

# Objectual correlates of culture: the meaning of the concept and the interpretive problems in archaeological investigations

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This article is a voice in the discussion about the concept of material culture. The author rejects the positivist division of culture into “material” and “spiritual” in favour of the more neutral concept of the objectual correlates of culture. This term refers to all the great segments and orders of culture: technological, and social. It also embraces the elements of the natural and or cultural environment involved. This approach is discussed in the centre of the actual discussion about the need to overcome the opposition between the pragmatic and semiotic approaches in search of a perspective integrating the approaches of various disciplines interested in the study of cultures.

KEY-WORDS: culture, material culture, archaeological culture, semiotics.

This article forms a supplement to my previous one on culture and its objectual correlates (Tabaczyński 1993 : 5–21), written as part of the discussion on the concept of “material culture”. The discussion concerns the content, extent, methodological and organizational implications (especially in the structure of Polish science) and also the cognitive status of the history of material culture as a specific direction in the historical sciences and the anthropology of culture. In that article – referring back to the work of Stanisław Ossowski – I discussed the arguments questioning the sense of the distinguishing of material culture from the field of a wider understood idea of culture. I demonstrated the doubtful heuristic value of such a differentiation and its implications. I also criticised the viewpoint – characteristic of positivist thought – of the divisibility of perceived reality (sometimes with certain formal reservations) as in itself an obvious division of culture into relatively autonomous fields, material, spiritual and social. According to this viewpoint, it should be possible to assign to each of these mutually exclusive fields of human activity the relevant group of evidence defined substantively and – according to the criteria of their objectual

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affiliations – “spatially” separated. This leads to the breaking of culture into abstract elements (Levi-Strauss 1958:6), and the investigation of cultural elements separately, to reconstruct their development and distribution. Less interest has been roused however by the different meanings given these elements by different cultural contexts. One may clearly observe a distaste for investigating the correlation between facts, for connecting into wider wholes facts of different nature. As is shown by practice, this tendency firmly closes the way to deeper investigation of the analysed phenomena.

This raises the question whether in historiography, scholars have not gone too far in the realisation of the reasonable postulates regarding the need to take to a greater extent into account the material instrumentarium and material conditions of social existence, and more or less consciously taking them from the methodological level (where it has its genesis) and transferring them to the ontological one? Has this overinterpretation or overstanding (Culler 1921:111) not led to an excessive isolation of the problems of material culture so conceived this causes from other aspects of social life?

My original article gave rise to a discussion, the general flow of which was presented in the “Kwartalnik of Historii Kultury Materialnej” (Sztetyło 1993; Topolski 1993; Ostoja-Zagórski 1994; Kajzer 1994). The problems connected with the history of material culture have also been considered in the context of discussions attempting to assess the influence of Marxism on the development of Polish archaeology in the period after the Second World War (Tabaczyński 1993b, 1995; Barford 1995; Kobylński 1991; Hensel, Donato and Tabaczyński 1986; Hensel and Tabaczyński 1983; Kmieciński 1987).

Discussion is still in progress concerning the means of investigation of culture on the basis of its material products, accessible to empirical observation, and I think it is worth continuing it for at least two obvious reasons. Firstly because it concerns the basic problems of the study of archaeological sources, and secondly because it defines the cognitive status and role of archaeology in investigations of anthropology of culture and the history of culture. The useful and pertinent initiative of the editors of “*Archaeologia Polona*” to dedicate this volume to the problem of culture creates an occasion to extend the discussion conducted within the context of the Polish scientific milieu.

## CULTURE: THE DISPUTE CONCERNING DEFINITION

Many of the basic questions in the humanistic sciences concern the concept of culture, and the development of the anthropological sciences as a whole have been described, not without reason, in terms of continually repeated attempts at answer-

ing questions of the content of that concept. There are almost as many serious attempts at definition of the concept as there are investigators involved in attempting to define it. These definitions can only with difficulty and only partially be ordered in a sequence corresponding to the cumulative increase of knowledge about culture. They are often an expression of *implicite* accepted ontological premises: investigative approaches formed by the university education, interests and personal preferences of their authors. Specialization, the conceptual apparatus and excessive attachment to the requisites of one's own craft lead to a situation where the "Law of the Hammer" (Kaplan 1964: 28) finds use also in the sciences about culture in a spectacular form.

As a result, we find a multiplicity of partial definitions, consolidating instability and unequivocal meanings of the defined term. We are also still far from fulfilling "the conditions of exclusivity, which is required of a definition, which allows the replacement of the *definiendum* by the *definiens* in all contexts" (Gedymin 1964: 32).

Despite the clear advance of investigations on many aspects of the complex phenomenon of culture, it does not appear that the difficulty which we have today in the formulation of a satisfactory definition of culture was less than that with which Kluckhohn and Kroeber (1952) struggled with nearly half a century ago. The multiplicity of approaches and the disputes over the definition have of course specific consequences also in the area of the subject of our interest here, the relationship between culture and its objectual – accessible to empirical observation – correlates. This relationship underwent characteristic alterations, which form a specific *cezura* defining the variability of understanding of the concept of culture itself in successive periods of investigation of the phenomenon. These variations are presented below – necessarily in abbreviated and somewhat simplified form. Their characterisation must however be preceded by a short explanation of what I understand by the term "objectual correlates of culture" used in the title of this article.

