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

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

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

In order to frame an answer, to give a cultural account of production, it is critical to note that the social meaning of an object that makes it useful to a certain category of persons is no more apparent from its physical properties than is the value it may be assigned in exchange. Use-value is not less symbolic or less arbitrary than commodity-value. For "utility" is not a quality of the object but a significance of the objective qualities. The reason Americans deem dogs inedible and cattle "food" is no more perceptible to the senses than is the price of meat. Likewise, what stamps troubl-
ers as masculine and skirts as feminine has no necessary connection with
their physical properties or the relations arising therefrom. It is by their
correlations in a symbolic system that pants are produced for men and
skirts for women, rather than by the nature of the object per se or its
capacity to satisfy a material need—just as it is by the cultural values of
men and women that the former normally undertake this production and the
latter do not. No object, no thing, has being or movement in human society
except by the significance men can give it.

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

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

Food Preference and Tabu in American Domestic Animals

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

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

3. The discussion which follows is but a marginal gloss on the larger analysis of notions of
edibility and relations to domestic animals launched by Douglas (1966, 1971), Leach
(1954), and Lévi-Strauss (1966). See also Barthes (1961), R. Valeri (1971), and, on
certain correspondences between social and zoological categories, Bulmer (1967) and
Tambiah (1969). The intent here is not so much to contribute to the semiotic analysis as to
stress the economic implications.

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

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

4. Cf. Benveniste (1969, vol. 1) on Indo-European pastu víra; for example: "it is as an
element of mobile wealth that one must take the avestic víra or pastu víra. One designates
by that term the ensemble of movable private property, men as well as animals" (p. 49).
Or see the extensive discussion of the Latin pecú, pecúnia, and pecúlium (pp. 55 ff.).
American cities at will, taking their masters about on leashes and depositing their excrements at pleasure on curbs and sidewalks. A whole system of sanitation procedures had to be employed to get rid of the mess—which in the native thought, and despite the respect owed the dogs themselves, is considered “pollution.” (Nevertheless, a pedestrian excursion on the streets of New York makes the hazards of a midwestern cow pasture seem like an idyllic walk in the country.) Within the houses and apartments, dogs climb upon chairs designed for humans, sleep in people’s beds, and sit at table after their own fashion awaiting their share of the family meal. All this in the calm assurance that they themselves will never be sacrificed to necessity or deity, nor eaten even in the case of accidental death. As for horses, Americans have some reason to suspect they are edible. It is rumored that Frenchmen eat them. But the mention of it is usually enough to evoke the totemic sentiment that the French are to Americans as “frogs” are to people.

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

PROTEST BY HORSE LOVERS

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

“I think the slaughter of horses for human consumption in this country is disgraceful,” said protest organizer Richard Gallagher.

“We are not at a stage yet in the United States where we are forced to kill horses for meat.”

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

5. “Supposing an individual accustomed to eating dogs should enquire among us for the reason why we do not eat dogs, we could only reply that it is not customary; and he would
the domesticated series cattle-pigs-horses-dogs. All of these are in some measure integrated in American society, but clearly in different statuses, which correspond to degrees of edibility. The series is divisible, first, into the two classes of edible (cattle-pigs) and inedible (horses-dogs), but then again, within each class, into higher and less preferable categories of food (beef vs. pork) and more and less rigorous categories of tabu (dogs vs. horses). The entire set appears to be differentiated by participation as subject or object in the company of men. Moreover, the same logic attends the differentiations of the edible animal into "meat" and the internal "organs" or "innards." To adopt the conventional incantations of structuralism, "everything happens as if" the food system is inflected throughout by a principle of metonymy, such that taken as a whole it composes a sustained metaphor on cannibalism.

