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, Tonari Kiririyi 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 Uber 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.s.s.) 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,
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' injwala/schema' - and a 'living metaphor' - migtra/expression; b) a 'symbolic' language, that is a language related to the symbolic meanings associated with the g.s. 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. labeled 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.s. 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
Nowau Text

Conversation A

*SS, 2.
Aveira kumila?

*SS, 4.
Bougwa ku reka? Bougwa ku vitokula biga mko sina katupoi ni nukwalu mu.
Gera, desi, yeigbu ba nukwu, ké? Gera, biga mko na wara, yoka kaiga mu sitana,
kaina i taboda mtona, ee yeigbu ba li(vala)/livala, bi reka ee igau bi mu. I
katupoi mu, ee biga, avei tuta nù ku kau bi mu, mimilis bwa ni sekai mu,
bougwa ku kau? Ee bougwa ku mapu, mu teitu, avei teitu mimilisi bwa ni sekai
mu, bougwa ku kau bi mu ee bougwa ku ma mu. Kaina bougwa ku nukoli kaina
gera. Ee tuveira, aveira ni sekai mu, nù ku kau? kaina kabe mu, kaina nubai mu,
kaina tama mu? Ee, igau, bougwa ku mapu, bougwa ku nukwa: aveira ni sekai mu
bwa nù ku kau?

*ST, 5.
Tabu gu ni sekai gu, buwa na kau.

*SS, 7.
Kurina.

*SS, 8.
Tuveira ni katupoi mu: mtona bougwa tokabitamu bougwa, kaina?

*ST, 9.
(To)kabitamu bougwa.

*SS, 10.
La dala?... kala kumila... kala kumila aveira? Ee aama ya ra? Ku livala! Gera
mwau mko na. Kulabuta!

*ST, 12.
Kulabuta, kabata.
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?

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?

No, it isn't possible.

It's forbidden!

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]

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.

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?

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

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

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

Drawing, tracing the designs...

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

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!

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

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

Your opinion about what you told me...

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

...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 (kwaisaruti) 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 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 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 (kwaisaruv), 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 (kwaisaruv) 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 kwaisaruv, 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 Kumwaigeiwa 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.
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.

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?

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?

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.

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]

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).

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

Yes.

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]).

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)?

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 (kwaisarivi) 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 kwaisarivi 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 gigiwanis (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 kwaisarivi, 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 'dudua' could be the design 'bulukalakala' which the men paint on their clins 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 'kaikikita' 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!
If the weku is the mouth of a man, is it correct, then, to interpret the kwaisaruvi as the design of an eye?

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

Why is that?

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.

And the duduwa?

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

And why is that?

...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 [imitating 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.

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

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

And the doka with the gigiwa?

The doka and the gigiwa 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]

So you agree that...

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

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.

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

...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...

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 doku and gigi wani 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 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, nor 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!

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?

Of a man! [emphatically]

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

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