a pen for example, and once you've finished tracing them, to carve them using a sculptor's mallet, so penetrating ((the wood)) and obtaining real, true carved designs, or not?~~

*ST, 361.

No, it isn't possible.

*SS, 362.

It's forbidden!

*SG, 363.

And do you know why it's forbidden to draw the designs before carving them? [an embarrassed silence, Tonori laughs, a little tired and nervous]

*ST, 364.

It's not possible to trace the designs first on the wood and when they're finished, carve them using mallet and chisel and then, after that, finish them off. **The designs must be fixed in one's mind** (all the work must be controlled, possessed in the mind) so that the design of the cry of the mysterious bird, and the carver-hero, must be fixed in my mind. They must be carved directly on the wood using the mallet and chisel. You don't trace the design first and then carve it. Definitely not.

*SS, 365.

At last! Good! But he asked you, and he wants to know: why don't you draw first and then carve? What does this mean, why is it so? Is it perhaps a prohibition, a taboo? Or what?

*ST, 366.

Who knows! I think that it's forbidden to draw the designs, it must be a taboo to be observed.

*SS, 367.

But what does this taboo mean? ((That's what he wants to know)).

*SG, 368.

If I'm your teacher and see that you are...How do you say?

*SS, 369.

Drawing, tracing the designs...

*SG, 370.

...tracing the designs, I rebuke you and say you mustn't do it, is this what happens? And do you know what this means?

*ST, 371.

If my teacher was here? If he sees that I'm tracing the designs on the wood, he would tell me that I must use (confirm what is impressed in my mind) a mallet to carve with — it isn't possible to draw, trace the design first, he would say to me, 'Why are you doing this?'. No, it really isn't possible, it's prohibited!

Conversation C

*SG, 1.

Now I'd like to know your opinion...Did I say it right?

*SS, 2.

((You say,)) '*Mi nanamsa*' ((and not)) '*mu nanamsa*'!

*SG, 3.

Your opinion about what you told me ...

*SS, 4.

...((You say)), 'Said to me'...

*SG, 5.

...what you said to me about the snake/shape of the *lagimu*. In fact, while in Towitara's *lagimu* it's possible to outline clearly the snake/shape of certain designs, like the cry of the mysterious bird and the black design of beauty, in

Tonori's *lagimu* it is more difficult, because the two designs resemble each other. Now I'd like to know, if a good carver like Tonori, who is very skilled in carving the surface of a *lagimu*, wanted to introduce new designs, would the snake/shape of the *lagimu* be modified? You answer first, Tonori, and then you, Siyakwakwa.

*ST, 6.

What's he talking about?

*SG, 7.

Listen to me, you are a good carver and also you know how to invent new designs, above all because you give far more attention to the face/expression of the *lagimu* than to its snake/shape, so that the latter is less important for you than the former. Is that right? Have I been clear? [Tonori is embarrassed]

*SS, 8.

He asked you, about the designs carved in your *lagimu*, if some are different compared with those carved by the old carvers. He also wants to know whether, if you should carve a certain number of new designs, seeing that you can do this because you are a good, a true, carver, the snake/shape of the *lagimu* would be modified. And if this should happen, and once all these designs were coloured, would the effect produced by the 'new' *lagimu* be beautiful, or not? That is what he asked you, and you should answer.

*ST, 9.

If I carved designs that were different compared with the traditional ones, and then colour them, the expression/face of the *lagimu* would still be beautiful, correct; the *lagimu* would not be ugly.

*SG, 10.

Is this what you think?

*ST, 11.

Sure! This is exactly what I think, and if I carved (made, worked) new designs on the *lagimu*, when I coloured them it would still look beautiful. It wouldn't be an ugly *lagimu*.

*SG, 12.

And what do you think, Siyakwakwa?

*SS, 13.

((What do you expect me to think?)) As he is a true carver, what he has said may be taken as true.

*SG, 14.

