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metaphorical levels

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MICROCOSM, MACROCOSM AND THE NUAULU HOUSE: CONCERNING THE REDUCTIONIST FALLACY AS APPLIED TO METAPHORICAL LEVELS

Introduction
It is well-known that symbolic worlds can only be understood in terms of other symbols, by insiders and interpreters alike. Indeed, this is what people mean by a symbolic system: not merely so many symbols independently symbolizing some aspect of what is conveniently agreed to be 'reality', but symbols representing each other, sometimes symbolizing more than one other symbol, sometimes an aspect of a single symbol. Thus we are in the business of constructing elaborate networks of meaning and expression where the nodes are both signifiers and signified, expressers and expressed; invariably semantically complex, but seldom identical. This follows not only from the formal character of shared meanings, but also because people vary among themselves in the attributions and interpretations which they place upon symbols, and vary also within themselves according to context and structured time. The symbolic world of a five-year-old girl is very different from that of a 50-year-old man, but both are sufficiently similar to permit many standard cues and responses, though not so rigid as to prevent creative flexibility. Thus, all 5-year-old girls and 50-year-old men also differ within their age-cohort and among their cultural peers. But in both cases the differences are not so great as to prevent communication, except that the increase in cultural distance diminishes the common semiotic world which they inhabit and the shared symbols which they can use.

We conveniently represent degrees of shared symbolic discourse as levels of meaning, while the coordinates employed in different contexts and according to different degrees of generality are often imagined (by many scholars who use the English language as a medium for dissemina-
ting their ideas) in such homely emic terms as those of a ‘layer cake’ or ‘skins of an onion’. Our ability, on the same or on separate occasions, to switch and invoke different ‘levels’ of meaning is seen as evidence of an ability to move paradigmatically through a syntagmatic realm. The form relations take between these levels varies, and there appears to be continual translation of resemblances and contrasts from one symbolic language to another, depending on what is situationally appropriate. Thus, in British political discourse we may move from the metaphorical language of the stage to that of the body, to that of the battlefield, and back again. This is common enough, but has certain emically recognized limits. ‘Mixing metaphors’ in contemporary British English is the stylistically unacceptable confusion of levels. However, since no one level of discourse is ever adequate for all occasions, effective cultural performance must involve a continuous switching of semantic levels, no less than it does linguistic registers. But sometimes we may leave the oscillating convenience of the syntagm for the powerful condensation of the paradigm. Here semantic complexity relies not upon the extensive use of metaphor, but upon the intensive truncation of levels at particular instances. Symbolic condensation of this type may employ as salient foci unifiers as diverse as the kayan puppet in the Javanese shadow theatre, the marsupial cuscus in Nuaulu initiation rites, or the crucifix in Christian iconography. It may also involve simple relations of opposition, association and analogy. These include the ubiquitous NATURE: CULTURE dichotomy and the colour triad, though it is quite insufficient to say that either operates as metaphors; they are generally so encrusted with ‘meaning’ that reduction to any one metaphorical level is absurd; more metonymic than metaphoric.

Between the two extremes of narrative and condensation is the relation of microcosm to macrocosm. This neither condenses meaning into powerful unitary symbols, nor relies on the endless switching of levels of symbolic idiom. Rather, it summarizes symbolic relations in a convenient middle-range framework. It is difficult to represent a microcosm in relation to syntagm and paradigm using the usual coordinates, since it characteristically combines elements of the two; but we might conveniently represent it by adding a third dimension to the graph. In such a model it might be seen as a three-dimensional topological surface, combining vertical and horizontal extension, and thus providing links between semiotic elements, as between objects in three-dimensional space.