Dogs and horses participate in American society in the capacity of "subjects." They have proper personal names, and indeed we are in the habit of conversing with them as we do not talk to pigs and cattle. Dogs and horses are thus deemed inedible, for, as the Red Queen said, "It isn't etiquette to cut anything you've been introduced to." But as domestic cohabitans, dogs are closer to men than are horses, and their consumption is more unthinkable: they are "one of the family." Traditionally horses stand in a more menial, working relationship to people; if dogs are as kinsmen, horses are as servants and nonkin. Hence the consumption of horses is at least conceivable, if not general, whereas the notion of eating dogs understandably evokes some of the revulsion of the incest taboo. On the other hand, the edible animals such as pigs and cattle generally have the status of objects to human subjects, living their own lives apart, neither the direct complement nor the working instrument of human activities. Usually, then, they are anonymous, or if they do have names, as some milk cows do, these are mainly terms of reference in the conversations of men. Yet as barnyard animals and scavengers of human food, pigs are contiguous with human society, more so than cattle (cf. Leach 1964, pp. 50–51). Correspondingly, cut for cut, pork is a less prestigious meat than beef. Beef is the viand of higher social standing and greater social occasion. A roast of pork does not have the solemnity of prime rib of beef, nor does any part of the pig match the standing of steak.

Edibility is inversely related to humanity. The same holds in the preferences and common designations applied to edible portions of the animal. Americans frame a categorical distinction between the "inner" and "outer" parts which represents to them the same principle of relation to humanity, metaphorically extended. The organic nature of the flesh (muscle and fat) is at once disguised and its preferability indicated by the general term "meat," and again by particular conventions such as "roast," "steak," "chops," or "chuck," whereas the internal organs are frankly known as such (or as "innards"), and more specifically as "heart," "tongue," "kidney," and so on—except as they are euphemistically transformed by the process of preparation into such products as "sweetbreads." The internal and external parts, in other words, are respectively assimilated to and distinguished from parts of the human body—on the same model as we conceive our "innermost selves" as our
“true selves”—and the two categories are accordingly ranked as more or less fit for human consumption. The distinction between “inner” and “outer” thus duplicates within the animal the differentiation drawn between edible and tabu species, the whole making up a single logic on two planes with the consistent implication of a prohibition on cannibalism.

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

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

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

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

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

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

9. Moreover, there is to this notion of communication a fundamental base, set down by Rousseau in his running debate with Hobbes: “But when it should prove true that this unlimited and indomitable covetousness shall have developed in all men to the point supposed by our sophists, still it would not produce that universal war of each against all of which Hobbes ventures to trace the odious tableau. This unchecked desire to appropriate all things is incompatible with that of destroying all fellow beings; and having killed everyone the victor would have only the misfortune of being alone in the world, and could enjoy nothing even as he had everything. Wealth in itself. What good does it do if it cannot be communicated; and what would it serve a man to possess the entire universe, if he were its only inhabitant?” (Rousseau 1964, 3:601).
their meaningful differences from other goods that objects are rendered exchangeable: they thus become use-values to certain persons, who are correspondingly differentiated from other subjects. At the same time, as a modular construction of concrete elements combined by human invention, manufactured goods uniquely lend themselves to this type of discourse. Fashioning the product, man does not merely alienate his labor, concealed thus in objective form, but by the physical modifications he effects it sediments a thought. The object stands as a human concept outside itself, as man speaking to man through the medium of things. And the systematic variation in objective features is capable of serving, even better than the differences between natural species, as the medium of a vast and dynamic scheme of thought: because in manufactured objects many differences can be varied at once, and by a godlike manipulation—and the greater the technical control, the more precise and diversified this manipulation—and because each difference thus developed by human intervention with a view toward "utility" must have a significance and not just those features, existing within nature for their own reasons, which lend themselves to cultural notice. The bourgeois totemism, in other words, is potentially more elaborate than any "wild" (sauvage) variety, not that it has been liberated from a natural-material basis, but precisely because nature has been domesticated. "Animals produce only themselves," as Marx taught, "while men reproduce the whole of nature." 10

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

One is led naturally to exploit the double meanings in such terms as "fashion" and "fabricate": I take the American clothing system as the principal example.

**Notes on the American Clothing System**

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

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

---

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

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

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

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