I agree, but I'd like to know what you think about it yourself.

*SS, 15.

Do you want to know what I think about the art and technique of carving especially when new designs are introduced, or when traditional designs and colours are altered? If the design of the cry of the mysterious bird is altered, or another completely different one is put in its place, when it is coloured, the effect of the entire *lagimu* will be without question ugly, incorrect. The same thing applies to the black design of beauty and the two lateral bands which are now coloured red. If, instead, he introduces new designs in the area of the *lagimu* which is painted white, the new designs are acceptable, because the combination of colours on the *lagimu* does not vary. What is essential is that the design of the cry of the mysterious bird (*weku*) is carved and cut out in the usual space ((just as it is equally important that the other basic designs should be respected)). It doesn't matter if new designs are carved in the area coloured white, because the effect of the *lagimu* will be good, beautiful, and its shape will be just as correct.

*SG, 16.

You have told me that the black design of beauty (*kwaisaruvī*) must always be carved on the right side of the *lagimu*, so as to balance the appearance of the whole canoe when the *lagimu* is inserted into it. And this is because, being black and completely solid, the design seems to weigh down and produces a sense of balance. Here if this design is not carved according to custom the impression of balance in the canoe as a whole will be missing, as in the case of the *lagimu* which Tonori gave me two years ago. I'd like to know if you agree with me on this point.

*SS, 17.

I agree! That's exactly it! In fact, if he cuts the two parts that stick out (the two butterfly wings) equally, it won't be very easy to tell the right side from the left side, even when the designs have been coloured. Isn't that the way it is? Because it is also true that if I cut the part that sticks out on the right, that is, the part that goes towards the outrigger of the canoe, larger compared with the left, the *lagimu* will still make the canoe appear to lie evenly, according to the rules laid down by the old carvers which are still followed. So that if Tonori wants to carve,

introduce, a new design, he can do so providing he follows the old rules of what is square and level. His new idea, in this case, is accepted, even if it could be judged not really 'correct' (positive) on the basis of the old rules. This is what I think.

*SG, 18.

And what do you think, Tonori?

*ST, 19

That's exactly right! In fact if I bring in a new design which is not in keeping with the meaning, for example, of the design of the cry of the mysterious bird or of beauty, or else of the two red side bands, or of the black designs, or of the snake outline itself of the *lagimu*, in this case the effect it will produce will be quite wrong. This will be because the old carvers established rules (guide-lines) which are shown by the designs of the cry of the mysterious bird (*weku*), of beauty (*kwaisaruvi*), by red and black. And I follow those rules, those guide-lines. But it is also true that I can find a design that does not matter much (all the designs that are coloured white) even if it has not been carved in the past. So that if I can think of a new unimportant design, I may carve it in place of the usual one. The colour effect of the *lagimu* won't be altered because of this, as long as the new design is kept to the white designs, even if they have never been carved before by the old carvers. But I must be sure to keep to the design coloured red and black.

*SG, 20.

All this is fine. But if this, for example, is the canoe [Giancarlo draws a canoe] and that is its outrigger, we have said that once the canoe is in the water it raises itself up on the right, so that in order to make it seem level the heavy designs, like the black design of beauty, are carved on the right side of the *lagimu*. In fact, this design, especially when it is coloured black, appears to weigh down and restore the line of the canoe, which becomes parallel again with the line of the sea (water-line). This is not achieved if one of your [to Tonori] *lagimu* is inserted in the canoe, as the design of the cry of the mysterious bird is carved both on the right and on the left; the canoe 'seems' to lean even more to the left. Is that right? Is the problem clear? [Embarrassed silence] Siyakwakwa, do you want to speak?

*SS, 21.

I have already answered, and I have said everything I had to say.

*SG, 22.

But couldn't you [to Siyakwakwa] explain this problem to him? Couldn't you ask the same question, but in a clearer way?

*SS, 23.

Ah! Have I got to ask him this question? [The tone underlines his importance in the conversation]

*SG, 24.