The Oxford English Dictionary (1933, vol. VI:411) defines microcosm as “the ‘little world’ of human nature; humankind viewed as an epitome of the ‘great world’ or universe; in an extended sense it is applied to a community or other complex unity regarded as presenting an epitome of the world, or as constituting ‘a little world in itself’”. In common parlance it often describes organizations which are parts of...
some whole, some basic aspects of which they portray, often in an
exemplary fashion, or even overemphasizing cardinal features to the
extent of parody. Thus the parish church may be a microcosm of the
Church Catholic, the local branch of a political party of the national
organization, the toytown municipality of the state, the garden of the
world of nature. More dramatically, the stage, the classroom and the
kitchen have all at various times been said not merely to represent a slice
of life, but to encompass and compress all of Life’s most fundamental
relations, tensions and petty idiocies. But in the way that it is used in the
anthropological analysis of symbolism, microcosm is less ‘a little world’
than a compression of a complex symbolic reticulum, containing all
essential (but no non-essential) items and relations. Treated mathem-
atically it is a common denominator, including all significant com-
ponent items, relations and properties common to a defined cultural
universe. Put precisely, it satisfies four general conditions: idealization,
abstraction (that is, simplification), generalization and consolidation, by
which I mean that related information is wrapped up neatly and eco-
nomically in a single package. Microcosm is therefore the middle-range
incorporation of various complex symbolic registers (or parts of regis-
ters) in terms of a much smaller set of relations based on an aspect of
experiential reality.

Commonly occurring symbolic microcosms include the body, the
village and the house, each representing in their own way the cosmos.
Within particular cultures the available microcosmic repertoire may be
more complex and essentially culture-specific. In some cases there is a
clear congruence between the symbolic dimensions of the body, the
house and the settlement. However, at the same time the body may
condense the village, the village the body. Consequently the concept of
microcosm is purely relative, depending on the direction from which you
enter. Of these various interpenetrating and multidimensional codes the
house is perhaps the most common, visible and accessible to analysis. As
a model, the house seems to satisfy admirably the four conditions of
idealization, abstraction, generalization and consolidation. This will be
my main focus here.

House as microcosm
Anthropologists have long known that Le Corbusier’s dictum, ‘la maison
est une machine à habiter’ (1923:ix), was sociologically naive, perhaps
even an unfair epitaph for his own work. Houses are not only good for
living in, but also (to paraphrase and punish a well-worn Lévi-Straussian
cliché) for thinking in. Because so many of our social interactions take
place in houses, they constitute culturally significant space of the highest
order; but more than this, they have been seen to produce a folk model
of wider cosmological implications. There have now been a series of
ethnographic studies, particularly from Africa and southeast Asia, on
the symbolic organization of lived-in structures. Some have sought the ‘rules governing’ the structure of space, occasionally seen as in some mysterious way lying behind mere local variations (Clement 1982:62, 66). Others have sought an archaeometry of symbolism through which earlier social structures might be measured (Rassers 1931). Most have simply sought to find a symbolic concordance between the house and other collective representations (e.g. Cunningham 1964, Barnes 1974, Kana 1980), not necessarily implying microcosmic status for the house, but merely stressing its fit with more general categories and principles. Thus for Tambiah (1969:429) the house ‘becomes a central grid to which are linked categories of the human and animal world’.

In a recent monograph, Gregory Forth (1981:23) goes further than the various approaches indicated in the preceding paragraph. In so doing he states summarily a more widely-held position, adopted by some of those who have considered the symbolism of the house in eastern Indonesia. He holds the Rindi house on Sumba to be ‘a microcosm which in its structure expresses categories and principles with the widest application in Rindi thought and action, and so provides a comprehensive presentation of orderly universal forms and relations’. The ‘universal’ here presumably refers to the local cultural universe under examination, but others have seen the symbolic pre-eminence of the house as a distinctive regional feature (Barraud 1979:58, Fox 1980), as others (e.g. van Wouden 1935, Vroklage 1936) have seen the boat. Some (Cunningham 1964:67) have gone so far as to suggest that the symbolic use of the house may be a pan-human conceptual universal. I would not wish to disagree that for several reasons (some of which Forth states) it is useful to begin an analysis of local categories, or anything else for that matter, with the house. What I am distrustful of are the implicit assumptions that it has therefore some priority in Rindi collective representations, that the symbolic ‘order’ is somehow frozen into the fabric, and that house symbolism is a puzzle in which it is necessary to place the pieces in the correct pattern to find the one and only solution. While this approach is undeniably persuasive and convenient, it overlooks the fact that the house itself can only be expressed in terms external to itself. It also begs an important question about for whom it is a microcosm, while misleadingly suggesting that symbols are arranged in intrinsically ‘orderly’ ways, and that there is some overall symmetrical patterning. In my experience, what is most interesting about houses is that they not merely express order (as they may certainly do), but that the orders may be of various kinds, understood in different ways to different people on different occasions. This makes it appear, in the terms employed by some beleaguered structuralists, that there is contradiction and perhaps even disorder which must find some cultural and analytical resolution. Furthermore, what is not always clear in such studies is whether or not local people conceive of the house as a symbolic microcosm, whether it is...
microcosmic at the level of non-reflexive collective representations, or whether the ethnographer is simply selecting it as a convenient means of summarizing some general culturally significant symbolic relations. The more you distil symbolic meanings about the world, the more you simplify and distort the significance which stems from diversity and complexity. No one quality may itself be supreme, but what is important is the total semantic and expressive load. And this may be in danger of being obliterated altogether.