## OBJECTUAL CORRELATES OF CULTURE

The term "objectual correlates of culture" appeared in the Polish sociological literature, and became established there as a result of growing opposition to the differentiation of material culture from the general concept of culture. This position is in itself debatable. The differentiation as a subject of analysis, by a process of scientific abstraction of the material products of human activity connected wholly or mainly with his material existence is in agreement with general investigative principles. It is – in the opinion of Bucaille and Pesez (1978: 304) a desirable and sometimes even necessary operation from the practical point of view. Nothing limits such operations, apart from the requirement of their

heuristic and explanatory usefulness. It is here that doubts arise. The separation of material from spiritual culture is, as investigative practice shows, based on an arbitrary division of the products and activities of man referring either to substantialist criteria or to premisses that evidence of both two types can be “spatially” differentiated and linked with separate spheres of human activity. At the same time, the world of human products is basically “homogeneous and creative thought interlocked with material, adapting to it; the world of culture is a continuum and there is no fundamental gulf between the most abstract ideas and the creation of art or objects of daily use” (Szczepański 1970: 76).

Kłoskowska (1964: 73) also argues for the empirical indivisibility of material and spiritual culture, proposing to “resign wholly from that kind of terminology where it is not justified by ontological premisses, deliberately accepted by authors”. In her further works, the author uses the term correlates (or – referring to Karl Popper – embodied [materialised] elements) of culture with reference for example to architectural monuments, paintings and sculpture. She does this in the conviction that “the most important for culture are not the objects-correlates themselves, although they may be indispensable, but their creation, reproduction and reception, and thus always a form of activity and approach focussed on those objects-correlates (Kłoskowska 1996: 36). The concept of correlate is considered by Kłoskowska (1983: 28) as more useful than the concept of artefact-product. This concept may also include, as Ossowski (1966: 64) showed, elements of the natural world surrounding man, which may be in the same relationship to the cultural activity of social groups as human activity. Ossowski writes that “the Tatra mountains, Baltic Sea, or Vistula river have the same place in the Polish cultural heritage as have Wawel Castle in Cracow, or Chopin’s polonaises, but neither the Tatras, nor the Vistula are products of Polish culture”. The question: “what in a given social group communicates” is not equal to the question “what has a certain social group produced?” According to this standpoint, correlates can therefore be regarded as taking part in the symbolism as well as the practical activity of a culture, even though they do not through that become part of the culture itself. It should be added that this is a viewpoint which is not foreign to anthropological thought. It is *implicite* contained in many definitions of culture, namely those which accentuate the role of socially-embedded ideas, patterns, dispositions and customs, while all objects to which they refer have a somewhat secondary role, assigned by those socially-formed attitudes and behaviours (Taylor 1948: 109, 1973: 100ff; Kluckhohn and Kroeber 1952: 143ff). Ossowski includes precisely this external, as it were, aspect of the phenomenon in the concept “objectual correlate of culture”, thus not a component, but a correlate.

Ossowski saw the precision of – as he termed it – an “unclear” concept of culture in the separate treatment of culture as ensembles of attitudes, behaviours,

and the activities of a given social entity, and objects, products to which these behaviours and activities refer. According to Kłoskowska (1983:223), such an approach, *i.e.*, of culture as a function of human attitudes or activities, best aids the understanding of the relationship of the social and cultural spheres. This defines the nature of the relationship between the two spheres, allowing the explanation of the changeability of the “content”, despite the existence of immutable objectivized “form” of cultural correlates or objects.

The introduction of the concept of cultural correlates is regarded also as an attempt to reconcile the position of vulgar materialism and extreme idealism in the consideration of the relationship between artefacts as products of human activity, and the human creative thought which accompanies their generation: the first tends to reduce the thought in favour of the artefact – the second to reduce the artefact to thought (Kwaśniewski 1987:44).

Attempts at a fuller description of the concept of archaeological source itself may also be undertaken with reference to this concept of the material correlates of culture. The starting point of these considerations of archaeological source-knowledge (and thus conducted on the plane of pragmatic methodology) was the dynamic comprehension of that term (Maetzke *et al.* 1978:8 ff). It was postulated that “being a source” (being evidence) was not an immanent characteristic of just any object, just as being interesting was not an immanent characteristic of every book (Piekarczyk 1976:152). An object may however become a source of information for a particular archaeologist and in a particular investigation. This epistemological creation as a result of which an object “becomes evidence” may be regarded therefore as an important factor in the intensification of the investigative procedure aiming to increase the variety and quality of the obtained information – sometimes without necessarily increasing the number of finds (Maetzke 1986:202). It should also form an integral element of a dynamic conception of culture.

In the conceptualisation of sources it was not possible to ignore the concept of entities drawn from systems theory and already having a permanent place in archaeological thought (Clarke 1968; Klejn 1978). Each socio-cultural fact can be seen as an entity, besides which – depending on the scale of the investigated phenomenon – single facts may occur either as relatively separate entities, or as elements of more complex ones. Besides this, socio-cultural facts can be treated as either the state of a given entity or as identified changes in the process of passing from one stage to the next. The buried elements (parts, components) of an entity identified by the archaeologist would be therefore an observable reflection of successive states of that entity, demonstrating the realisation of the process – its trajectory.