Yes. Make it clearer.

*SS, 25.

Giancarlo asked you if the black design of beauty (*kwaisaruvi*) is carved in the part of the *lagimu* which goes towards the outrigger to make the right side of the canoe seem heavier. In fact, he says that while the design of the cry of the mysterious bird (*weku*) is a 'light' design, being empty and not coloured black, the black design of beauty is a 'heavy' design. Look here! [points to Giancarlo's drawing] In fact, if I am on the beach and watch a canoe sailing toward us, I can see that it leans to the left. Now Giancarlo says that owing to the effect of the black design of beauty, which weighs the whole canoe down to the right, it seems to be level again, because on the left of the *lagimu* is the cry of the mysterious bird which is a design he regards as 'light', and is in contrast with the 'heavy' design carved on the right. So that, still according to him, he says if a 'heavy' design isn't carved on the right ((of the *lagimu*)), like the *kwaisaruvi*, the canoe does not seem to lie even in the water. That, according to him, is the reason why we carve the design of beauty on the right side of the *lagimu*. This is what he thinks and now he wants to know what you think of his idea. He wants to know, also, why you carve the design of the cry of the mysterious bird both on the right and left side of the *lagimu*, not following, therefore, the rule (principle) of harmony (balance). Now you should answer.

*ST, 26.

So, I must explain the reason why I carve on my *lagimu* two designs which are equal amongst themselves, that is two designs of the cry of the mysterious bird, unlike Towitara who carves two different designs, on the right the black design of beauty, on the left the design of the cry of the mysterious bird. The reason is that I copied my ancestor's designs in my *lagimu*. But the design of the cry of the mysterious bird which I carve on the left is fretted, while the same design is carved solid when it is on the right. So the two designs are not altogether the same, as people think. But it is also true that we carvers of Lalela do not carve a 'heavy' design on the right side of the *lagimu*, the way the carvers of Kumwageiya do. It must be remembered, then, that the difference between the design carved on the right and the one on the left comes from the fact that the first is solid while the second is fretted. Also, the part that sticks out on the right of the *lagimu* is much bigger compared with the part that sticks out on the left.

*SG, 27.

I agree, however, you must explain to me why Towitara, or his teacher (his uncle) felt the need to make a sharp distinction between the right and left areas of the *lagimu*, carving the black design of beauty on the part which goes towards the outrigger.

*ST, 28.

Do you want to know why the black design of beauty (*kwaisaruvu*) is carved in the part of the *lagimu* which goes towards the outrigger?

*SG, 29.

Yes. In fact, if you think that in order to tell the right-hand part of the *lagimu* from its left-hand part it is enough to carve out the design carved in it, for what reason, then, did Towitara feel the need to bring in a new design on the right, and, what is more, one coloured black?

*ST, 30.

I really don't know...[embarrassed]...I don't know how to express myself well...I don't know the language thoroughly, and then I can't express myself in a way that makes sense...I'm feeling tired, confused.

*SG, 31.

Don't worry...you only need to tell me what you think, your opinion. It doesn't seem so difficult to me. Don't worry. In fact for me it's important to know what you think because I want to check my notes (what I have written in my notebook), and see if I've understood properly, if we agree. Why isn't a design like the cry of the mysterious bird carved in Lalela the way it is in Kumwageiya? It's important to know why, to understand Towitara's ideas too. Do you agree with Towitara's explanation that the design of the cry of the mysterious bird is used to make the canoe seem more level? [Tonori is totally embarrassed, almost depressed]

*SS, 32.

I'll explain what he thinks. When the canoe sails the outrigger rises on the right while the hull 'fishes', sinks, in the water, so he is saying that the black design of beauty is carved in the part of the *lagimu* that goes towards the outrigger, that is, in the part that juts out, to make this area seem heavier, so that the outrigger seems to be weighed down and the whole canoe seems to lie more evenly (seems more stable). This is what he thinks (this is his interpretation).