The Nuaulu case

In the rest of this paper I wish to examine in detail the Nuaulu house as a symbolic microcosm. The Nuaulu are a small population located in south central Seram, whose economy rests on sago extraction, hunting, swiddening and forest foraging. In many ways they share the superficial similarities in social organization and symbolic relations well-known from other eastern Indonesian societies (van Wouden 1935, Fox 1980). Each clan is a diarchy, put crudely, of temporal power on the one hand and spiritual power on the other; lineal segmentation is less important than patriclan alliance established and maintained through marriage of classificatory cross-cousins; descent groups are structurally more important than local groups, and the ‘house’ (highly significant in the present context) is a fundamental political, rather than simply domestic and physical unit. In contrast to the eastern Indonesian stereotype, however, political organization above the level of the clan is weak, and although this might reasonably be explained in terms of the effects of colonial disruption, there is no good reason to think that higher order organization has ever been anything other than loose and temporary, and when present either imposed or created for short-term advantage. The autonomy of the individual clans is reflected in differences in their respective symbolic discourse, which when drawn together into such conventional analytical categories as ‘Nuaulu symbolism’ appear contradictory, may lead the ethnographer to question the reliability of the data, and even encourage a certain amount of fudging and dodging. I am inclined to resist the latter temptations by exercising restraint when it comes to making generalizations. We shall see here that the house is a microcosm in a very real sense, but that as a symbolic domain it cannot be isolated from other registers (levels), and that those ‘levels’ buffer and intrude upon and are crucial to the understanding of the house. It is not self-contained. In other words, we are dealing with interpenetrating and non-reducible levels of meaning; and, far from being the centre of the Nuaulu symbolic universe, the house depends for its imagery on other symbolic microcosms, which, using standard formalist casuistry and sophistry, it could be reduced to.
The symbolic components of the Nuaulu house

Each Nuaulu house is owned and occupied by an extended family group or household (also termed numa) and forms the minimal corporate unit of Nuaulu social organization. In Nuaulu hamlets which I have been acquainted with between 1969 and 1981, there have been two basic physical house types: those built on piles, and those built directly on the ground. The latter are easier to build, have only been in use since moving to the coast, and have been in part imposed upon them by both colonial (Ellen 1978) and post-colonial administrations. Of the 106 dwellings in use in all five hamlets in 1971, 39 were pile houses and 67 ground level houses. Pile houses are generally termed numa mone ‘sacred houses’, but I have on occasions heard them referred to as numa pusaka or numa pemali. Now, pusaka is an Ambonese Malay word meaning ‘sacred objects’, and pemali is the same for ‘taboo’. It is true that the terms were ones heard in conversations between different language speakers, and perhaps were also used for my benefit. However, it suggests an interesting emphasis, in the sense that the mone in the strict Nuaulu term refers not simply (or on all occasions) to the house, but to its sacred contents. Indeed, mone is a polyvalent word which may refer adjectivally to things sacred or prohibited, or nominally to objects themselves. In this context, therefore, the numa mone becomes a depository for sacred objects, rather than a sacred structure in its own right, and even less a habitation for human beings, which is virtually incidental. More than this, it becomes a physical incarnation, literally an ‘embodiment’ of the clan, its customs and sacra. Ground level houses are also conceived of in terms of some of the same symbolic coordinates, and many contain sacred paraphernalia and involve ritual in their construction. There is no clear distinction between, as it were, ‘real houses’ and ‘sheds’ as claimed for some Indonesian societies (e.g. Swift 1971). Indeed, in the absence of a numa mone for a particular clan section, a ground level house may temporarily serve this purpose. Although the basic pattern of orientation is common to all houses, and behaviour patterns with respect to them are also identical on ritual occasions, there is a tendency to reserve strict adherence to many of these formalities for numa mone. Consequently non-traditional houses are felt not to require the meticulous ritual attitudes appropriate for the traditional houses containing mone valuables. The distinction is blurred. Physically, there is virtually a continuous distribution. Moreover, simply in physical terms some ordinary non-sacred houses may resemble numa mone in being pile-built, possessing a verandah and raised floors, especially when over rocky and uneven surfaces.