The concept of the elements (parts, components) is treated here as closely connected with the correlate concept of the whole. The term “the whole” is

carried over – according to one of the manners of understanding that term suggested by Nagel (1963: 136-138) – to the whole of the group of elements connected with a network of mutual dependencies and connections. The term “element” however can mean both the individual parts (components) of the whole understood in this manner, as well as its “features or states, or processes, which they undergo, or lesser networks of structural relationships”.

If we are to accept this conception of the relationship linking historical reality with the material traces recovered by archaeologists, this correlation of the category of “part(s)” with reference to “the whole” may be applied not only to material traces, but also their characteristics, states or processes, and also to the relationships, dependencies and connections between them. These characteristics of products, states of the entities or their components observable in the widely-understood archaeological material may in each case be treated as significant for one or several variables of the whole entity. This entity cannot however be reduced to only one of the sub-entities (for example only the material or ideological spheres).

Each material correlate of specific entities of the social past (usually an excavated one) can therefore become an archaeological source for the investigation of that entity. This correlate may be both a product resulting from the activity of men, as well as an element of the surrounding natural environment which is in a detectable relationship with that activity. Only those correlates which from the point of view of a given investigation are in a relationship of representation with the investigated entity become effective (real) sources. It is this type of relationship, the recognition of which allows the archaeologist the acknowledgement that the object considered by him has a specified – and for the investigator significant – relationship with the analysed entity, as well as the formulation on that basis of at least one question (from a group of questions which interest him in a given investigation), concerning that entity. Such an interpretation of the representational relationship became recognised as a result of discussions of archaeological source-knowledge to which we refer (Maetzke 1986: 295), as one of the possible meanings of the relationship “entity-source” (the definition of the relationship of representation according to Piekarczyk 1976: 152).

The relationship of representation also appears to define with adequate precision the specific character of the relationships in each case between a specific socio-cultural entity and its archaeological evidence surviving to the present day and available for detection and investigation by archaeologists – excavated correlates of that entity. Such evidence is above all products of that entity. These are groups of artefacts, half-products and waste (from production and consumption). These groups of items – reduced and sometimes considerably distorted as a result of the operation of post-depositional factors are preserved either in their primary context or redeposited. Within the scope of this evidence however also fall – in accordance with our viewpoint – also certain elements of the surroundings of the

investigated entity and both of its natural and cultural surroundings. In the first case we are concerned with the natural environment which was involved in the symbolic activity of the group (for example the significance of the Tatras, Vistula and Baltic in Polish culture mentioned by Ossowski), either their practical activity, leaving detectable traces in their vicinity (ecofacts) – for example faunal material, especially bones, with their potentially rich, multilevel resources of information (Marciniak 1996). In the second case we are dealing with material correlates of the relationships linking the investigated society and its culture with its geographical (means of circulation of wealth and payment, imports, loot) and historical neighbours (sacral and lay architecture, urban layouts, road and irrigation networks, as well as the field divisions of Antiquity used in the early and later Middle Ages).

Archaeological evidence (excavated correlates of cultures no longer existing) consists therefore of just fragments of that which – as physically and relatively permanently preserved correlates of past differentiated, variable and transient events – today available for empirical observation. It is a specific and fragmentarily preserved, usually partly effaced and difficult to decipher, but detectable and stable record of that fleeting past. As Binford (1981:28) suggests – it remains in relationship to that past reality in the same relationship as occurs between objects and events in the naturalistic conception of Whitehead, and in particular his theory of events:

“whatever passes” – he writes – “is an event. But we find entities in nature which do not pass [...] factors in nature which are without passage will be called objects [...] recognition is reflected in the intellect as comparison [...] The recognized objects of another event are compared with the recognized objects of another event [...] but it is not the events which are compared. For such an event is essentially unique and incomparable. What are compared are the objects and relations of objects situated in events” (Whitehead 1964: 124–5).

The relationship object-entity is not one which is immutable, established once and for ever. It is a function – dependent each time on the actual condition, of socially conditioned disposition, behaviour and activity concerning that object. These conditions themselves undergo change. Objects, because of their permanence, thus possess characteristics which are opposed to the characteristics of the changeable and impermanent events which make up the socio-cultural process. In opposition to the stream of changing events, material objects represent stability (self-identity) and unchangability (see also Kopiciecki 1976). There are factors which may return and repeat themselves, be “here and now” but also “there and later”.

Objects retain therefore the characteristic of their self-identity, independently of their relationship with events. In this the object changes only its meaning, it continually forms different relationships with successive events, but in effect remains still the same element – a specific type of immutable (Jusiak 1992: 85). On

the one hand we have therefore enduring objects and on the other events as the basic elements of the process which is nature. The event is at the same time “an individual group of real things” (Whitehead 1989: 209, 286, 292 Polish edition; cf. 1988 ed. and Jusiak 1992). For the archaeologist the basic question is identification of those eternal objects and connecting them with events. This identification forms a link filling the gap between past and present. They supply the “durables” which serve as the basis for the recognition of events, making possible their analysis, and investigation of the process of passing from one event to another (Binford 1981: 28).