*ST, 33.

[To Giancarlo] Do you think that it is really the way it is? Is that what you think?

*SG, 34.

Yes.

*ST, 35.

But the black design of beauty (*kwaisaruvu*) carved on the right of the *lagimu* isn't a 'heavy' design (is not used to make it heavier). You think that it is a 'heavy' design, but I don't think it is (it isn't used to make the canoe heavier on the right). It is only a design invented, introduced, by Towitara (the old man) when he arrived [from Vakuta]. So that now the black design of beauty is carved on the larger part that sticks out of the *lagimu* and the design of the cry of the mysterious bird (*weku*) on the smaller part that sticks out. But that is not why the part of the *lagimu* which goes towards the outrigger seems heavier and the left side lighter. No, not at all. In fact, once we are in the canoe and it is sailing along, the hull still leans to the left. As soon as we disembark, the canoe rocks a bit and then finds its own level, settles itself, but still leaning a bit to the left. So that it doesn't seem to me that the black design of beauty makes the hull heavy, but it is only a design invented, introduced by the old man when he arrived at Kitawa and it was suggested to the old carvers who later carved it on the top part of the *lagimu*. But it is also true that the old carvers had already established that the bit of the *lagimu* that sticks out went to the right, turned towards the outrigger and the smaller part on the left, so that the level appearance had already been achieved. So it's not that the black design (*kwaisaruvu*) introduced by Towitara makes it heavier, it's not that you need it to make it seem to lie more evenly. It should only be seen as an idea of his that came to him later ((an ulterior visual strategem)).

*SG, 36.

And why don't you carve the black design of beauty seeing that it has also been accepted by the old carvers (whom you keep talking about)?

*ST, 37.

Because my ancestor Kurina did not carve it. If he had carved the black design of beauty (*kwaisaruvu*) on the right side of the *lagimu*, I would have done the same. But he didn't do it, but he preferred to carve two designs which were the same. However, the one on the left is fretted, while the right-hand one is solid, so that I can copy the designs of my ancestor who acted differently from Towitara who introduced the black design of beauty. Towitara and the other carvers of the

Kumwageiya differ from us in that the black design of beauty occupies a bigger area compared with our design which, though being carved in the same space, is smaller and with less black in it. However, you must remember that the design we carve on the right isn't fretted like it is on the left.

*SG, 38.

And you, Siyakwakwa, what do you think?

*SS, 39

I think the same as he does. We don't know who Towitara's teacher was...perhaps he was from Vakuta, yes, I think he was from Vakuta...and he must have taught him to carve the black design of beauty (*kwaisaruvi*) on the right side of the *lagimu*. And the reason why Tonori doesn't carve the same design on the right is because his ancestor Kurina was not accustomed to carve it and he acts in the same way. All the carvers of Lalela act in the same way. They carve the part that sticks out on the right bigger than the part that sticks out on the left. And they do this because they know that the bigger part balances the smaller part, the left of the *lagimu*, and serves to make the whole canoe heavier. So that it doesn't matter that the cry of the mysterious bird (*weku*) carved on the right is small, not very noticeable. That is what I think, the way I look at it.

*SG, 40.

In essence, then, my idea that the design of the *kwaisaruvi* carved on the right to improve the balance of the canoe more, could be correct?

*SS, 41.

Yes, it could be correct.

*SG, 42.

According to you [Tonori] why have the *lagimu* and *tabuya* been put in canoes?

*ST, 43.

But I've already told you that while I was still a boy my ancestor died and did not have time to tell me everything I ought to know, and as he died when I was still a young boy, I don't know exactly what he thought about it. According to me, the *lagimu* represents the face of the canoe, and together with the *tabuya* serves to fix the broadside, so that the whole structure of the canoe is strengthened. If we didn't use the *lagimu* and *tabuya*, we wouldn't know where and how to fix the broadside of the canoe. The same applies if only the *lagimu* was used, because it would fall.