In conceptual terms the main difference between a ground level house and a numa mone must be seen in terms of the house itself being the subject of ritual and its construction an elaborate ritual cycle. The Nuaulu maintain a distinction between religious activity which is per-
formed for and on behalf of humans, and that which is performed by humans but – as they say – 'belongs to the Suane (the village ritual house) and is the domain of the ancestors'. The former consists of the familiar life-crisis rituals, together with certain other rituals, such as the great kahuai dance festival; the latter of the specific rituals connected with various stages in the life-cycle of the suane, of individual clan ritual houses (numa mone) and of mone sacred objects.

Most numa mone are clan section houses. Each Nuaulu clan (ipan) has two sections (numa), descent groups headed on the one hand by a chief responsible for ritual matters (yonate ipan) and on the other by a person often represented as being responsible for raiding and warfare (kapitane). These divisions are found widely in eastern Indonesia, and are often thought to be structurally equivalent and functionally complementary. Although the Nuaulu may sometimes represent them in this way, careful ethnographic inspection soon reveals significant organizational asymmetry and overlapping in roles. The yonate ipan is regarded as being descended in the most senior genealogical line from a founding ancestor, and exercises civil as well as ritual authority. He is a primus-inter-pares. On the other hand, the kapitane is far from being simply a war-leader, and has a wide range of similar and complementary ritual duties. Each ipan is therefore a duality, and each half is focused on a sacred house, either numa onate (or numa mai’ina’i) or numa (onate) kapitane, in which are kept sacred valuables and in which reside the ancestral spirits of the descent group. Each numa mone has a sacred name. Thus the clan Penisa is divided as follows:

**PENISA**

| Numa kapitane | Numa onate |
| 'tehu nohi' | 'numa nohi' |
| (voices of the house-platform) | (voices of the house) |
| WATANE | RUHUWA |

Numa onate and numa kapitane are virtually identical physically, although the completed structures may differ in a few minor respects, respects which are nevertheless regarded by the Nuaulu as diagnostic, ritually important and obligatory. For example, the sanihatu, or ceiling of sago leafstalks, of the numa onate of the clan Nepane-tomoi’en conceals the entire roof-space; in a numa kapitane of the same clan it covers only the eastern (SACRED) half. I do not know how generally this applies to other clans, but it is characteristic of the Nuaulu that
differences between the customs of clans should be expressed in such
minutiae, though multiplied many times. Although there are differences
between clans in the form of the house, the description which follows is,
to the best of my knowledge, one which would apply to all of them.

Among the various clan heads, that of the clan Matoke has a special
status, by virtue of his mythological genealogy. In him is vested ritual
guardianship of all land and the sacred suane, the village ritual house.
The translation of the Malay term ‘tuan tanah’, by which this office is
generally known in the central Moluccas, is ‘lord of the land’ or ‘lord of
the earth’, common enough in wider Indonesian terms. Although this is
not the literal meaning of the equivalent Nuaulu word, it does summarily
indicate his role in the scheme of things. Although it may contain
valuables sacred to the village as a whole and clans in other villages, the
numa mone Matoke is little different in its physical and symbolic struc-
ture from other numa mone. Apart from those embodying clan sections,
the only other kind of numa mone is that of certain extra descent group
officials. Thus, in the village of Ruhuwa, the house of Patioka Sonawe
was considered sacred by virtue of his office as an official of the suane.

I shall briefly describe here the main features of the house which have
some bearing on the symbolic uses to which it is put. For convenience, I
group these as follows: (a) timbers (the main framework of the house),
(b) the main faces (aspects) of the completed structure, and (c) the
spaces which arise from the intersection of (a) and (b). These are all
summarized in table 1, and their spatial relationships indicated by
figures 1, 2 and 3. Literal translations of Nuaulu terms are written in
single inverted commas; meanings attributed to house parts by the
Nuaulu themselves are written in UPPER CASE thus.