## THE PRAGMATIC APPROACH – THE SEMIOTIC APPROACH

Until about the middle of the last century the term “culture” was used almost exclusively to refer to the spiritual sphere of human activity, to the products of the human mind, or psyche. In this period, the material form of these works was – according to the accepted perspective – something of second-rate importance; the growing collections of artefacts from the past remained in the shadows, beyond the scope of culture perceived in this manner, for the investigator, the intention of the creator of the item embodying the products of human thought. As Pomian (1995: 8) accurately formulated it: “The understanding of the work is about rediscovering the intention of its author, which the observer achieves through recreating that thought within himself. The correct manner of investigating culture is through hermeneutics, and the favoured objects are texts, especially literary and philosophical ones. The exemplary historian of culture is above all, if not totally, a philologist...”

The recognition of the material aspects of culture and the cognitive consequences of this appear only in the 1830s and this occurred mainly as a result of archaeological discoveries. A key role in the reaching of a fuller understanding of aspects of culture disregarded until then was played by two cognitive achievements. The first of them was the demonstration, based on specific and copious material collected in the National Museum in Copenhagen, the sequence of prehistoric cultures: the Stone, Bronze and Iron Ages; the second, the accurate reading of the sequence of silts in the Somme valley which contained copious flint tools and remains of extinct fauna, which supplied empirical proof of the existence of “Pre-diluvial” forms of hominids.

Scholars of the second half of the nineteenth century were moved by the discovery of the distant antiquity of Man. Stimulated by advances in the natural sciences, they wished to create the basis for the development of archaeology as an independent scientific discipline, free from the traditions of antiquity which weighed it down (collectors, antiquarianism, *dilettanti*). Typology, Schnapp

(1993: 321) writes, frees archaeology from the onerous dependence on written sources; technology from the dilemma of Nature/Culture, and stratigraphy from the paradox local/universal:

“Typology ascribes the investigated object (product) in an identifiable timespan and changes it into evidence of the past, just as technology establishes that which is “natural” and that which is “cultural” in each material product, allowing the ascription of each of the products a specific function. Stratigraphy brings added support to such a construction: an object enters the earth (est enfoui) as a result of the depositional process, which is both local and universal. Each object, each ancient artefact (monument) inevitably finds its place in the general stratificational process which absorbs it (qui se confond) and connects it with the history of our globe” (Schnapp *loc. cit.*).

The observation of the material aspects of culture introduces at the same time a new element to the understanding of history as the counterpart of historical processes (*res gestae*) and the fact that this material aspect may become the subject of systematic scientific observation widens and radically changes the understanding of history as the relation of these processes. *Historia rerum gestarum* may from now on be built not only on the basis of written records or traditions, but also on the basis of the objectual equivalents of culture. All that man creates, alters, builds, collects, deposits and leaves behind after him becomes a potential source of information.

This dual character of the sources gives an entirely new dimension to historical cognition. The history of the human species is written from now on in that which is material, concrete and observable today in (or on) the earth – complexes of monuments, spatial arrangement of towns, cemeteries, buildings – the anthropogenic changes in the natural environment detectable by natural scientists, as well as in that which is not material, written sources, traditions. Narration extends beyond the confines of chronological, territorial and even material barriers. Excavated data inform us about – to refer to the terminology of Lévi-Strauss – not only those manifestations of which we are aware, but also those of the conditioning of social life in all epochs and on all continents of which we are unconscious.

In this period it is the visible products of man, and their differentiation and spatial distribution which are the centre of attention. The preferred subject of investigation – utilising where applicable statistical methods – are technology and economy, division of material wealth and its exchange. The prehistorian or medieval archaeologist becomes an exemplary historian of culture, as does the anthropologist bent on studying the material equipment of a primitive society, on the analysis of their economy; and also later (from the 1920s) the historian of material culture. An expression of these preferences is the creation of institutions specialising in the investigation of the material conditions of social existence

(Russia 1919, Poland 1953, and later also Italy and Austria). These institutes had a multidisciplinary character and contained archaeologists, ethnographers and historians.

In the new historiography, material culture ceases to be a “rhetoric of curiosities”, supplementing – like an anecdote or representation the discourse on the material conditions of social existence. In the “*Annales*” school the resources of material evidence are treated as equal to the written sources and the sphere of production, exchange, consumption and everyday existence forms an exceptional component of all formulations of global history. Braudel’s concept of the *longue durée* refers to this sphere of existence, the sphere of daily contacts of man with the natural realities surrounding him, to these “layers of slow history”, “almost without motion” (Braudel, Polish edn. 1971 : 58). The material world becomes, in this approach, a particular kind of foundation, received reality, the “genesis” – a starting-point of all further phenomena (Wrzosek 1995 : 107). This raises the question, however, whether there exists an area of historical reality which can justifiably be differentiated and which would be “material” in the full meaning of the word? Is it possible to justify and maintain a positivist division of culture into “material” and “spiritual” together with its theoretical and practical implications? Formulation of such questions as well as attempts to answer them are the genesis of the new current in the discussion on the concept of culture.