But if we fix the *tabuya* too, it reinforces the whole thing and we can fix the other pieces of the canoe, and the whole thing becomes stronger, more resistant.

*SG, 44.

What you are saying is fine, is correct, but perhaps you don't know what the designs carved on the *lagimu* mean (they hide within themselves). For example, according to me, '*weku*' is meant to be...

*SS, 45.

...the mouth of the mysterious bird...

*SG, 46.

...yes, while *doka* and the procession of *gigiwani* (the pale caterpillars) represent idea, intelligence, and for this reason they are placed inside the 'head' of the man, the hero. In fact, Towitara told me so, as he also told me that it is very important for a *tokabitamu* to know how to carve the design of intelligence, imagination (*doka*) — while '*weku*' could mean both the voice of the mysterious bird, and one of its eyes. And this is because you yourselves have told me it is impossible to see this bird in the forest, but you can hear its almost-human cry. The *kwaisaruvi*, on the other hand, could stand for an eye, because it is like the black design of beauty that the girls paint around their eyes with the black smoke of the coconut. The '*duduwa*' could be the design '*bulukalakala*' which the men paint on their chins and round their mouths, so could stand for a mouth. The '*karawa*', on the other hand, represents the body, the torso of the figure. The '*beba*', the two parts that stick out of the *lagimu*, stand for the right and left of the body, its arms. The '*kaikikila*' is its legs. While the '*tabuya*' stands for the nose of this face, which is moved to the *lagimu*. So the *lagimu* and the *tabuya* symbolize the face and body of a man. What do you think, Siyakwakwa?

*SS, 47.

That's right! That's exactly right! You have explained it really well, and I can tell you that I think the same!

*SG, 48.

And what do you think the '*weku*' stands for? The mouth, or else an eye?

*SS, 49.

A man's mouth. A man's mouth, yes, it actually stands for the mouth of a man!

*SG, 50.

If the *weku* is the mouth of a man, is it correct, then, to interpret the *kwaisaruvi* as the design of an eye?

*SS, 51.

No, I think that the *pakeke* (or *kwaisaruvi*) stands for the ears of a man.

*SG, 52.

Why is that?

*SS, 53.

Because you must realize that the *kwaisaruvi* is like the burnt husk of the coconut, and it really looks like an ear [indicating the design in Giancarlo's drawing]. It is also placed leaning backwards (it gives the effect of being moved towards the back) and really looks like a man's ear. According to me, it means, stands for, this.

*SG, 54.

And the *duduwa*?

*SS, 55.

According to me, the *duduwa* represents a man's eye. But this is just an opinion of mine!

*SG, 56.

And why is that?

*SS, 57.

...Why could the *duduwa* be an eye? You must realize that eyes are actually shown by this design. In fact, when a man makes his eyes up for a dance, he makes little white dots like those of the *duduwa* right round the eye [miming the act of putting make-up on an eye]. While the black is painted all round the eye, making a fish-shaped mark, and then right round that lots of little white dots are made, like this, right here [continuing to mime a man making himself up] so that the make-up seems just like a *duduwa*. The black mark is spotted with white, all round, like this [repeating gesture]. Yes, I'm sure that the *duduwa* stands for an eye.

*SG, 58.

And could the *karawa* stand for the body, the trunk, of a man?

*SS, 59.

Yes, the *karawa*, the fern, actually stands for the trunk of a man, look! [indicating his own torso]

*SG, 60.

And the *doka* with the *gigiwani*?

*SS, 61.

The *doka* and the *gigiwani* are the head of a man, that's it. Is there enough red? Is that all right? [referring to the drawing which Giancarlo is finishing with colours during the conversation]

*SG, 62.

So you agree that...

*SS, 63.

...that the procession of the pale caterpillars are the head of a man? Yes, I do.

*SG, 64.