TABLE 1. Principal components of the Nuaulu house

| A: TIMBERS                        | 22 main uprights supporting roof |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. **hini**                      | lit. ‘the moon posts’           |
| 2. **hini hunone**               | lit. ‘sacred hini’: the two innermost hini hunone supporting the ridge. That behind the fireplace (hini otue matai) is FE-MALE, that supporting the rini is MALE purlin |
| 3. **hini mone**                 |                                  |
| 4. **papanate**                  | lit. ‘the place of the rat’s seance’ |
| 5. **makaretanaha**              | lit. ‘cus-cus tail’; papanate nearest eaves; made of swenye (species of bamboo) |
| 6. **maran etute**               |                                  |
| 7. **papana pukune**             | lit. ‘short papanate’: collars and tie beam, that is, main horizontal traverse timbers |
| 8. **wasa**                      | rafters: all inclined and vertical roof timbers, supporting purlins |
9. wasa sine
  (= *mana mata*: ‘birds eye’): vertical roof timbers on W and E sides of house
10. mamwesi wasa
    ridge piece: supports upper ends of wasa
11. m’nutune (*m’nutune*)
    underfloor joists
12. wasa ai whutai (*weti*)
    purlin nearest ridge piece
13. wasa hinai
    sprokets: short inclined pieces of bamboo (*swenye*) running from base of rafters under projecting eaves
14. tatuete
    heavy piles supporting floor
15. sakanai
    boards along base of each wall; sometimes along exterior face of verandah
16. suntanai (*kalolate*)
    timber uprights along walls into which are slotted sections of *topai* (sago leafstalk)

B: FACES
17. mitanunwe
    N and S facing walls; doors [*mitananua* (*pl.*)]
18. sine
    W and E facing walls
19. ainutai
    roof; sago leaf thatch
20. lante
    floor; flooring
21. sani hatu
    ceiling of *topai*, sago leafstalks; not present in every house
22. kasanepune
    generic term for walls (of sago leafstalk)

C: SPACES
23. numa anoi
    lit. ‘house interior’
24. hunisone
    principal interior central space, composed of split bamboo flooring (*lante hunisone*)
25. kwa tihu ai
    lit. ‘place of the sap wood’
26. kakone
    half of house N and E of diagonal line drawn from NW to SE corners
27. onane
    half of house S and W of diagonal line drawn from NW to SE corners
28. pantetane
    verandah of S (seaward) side of house; also *teune* (*teu nawe*)
29. numa ruai
    lit. ‘sea of the house’
30. kakarane
    shallow platform along N and E sides of house interior
31. riau unu
    space external to *kwa tihu ai* (25) but within *kakone* (26); *unu* = head
32. otu matai
    lit. ‘dead fire’ (*otue* = house fire): fireplace, hearth. The generic term for fire is *usa*, but the fireplace could never be termed *usa matai*
33. katiru, tau otue  
(katira tau usa)  
lit. ‘chair about the fire’: katira is from the  
Portuguese ‘cadeira’, probably via Am-  
bonese Malay kadera; framework around  
the fireplace

34. hotune  
shelf above the fireplace

35. rini  
shelves or lofts in roof space at W and E  
ends

36. hantetane  
house steps

37. hantetane nene huaia  
individual step

38. hantetane nene nutuna  
(hini)  
side of steps

39. hunu hatai  
sacred and ornamental thatched ridge  
piece: its emplacement marks the comple-  
tion of a house: ‘topping out’

40. kalota man kihen  
lit. ‘bird’s wing kalota’, inverted V shaped  
strip of rattan on E and W exteriors pin-  
ing thatch and reflecting swallow-tail  
shape of gable

41. katunepate  
door bolt made from palm wood

42. katunepate nani ai  
wooden boltfast on doorpost

43. hatai  
door threshold

44. mita nun ai  
lit. ‘doors of timber’: the huge hinged  
wooden slab doors found in completed  
ritual houses

Note: Nuaulu terms listed above and featured in the text have been broadly transcribed as  
in standard Indonesian. Stress in two- and three-syllable words is generally on the first  
syllable and on the second syllable in four-syllable words. In stressed syllables the vowel /i/  
appears to be pronounced with the full length [i], similar to the non-nasal [i] of the French  
merci. In the unstressed position the length is somewhat shortened. This is probably the  
 isolus in other vowels as well, or at least /u/. I am grateful to Jim Collins for help in clarifying  
the matter of stress.