This current is the semiotic approach to culture inspired by the works of de Saussure. This period is opened by interpretations of Lévi-Strauss of these works beginning from the 1940s. It meant the rejection of the justifiability of the division of the phenomenon into material and spiritual, in particular the questioning of the premise that this division is at once exhaustive and exclusive (that is, such that a given phenomenon belongs either to one or the other category) and its application a desirable operation. From the point of view of the semiotic approach to culture, the heuristic and explicatory usefulness of such a classification seems in principle doubtful.

From the semiotic point of view, language is an abstract supra-individual creation – in the more general phenomenon of speech. It is a system of socially generated and recognised signs and rules governing their use in concrete, individual acts of speech. Language is “at the same time intellectual and sensual, mental and physical, and these two sides are as indivisible as the two sides of a piece of paper” (Pomian 1995 : 9).

There are basic analogies between language understood in this way and other fields of culture (Lévi-Strauss 1958; Polish edn. 1970). They have a structure which allows their analysis using the conceptual apparatus and methods used in modern linguistics. Culture, including human products, in this approach is the sum of a system of signs (Pomian *loc. cit.*). An especial subject of analysis are

“structured groups of differences” – a sign (*znak*) is nothing else than the sum of differences which exist between it and other signs. “In language, as in any other semiotic system, that which constitutes a sign is that which differentiates it” (de Saussure 1991).

In this approach the individual has a passive role and the observable states of social and cultural reality are treated as externally-visible expression (symptom – *oznaka*) an unconscious structure and/or universal property of human thought (Hodder 1995 : 69). It is not the individual which gives the structure a sense, within which he lives, but the structure defines the sense of his life; “the individual is passive... determined by structures and/or universals of the human mind” (Hodder 1986 : 48). These structures – in the approach of Lévi-Strauss are the source of the observable relationships, and thus are regarded as closely connected to the facts and primary to social order.

The attention of investigators should be therefore concentrated on not only the observable state of things, but also to the relationships in attempting to arrange them into ordered and – if possible – closed system of binary opposition. The accent has here been shifted from the factual category, that is, things which before had been investigated as such and in themselves (*in se e per se*), to the relationships which may be regarded as just as “real” as the things. It is necessary to repeat that we should pay sufficient attention in the present discussion to this a change in perspective. The development of the social sciences has frequently in the past been retarded by a misunderstanding of the relationship between that which is “real” and that which is “concrete” (Kluckhohn and Kroeber 1952 : 62).

In connection with this, the proper manner of investigating culture in many disciplines has to a greater extent become the structuralist method, and models of such modes of study of culture by methods which are not purely pragmatic are the linguist, the cultural anthropologist, or semiologist – rather than the archaeologist, who is loathe to reject the positivist and materialist treatment of the subject of his investigations. This is why structural analysis reached archaeological analyses with some delay, and its influence was weaker and less obvious than in other fields of study (J.V. Neustupný 1958; E. Neustupný 1993). Ian Hodder (1986 : 36) speaks plainly of this, “the dominant archaeological perspective of science was antithetical to structuralism” According to Hodder, there were three reasons for this:

- an exceptional variety of structuralist approaches (from de Saussure, through Chomsky and Piaget to Lévi-Strauss), resulting from different sources of inspiration, which disintegrates the unity of a structuralist perspective.
- the similarity between systems analysis and structuralism which has meant that many structuralist approaches in archaeology could fit within processual archaeology.
- the difficulty in acceptance by traditional archaeology of the decidedly antipositivist character of structuralism (Hodder 1986 : 34–5).

It seems that among the reasons for this distancing by archaeology from structuralism we should see the fact that the concept of structure – which is underlined especially by Lévi-Strauss (1958:305) “does not refer to empirical reality, but to the construction of a model on its basis”. In research practice, the concentration of attention on structure – with the imprecise definition of its connection with the historical process – leads to the removal or rather exclusion from the scope of investigation of a question of greatest importance for archaeology, which is the question of the mutual relationship between the relationships themselves, that is the signs, and their carriers (Pomian 1995:10). He further writes that:

“this question was present in linguistics as concerning the relationship between phonology to phonetics. In general however, there is no place for it, as there is none for the carriers themselves in semiotic ontology, which concerns itself only with relationships and systems of relationships. Thus the limitations and inadequacy of the semiotic approach when the investigated subject cannot be reduced to the level of signs and where it is necessary to “introduce through the back door that which had been thrown-out of the front door” the carriers of signs, as occurs in the case of the plastic arts and architecture or all semiophores, where the carrier is the human body”.

The unjustified lack of concern for the problem of carriers has two other implications, especially interesting for archaeologists. They create on one hand the impression of a relationship between the semiotic approach to culture and the spiritualist approach – where both approaches oppose the pragmatic approach and “one concerns itself with signs without carriers; while the other the carriers without the signs” (Pomian 1995:11). On the other hand, the investigation of objects merely as signs gives the structuralist approach an evidently ahistorical character (Hodder 1986:48). This type of approach somewhat undermines the basic assumption, the subject and aims of archaeological investigation, which is a discipline linking within itself two equally important and mutually supplementary perspectives – the anthropological and historical. Historicity is determined by the very character of archaeological material itself. Each object studied has come to us along a journey through time and space. Its place and role in the relationships of production, exchange, social relationships and consumption may have changed. It is possible also for several classes of objects to have changed their socio-cultural and archaeological contexts. Apart from this, part of the material remains excluded from the depositional process – this concerns especially semiophores, that is visible items which are carriers of meaning (Pomian 1995:4; see the model of Schiffer 1976).