Tonori, you speak now [Tonori is worried, he laughs nervously, awkwardly]. But you mustn't worry. You must only tell me what you think, in fact, each of us has different ideas about what we're talking about. Perhaps the way I look at it is different from yours or Siyakwakwa's.

*ST, 65.

I...please, I don't know what we're talking about...

*SG, 66.

...but you mustn't get upset! You must just tell me what you think, just like Siyakwakwa and I. And this is to see if what I've written is just an explanation of mine, or not...

*ST, 67.

I think it's exactly as Siyakwakwa has said. This design (this one here) is, how do you say? Ah! the design of the sea martin and we think that it stands for the hair of a man. The old carvers carved it this way, and I think that it stands for hair. This is what I think. In fact, these designs of the sea-martin (*Meikela*) were intended to be

the hair of a man and I think this is true. Ah! I meant to say the sea-eagles (*susawila*) because probably you don't know the term *meikela*, so they are the designs of the sea-eagles, yes, sea-eagles.

*SG, 68.

I know what *meikela* means, because I've already written it in my notebook, I know the meaning of the term, of...

*ST, 69.

...of-my-word...

*SG, 70.

...therefore the design *meikela* has the same value as the design *susawila*, they are the same thing...

*ST, 71.

...yes, this design is meant to be the hair of a man. While the wings of the butterfly (the two parts of the *lagimu* that stick out) where the *kwaisaruvi* and the *weku* are carved, stand for his ears, the ears of a man.

*SG, 72.

Ah! For you they stand for the ears of a man, don't they?

*ST, 73.

Yes, the ears, these designs stand for the ears, their meaning isn't different. That is what I think. I'm not lying. All that I know, I tell you, and what I don't know I will not tell you.

*SG, 74.

Good! But if the *lagimu* and *tabuya* stand for the face of a man, it is very difficult for an ordinary inhabitant of Kitawa, who isn't a carver, and often even for carvers, to recognize a 'face' in these two things. In fact, it would have been difficult for me too, if Towitara hadn't told me, and especially if he hadn't explained the meaning of the signs carved in the *lagimu* and *tabuya*. Why does a carver, to represent the face of a man, use these designs, which few people are able to explain? Essentially the *lagimu* and *tabuya* are 'as if they were a face' but they aren't a real face...

*SS, 75.

Yes, it's true that it's a make believe, a pretence, it isn't really the face of a man, but it's only 'as if it were'. The *lagimu* is carved as if it were the face of a man, but it

isn't, it isn't a real face, it isn't recognizable, as in the case of a sculpture. However, what the *lagimu* means to represent is the face of a man and his body, look! [indicating Giancarlo's drawing which has developed the designs of the *lagimu* into an image of a man-monster] You understand, in fact, that the design *susawila* stands for his hair; the *doka* and *gigiwani* is meant to be his intelligence, mind, head; the *duduwa* his eye; the *weku* stands for his mouth, voice, cry — even if it's the mouth of a bird, we still think it is meant to be the mouth/voice of a man; the *kwaisaruvi* the ears of a man; the *karawa* is as it were the trunk/chest of a man, look! Here! [indicating the drawing and his own torso] Then...what? Ah! The *kaikikila* stands for the legs of a man, when he walks on the ground or the floor of a hut, yes the *kaikikila* are like the legs of a man. This is what the *lagimu* 'seems'. But it isn't a real man, we don't look on the *lagimu* as a real man, but as an impression of him; it's a supposition (*utobobuta*)...

*SG, 76.

...what did you say?

*SS, 77.