(a) Timbers
The main uprights, supporting the roof, are termed hini, of which there  
are 22. The same term may also refer generically to all house timbers  
(see Ellen 1983b). Certain hini are regarded as being more sacred than  
others: the hini hunone, or ‘moon posts’. In all houses the most sacred  
mainpost is that in the northeast corner. This is the first to be erected  
(irahu, lit. ‘to plant’), and formerly required the taking of a head which  
was buried together with the ‘foot’ (atori) of the hini. Nowadays there  
are various substitutes. For example, the clan Nepane-tomoi’en tie a  
piece of red cloth (karanunu) around the base. These hini have personal  
names. That of the numa mai’inai Nepane tomoi’en is Pina wasa  
(lit. ‘female rafter’), but may equally be rendered wasa inai (lit. ‘mother  
rafter’), a reference to the putative origin of the clan from a wasa or
Figure 1. Outline structure of Nuaulu house showing relative position of selected components mentioned in the text. Numbers refer to table 1.
maikasu. The name of the equivalent post in the numa kapitane of the same clan is Tomoi’en. Note that the personal names of the northeast post and of the clan section house as a whole are identical, the one serving as a synecdoche of the other. This association is of some importance, as we shall see later. Also sacred are the two innermost centre posts. These are specifically termed hini mone (lit. ‘sacred mainposts’). That behind the fireplace (hini otue matai) is FEMALE, that supporting the rini is MALE. The five hini along both the east (MALE) and west (FEMALE) ends evoke the Patalima (‘five’) division of Seramese peoples to which the Nuaulu belong (see Ellen 1978:22-23).

(b) Faces
Walls (always assuming that they are made of sago leafstalk) are generally termed kasanepune. The prepared lengths of sago leafstalk are known as topai, and a single length of midrib, topi hatai. Walls of any structure are terminologically distinguished according to the axis to which they are oriented. Thus, walls perpendicular to the mountain-sea axis are termed mitanunwe and are parallel to the ridge which is said to imitate the diurnal path of the sun. This term is also used for entrances, since, with only one very specific exception, the position of the two coincide,5 as follows:
Walls perpendicular to the east-west, sunrise-sunset, axis are termed *sine*. The roof is double-pitched and swallow-tailed.

(c) *Internal spaces*

The principal spatial divisions of the house are complex and cross-cutting. We can begin by examining a plan drawn at the level of the house platform (figure 2). Here we should note that horizontal space can be divided four ways. This gives rise to different terminologically designated spaces, each of which are symbolically significant but cross-cutting.

1. First, space can be divided concentrically, in terms of its location in relation to the centre and outside. The principal interior central space (*hunisone*) is composed by split bamboo flooring (*lante hunisone*). Of all parts of the house, it is the most important for practical purposes and comprises the basic living area. It is the usual location for cooking, eating (more especially for women and children), sleeping and participation in innumerable minor domestic tasks. Contained within the *hunisone*, but not coterminous with it, is the *kwa tihu ai* (lit. ‘place of the sap wood’). The boundaries of this are not rigid, but it is generally accepted as that central space which remains once people are seated along the walls and elevated platforms; it is an area which must always be kept free during ritual, when it is a focus of certain kinds of activity.

On the exterior seaward aspect of every *numa mone* is the *pantetane*, a platform of constant width (around 180 centimetres) but of varying length, depending on the size of the house. Much of the daytime relaxa-
Figure 3. Fireplace assembly at west end of Nuaulu house.
tion takes place here. It is also the site where numerous male and female
domestic tasks are performed. Here also the men, particularly elders,
meet to discuss important matters away from the midday heat.

2. Secondly, we can divide space in terms of an east:west contrast. To
the west (FEMALE) end is, appropriately, the fireplace, by the sides and
at the rear of which are spaces for storing a wide variety of domestic
objects. Directly over the fireplace is the hotune or place for curing meat
and drying other foodstuffs (figure 3). At both ends of the lante huni-
sone, in the roof space, are situated large lofts or rini stretching the width
of the house. The rini at the west end is largely for storing mundane
articles, such as baskets, but it is here also that are found large quantities
of penesite, pig and deer jawbones and cassowary breastbones, of which
it is forbidden to dispose. They are normally strung from one side of the
roof to the other, but older specimens are just stored in baskets.