The track through time and space and the contextual data of each object of archaeological study (individual artefact, groups of artefacts or assemblage of

artefacts) are particularly important. The relationship: object <-> socio-cultural entity is not, we should remember stable, fixed once and for ever. It is always a function of changable human dispositions, behaviours and activities in respect to the object. These alter and actualise the function of the objects and the significance which constitutes them. Thus also if archaeology is to make possible the understanding and give meaning to the relicts (monuments) of the past surrounding modern man, like other disciplines concerned with the history of culture, it must – as Pomian (1995 : 11) postulates – overcome the opposition between the semiotic and pragmatic approaches, that is between theory and history.

### THE PERSPECTIVE OF INTEGRATION

“Experience gives us access not to abstractions, that is signs and systems of signs, but visible objects – and among them semiophores. As in the case of all visible objects, as here, it is necessary from the start to examine carefully how they are situated in geographical and social space. First the visible, followed by the invisible. First the form, and then the function. First the present and then the past [...] thus first description, and then theory and history” (Pomian *loc. cit.*).

In the proposed approach, to theory belong; the problem of the relationship between the signs and the objectual world; the problem of the place of semiophores among objects in general; the problem of the relationship between the objects and their receivers and finally the problem of the relationship between semiophores and that which is invisible, “relationships the acknowledgement of which by the receivers as real, makes just such a visible semiophore from any given object and the designation of which is equal to giving it such and not another meaning” (Pomian *loc. cit.*).

In differentiation however from the analysis of systems of signs, in the investigations of semiophores – Pomian emphasises – a necessary supplement to theory is history. Semiophores – just as do all other objects – undergo development (redefinition) with time and movement in space. At successive phases of their journey through time (and sometimes space) not only individual objects, but also types of objects undergo changes, the mechanisms of which have been so exhaustively and suggestively described in the archaeological literature by Clarke (1968 : 187ff). The social and cultural contexts may undergo change, as also may the factors (which are difficult to generalise on) of individual and group behaviour of the people producing and utilising the objects and which give the object function and meaning. What is more important however, this journey, which Pomian (1995 : 12) appears to especially clearly express “leaves traces in the memories of people or in other semiophores and by this takes part in the creation of its meaning.”

The postulates of Pomian, a theoretician and historian of culture, and author of works regarded as laying the foundations for a new discipline of knowledge of culture (1987; 1995; 1996a; 1996b) have been given much attention here as having significance for the subject discussed in this article. A central question is the place and role of objects/human products in the range of the “great segments of human culture” differentiated by Kroeber (1973: 395) – specific “orders”: technological, cultural and social. The first of these segments “concerned with reality” is characterised by continuity, cumulativeness, and the possibility of spreading by diffusion. The second “concerned with values” is permanently creative and “always begins again from the beginning”, in contrast to the third segment, which in some ways links the first two, which “does not seem to be specifically cumulative, nor creative” (Kroeber 1973: 368).

In the excavated archaeological material of course all of these orders designated by Kroeber (technological, social, cultural) can be detected, though not always sufficiently clearly and in a direct manner. We find in this material evidence of behaviour and symbolic artefacts, that is which represent “something beyond themselves, transmitting a meaning or expressing a value, substituting for or presenting something in accordance with the system of communication agreed between those who use them” (Kłoskowska 1962: 27). We find also evidence of activities and “direct objects”, that is those which “do not represent anything other than themselves, and are not linked with any conventional significance” (*ibidem*), but play a decisive role in the satisfaction of the biological needs of man. It is they which take part in the process of the modification of the elements of the surrounding natural environment into means for satisfying human biological needs.

The whole of the first group of transmissions is part of culture: “beyond culture there are no meanings or values” (*ibidem*), while the second – being a permanent and necessary basis for social life – remains to a great degree excluded from the effects of cultural conditioning. These groups should not be treated as mutually exclusive “spatial” divisions of human activity, but rather – in agreement with the position which Kroeber (1959: 166) proposes – as centres or axes about which are grouped phenomena differentiated according to selected aspects. The division of sources is not in many cases conducted according to substantialist principles. It is not based on the classification of specific behaviours and their total results, but on the differentiation of their individual aspects in connection with the system of values which we accept for the ordering of the investigated phenomena.

In this manner, objects of daily use such as pots and clothing, with regard to their function satisfying basic daily human needs, form part of the range of transmitters of direct activities. At the same time they are bearers of certain stylistic features such as form and ornament which we regard as belonging to the category of symbolic behaviour proper to each culture – as also in the case of all

other expressions of artistic creation together with elements of religious cult, sacral architecture, funerary rites *etc.*

The boundaries of division are not always easily detectable, and this may produce sometimes many practical problems. We are inclined to ascribe considerable cognitive significance to the differentiation of these two aspects of source knowledge, especially when archaeological cultures are the object of interpretation.