...the meaning of the word is this: if I say, for example, 'Aku [it is a missionary-boat] will arrive tomorrow' and I just say that, 'Tomorrow Aku will arrive', my statement may or may not be true, and if tomorrow Aku actually arrives, it means I have told the truth. I have therefore said that I supposed; in fact, I haven't seen Aku arrive, nor have I certain news of his arrival. So that I have only 'supposed', and my impression must be confirmed by reality. So that when I say, 'Tomorrow Aku will set sail', if Aku really sets sail it means that my hunch is true. But it could happen that Aku doesn't set sail. The word *utobobuta* means exactly this. It's like 'perhaps'. It's like 'suppose', 'perhaps'. And what I suppose may be true or false. So that the *lagimu* 'might' be, represent, the face of a man, as it might just be an 'explanation' of him, the 'make believe' of a face. In fact, if you go to any inhabitant if Kitawa and ask him, 'Is the *lagimu* like the face of a man?' nobody will be able to answer, because they don't know. Nobody will be able to answer you. Only Towitara was able to tell you, and it's the truth. But he is a great carver, a true master-carver. This is what I think.

*SG, 78.

And you, Tonori, what do you think?

*ST, 79.

((Siyakwakwa)) has told the truth. Because the old carvers of the past did not make mistakes, and probably one of them, after finishing the carving of a *lagimu*,

must have looked at it and decided that it was meant to be the face of a man. In fact the face-*lagimu* looks just like the face of a man. And if the *lagimu* isn't there, the canoe isn't complete, it's like a body without a head. In fact, when I fix the *lagimu* in the canoe this really seems to be its face. You must understand that when the canoe sails at great speed, or is rowed, the *lagimu* seen from a distance looks like an animated face, it looks like its face. Yes, if the *lagimu* isn't there, the canoe really seems to be a body without a head.

When people look at the canoe, they rejoice if the *lagimu* is beautiful, as they rejoice at a beautiful face. And the fact that the *lagimu* represents the face of the canoe was not learnt by the old carvers from the present generation, not at all; they decided it themselves. When I've finished carving a *lagimu*, and put it in the canoe, I give it the last touch of colour, and it really looks like the face of the canoe. That's truly so!

*SG, 80.

And for what reason did the old carvers want to give the canoe a face? And why the face of a man in particular, or could it have been the face of a woman?

*SS, 81.

Of a man! [emphatically]

*SG, 82.

Why is that?

*SS, 83.

Because the old people saw the *lagimu* as if it were the face of a man, even if this is only a make believe. They thought that the *lagimu* could be the face of the canoe and so they carved it as if it was the face of a man who is made up for the dances, or some other festivity, with black and white colours, so that when people see him making up, they exclaim, 'Ah! He is painting another face of his face!' and in the same way a carver makes up, colours the *lagimu* with white, red and black, as if it were truly the face of a man who is making himself up. And looking at the *lagimu*, he exclaims, 'It really looks like the face of a man'. It is the face of a man who is making himself up. So that the *lagimu* is thought of as if it were the face of a canoe, which, in its turn, is seen as if it were the face of a man. But it's all a 'simulation', which is expressed in the words, 'It is as if it were the face of a man'.

*SG, 84.

But could the *lagimu* and the *tabuya* stand for the face of woman?

*SS, 85.

It could be...it could be either the face of a man or a woman!

*SG, 86.

And how could it be the face of a woman, seeing that it is forbidden for a woman to get into a canoe?

*SS, 87.

Yes, it's true that it's forbidden for her to get into a canoe, it's taboo. But, as you said, suggested, that it could be the face of a woman then I, too, say that it could be so. However, the people, the old carvers, have never said, stated, that the *lagimu* is the face of a woman. They only said that it stands for the face of a man, so that for us also it stands for the face of a man. In fact, women are taboo. When, for example, the canoes set sail, women are not involved, but stay on land. And for this reason they have never said that the *lagimu* stands for a woman. In fact, it is the man who constructs the canoe, it is he who sets sail, and this is another reason why the *lagimu* stands for the face of a man. You must understand, also, that it is the man who knows the canoe 'from the inside', when it sails, when it sets sail, or when it is rowed. And this is another reason why it is said that it stands for the face of a man. No, it really isn't right to say that the *lagimu* is the face of a woman. It is really the face of a man.