The rini at the opposite east (MALE) end is also used for mundane
objects, typically male paraphernalia such as spears and bows, but the
half towards the mountainside of the house is largely for storing mundane
articles, such as baskets, red cloths, baskets containing woven kain timor and patola cloth, beads, bracelets and so on. Further mone
objects are actually placed in the roof thatch, or on the mountain-ward
wall of the house, together with non-mone objects of ceremonial attire.

Often, hanging directly under the rini at the MALE end, is a sokate
or basket containing valuables in which the spirits of the immediate
ancestors (saruana) invoked by spirit-mediums are said to reside. Under
the rini, at the east end, is a platform (kakarone) upon which men may sit
and sleep. For most of the time women are confined to their parts of the
house and men to theirs.

3. Thirdly, we can divide space in terms of a north:south contrast. The
terms for the faces, like those on the east:west axis, are identical. Against
the north wall lies a platform upon which men may sit; against the south
wall there is no platform. The outside platform, the pantetane, lies on the
south (sea) side only.

4. Finally, there is a planar division of space diagonally from the north-
west to the southeast corner. The space on the south and west of this
divide is known as the onane; that on the north and east the kakone.

As we have seen, along the north and east sides of the house (that is
entirely within the riau unu; unu = 'head') is a shallowly elevated
platform, the kakarane. This is primarily a sitting and eating place for
males, but it is also used for storing valuables, as well as more mundane
clothing, and baskets of root tubers for planting or other food. This ritual
sitting arrangement is known as pene nehu sio'pinau, lit. 'that which
prohibits females'. Basically, the arrangement follows from what we
have already discovered about the internal division of space. Thus, at the most sacred northeast corner by the hini hunone sit the clan chief and kapitane. Men of descending rank sit on either side along the north and east walls. In contrast women sit along the south and west walls. No one is permitted to sit in the kwa tihu ai. Within the basic arrangement there is a more detailed one, in which older persons sit to the rear (that is nearest the walls) and younger in front nearer the centre; while married persons sit nearer the northeast corner, children furthest and unmarried initiates in the middle.

If we now look at the house in vertical section there is a clear contrast between the loft space and floor, and the floor and the underfloor. This is particularly evident at the west end in the context of the fireplace assembly, where there is a gradation of physical levels. The underfloor is an area for refuse and coprophagous dogs. Nothing may be stored under the house. This space is the depository for children’s faeces, fussily pushed through the split bamboo flooring, food scraps dropped and swept through for the dogs, chickens and the occasional staked feral piglet. The ground underneath the floor is spattered with red betel stains, testimony to an habitual social custom. By contrast, the ridge is the most sacred part of the house viewed in vertical section, the hunu-hatai being the last part of the house to be ritually completed. There is a movement in the house from BELOW to ABOVE, as if the house ‘grew’ in the same manner as a plant. This movement from things impure to things sacred is embodied in the metaphorical uses of the hantetane. In the male initiation ceremonies, a large hantetane is constructed in the forest. Here an analogy is presumably drawn between ascending physically into the house and ascending through age grades in the life-cycle. Again the connotation is ‘growth’. The fact that the house is above the ground is significant in Nuaulu thought, since sleeping on the ground is associated with animals; even in the bush a bivouac will contain a raised platform for sleeping on. The rini are all sacred, although that at the east end is the most sacred.

Not only is the house as a whole treated as a microcosm, but parts of the house are employed figuratively in proverbs, as metaphors and euphemisms. Thus, the mitanunwe ai ukuna (lit. ‘the hole in the wood of the door’) is the gouged recess in the threshold into which carved flanges on a door fit to form a hinge; however, it is used coyly to refer to the vulva. This association is semantically reinforced in that mitane (‘shrimp’), which morphologically resembles mitanunwe (‘door, wall’), is also used in this way. Similarly, kaniho papate, the rattan lashing by which the hini (upright) is attached to a papate (length piece), is used figuratively to express a firm and unbreakable social bond, as between brothers-in-law or between MB and ZS; kanihoi is a lashing holding the major house posts; as a verb kaniho means ‘to bundle, bunch or tie’. Again, the exactitude characteristic of laying pieces of thatch to obtain
the correct amount of overlap using a *soka ainatai* (*ainatai*, 'sago leaf thatch') is a by-word for the exercise of care and forethought in the conduct of personal relationships; while *ikai etute* (lit. 'fishtail'), a plug of end-grain wood used to prevent split house timbers from deteriorating yet further, is also a term used of persons who, through their oratorical or brokering skills, have prevented conflict or splits between angered parties.