In the context of our discussion, the postulate of the overcoming of the opposition between the pragmatic and semiotic approaches may be regarded as especially promising. It seems to offer the perspective of a real possibility to undertake an analysis of "material culture" in a manner which is more complete. A need to critically utilise a wider spectrum of investigative experience, going beyond the range of accepted mental templates and investigative routines which have been developed and embedded in the working practices of specific disciplines; an approach which would allow the replacement of a "dialogue of the deaf" visible sometimes on the interface of the historical sciences by real co-operation. It seems that in the works of Pomian, the archaeologist may find reliable guidelines to just such a programme of interdisciplinary cooperation.

Such an investigative programme would include both the morphology of "material culture" that is the internal structure of its components, as well as (to use the terminology of David Clarke), its ecology – that is the relationship with its environment understood in broad terms, which is made up of the above mentioned segments ("orders") of broadly-understood human culture. In such a context would also be found elements defining the relationship between that which is visible and that which is not. We would have therefore: idea and values, knowledge and belief, attitudes and symbolic action. At the same time however, we also have elements which are necessary for the correct placing and consideration of the role of that which is concrete, tangible and real.

It seems that a precondition of the realisation of such a programme is an outright rejection of the position which regards as obvious in itself the division of culture with regard to autonomic fields: material, spiritual and social. This separability of the perception of reality characteristic of positivist thought has turned out for archaeology to be highly unproductive already at the stage of the systemisation and classification of material culture as a source material. As a precondition that procedure had to refer to criteria from beyond those strictly objectual. The criteria for the differentiation of archaeological cultures belong as a rule more to symbolic culture than the culture of existence; more to the sphere of "idiosyncratic degrees of freedom" than "functional limitations" of Clarke. They thus become completely counterproductive at the stage of passing from the systemisation and cultural classification of the materials to historical interpretation and explanation of the investigated phenomena.

It is at this phase of investigation which – it seems – it is necessary in a decided manner to reject attempts to treat the postulate (however pertinent by all other measures) of a fuller consideration in the investigation of the social past, of the instrumentarium and social conditions of existence, as a justification of the tendency and even stimulus to the reification of the investigated phenomena, and assigning them to a distinct substrate, which is what was done in the definition of “material culture” and arbitrarily separating it from other fields of human activity. This tendency is perhaps a natural consequence of the manner of human thought, but – as for example is shown by the discussions on the anthropological conception of culture – can be thoroughly overcome. The defined methodological option need not necessarily bring with it a specific ontological choice (Sztompka 1973: xxv). In the discussed case, I think, we see the results of a mistake which concerns the mistake of confusing concrete with abstract – and the falling into the “Fallacy of misplaced concreteness” (Whitehead 1987: 288; cf. Taylor 1973: 97).

From the views presented above, – and with reference to Kłoskowska (1964: 73) – I regard it as completely justifiable to assert the empirical indivisibility of material and spiritual culture. In consequence therefore for the replacement of the term “material culture” by the term “objectual correlates of culture”, the content and scope of which have been discussed in the context of the definition of archaeological sources.

I think that this step forms one of the necessary but of course not sufficient conditions of the overcoming (both in the manner of thinking as well as in investigative practice) of the opposition of the narrowly pragmatic and semiotic approaches, while not losing sight of the advantages of the perspective of both of them.

Just as the perception of the material aspects of culture gave historical cognition a new dimension, so the semiotic approach to culture introduces a new quality and necessary element to the study of man.

The semiotic approach provides for example a conceptual apparatus for a more subtle analysis – which is particularly interesting in the context of our discussion of the archaeological aspects – of the relationships of culture in a general sense (*i.e.*, an attribute of the human species) as well as of culture in a partitive (distributive) sense, that is the cultures of particular human groups defined in space and time. The first exists in the form of a multiplicity of separate cultures, each of which occupies an area within the whole of which it forms a part. This – according to Kłoskowska (1996: 37) – is how the metaphor which Ruth Benedict (1949: 19) cites from the traditions of the Digger Indians concerning the “scooping up” like water of formless culture in vessels of specific shape which gives form to its substance: “in the beginning [...] God gave to every people a cup, a cup of clay, and from this cup they drank their life [...] they all dipped in the water, [...] but their cups were different...”

The genesis and functioning of particular cultures is through the operation of historically-shaped and empirically differentiated mechanisms. These mechanisms of symbolic systems, aggregation of their elements and differentiation from others and then the mechanisms of their distribution have been described by Kłoskowska with reference to her investigations into the beginning of national cultures (1996). The archaeologist will find interesting the apt and fruitful use of the apparatus and concepts of French structuralism, and especially Barthes (1964). Particularly interesting is the way that his linguistic definitions of the axes of paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations have been applied to other spheres of culture.

According to Kłoskowska (1996 : 37, diagram 1), global culture is composed of the main systems of human symbolic culture. These have a paradigmatic character. They are seen as a potential whole, a specific sum of of all ethnic and national partial systems of a given type (all religions, all languages, systems of customs, systems of art), which have existed whenever and wherever in human history. The columns of these universal systems (Fig. 1) are cut across by horizontal lines which differentiate particular national cultures. For defining these entities – with reference to Barthes’ concept – the term “syntagme” has been used. This term is used to visualise (to demonstrate) the nature of relationships between the singular systems of symbolic culture (language and literature: religion and custom; humanities and literature and tradition) within the same national community. In a cultural syntagme (as in a linguistic utterance), the syntactic rules determine relations between the particular elements. The cultural syntagme differs however from relationships examined by Barthes for its elements come from different systems. That is why the notion of cultural syntagme, as well as the whole structuralist concept, is treated as an inspiring and useful metaphor.

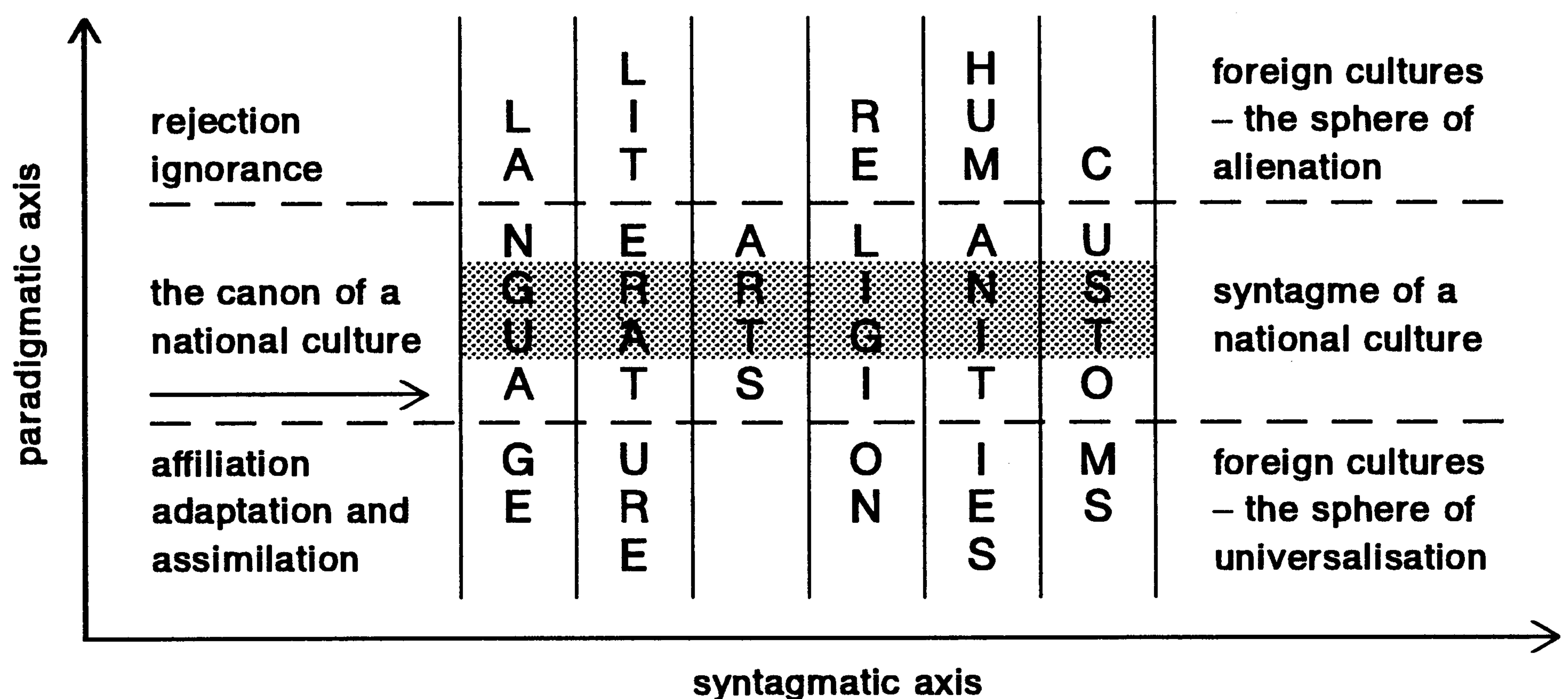


Fig. 1. Representation of the syntagme of national culture (according to A. Kłoskowska).

The model of Kłoskowska seems a very interesting starting-point for discussion on the meaning of the concept and interpretive problems of archaeological cultures. Perhaps considerations of systems of symbolic culture can be extended also to other "large segments of human culture" which contain, alongside language and value culture, also reality culture and social order. Experience in the field of differentiation of national cultures based on the considerably fuller information available from "living culture" could be extended and utilised as an indispensable element in the processes of archaeological studies of past cultures considerably enriching the resources of non-source-based knowledge used in these procedures.

This article has considered only a few aspects of a very extensive problem. It is just one voice in a continuing discussion, a debate which in the Polish scientific milieux will certainly shortly be enriched by further reflection concerning the recent works of Krzysztof Pomian and Antonina Kłoskowska. This discussion awakens aspirations to a total approach to the history of culture. None of the disciplines involved in the study of the social past can afford to remain indifferent to the course and results of this discussion. Each can also add its own individual contribution.

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