**Interpretation**

In interpreting symbolic patterns encoded into the house an unusual degree of care is required. In the past the character of the evidence and the steps in the analysis have not always been clear. We must begin by asking ourselves what kind of evidence it is we are dealing with. Firstly, there is the material evidence of shapes and dimensions, of how space is used. I have ample photographic evidence of this. Secondly, I have the evidence of what people have told me in response to prompts which at times may well have had the virtual certainty of eliciting particular responses, but which in plural and taken in conjunction with quite unsolicited commentaries and interjections, growing scepticism and ability to formulate techniques of questioning which did not ensure particular answers, provides a formidable and reliable foundation. Some of this I have been able to record on tape. Thus, separate occurrences of symbolic oppositions have been recorded by me either as I could, in a behaviourist sense, 'observe' conduct which implied them, or by accepting what people told me. Thus far there are no particular problems, and many ethnographers have got as far without coming unstuck. However, at this point it is tempting to make imaginative leaps of insight, in order to connect up superficially disparate relations into a pleasing whole. Aware of these problems (Ellen 1981a, 1983a), I try here to draw together the relationships between some actions and statements concerning the symbolic aspects of house structure.

In terms of behaviour and representations, one of the most obvious and recurrent symbolic contrasts in the structure of the Nuauulu house is between MALE and FEMALE. The evidence for this is good. Women will not, as a rule, walk, sit or even look into certain parts of the house. If such patterns of movement or eye-contact are not always rigidly enforced on a day-to-day basis, they are so (even to the point of caricature) during ceremonies.

In the Nuauulu house the MALE:FEMALE distinction with its various symbolic concomitants occurs along at least five separate axes (figure 4): MOUNTAIN:SEA::MALE:FEMALE, as in determining the appropriate door for each sex on ritual occasions; SUNRISE:SUNSET:MALE:FEMALE, as in determining the sleeping areas for each sex; vertically (MALE, above:FEMALE, below); and diagonally MALE (northeast):FEMALE(southwest), as in determining the seating posi-
Figure 4. Some major symbolic contrasts in the Nuaulu house.
tion for certain ceremonies. If we then look at the house three-dimensionally we can isolate a further diagonal contrast between MALE: FEMALE (sacred:profane), between the lowest part of the southwest corner and the highest part of the northeast. The fourth opposition here might be seen as a logical resolution of the contradictions posed by contrasts 1 and 2. This is indicated in the matrix values assigned in the figure, and finds support in the fact that the northeast corner of the house is, indeed, the most sacredly charged. Likewise, the fifth opposition can be seen as a logical resolution of contradictions posed by 3 and 4.

It is perhaps worth stressing that no easy equations assigning positive value to MALE components and negative value to FEMALE components can be made, and on different occasions the same component may have a diametrically opposed association. The house interior is FEMALE to the MALE exterior and pantetane. But the pantetane is on the seaward side, which otherwise has female associations. Also, in overall terms, the house may be either MALE or FEMALE. Similarly the first tope to be inserted in the kasanepeun is at the west (FEMALE) end of the house, because ‘this end of the house must receive the women who must cook. Men only eat’. An eminently practical consideration perhaps, but one which nevertheless contradicts the priority otherwise accorded to the east end.

In an earlier essay (Ellen 1981a) I described some of these MALE: FEMALE contrasts. I did this to portray in a summary way a situation which I held to be intrinsically more fraught, but did so also to render the fact of ‘contradictions’ in folk logics palpable. I hold, with Lévi-Strauss, that the contrast is the thing, and what is contrasted, though certainly not incidental, is changeable and complex. In one context the MALE: FEMALE contrast for house symbolism may be operationally valid, in that there is a fit between this interpretation and actual behaviour; in another context the same contrast of elements might be more appropriately rendered another way, SACRED:PROFANE, OLD:YOUNG and so on. No summary model containing all symbolic representations exists independent of particular manifestations in practice.

Houses within the wider physical context
It is indicative of the problems I have identified in viewing the house as the supreme focus of symbolic relations that it is impossible to understand the Nuaulu house except in relation to the semiotic coordinates of other, wider, physical and geographical features: in terms of the suane ritual house, the village-plan, other villages, and the island of Seram as a whole.

The suane is as much a candidate for a symbolic primus-inter-pares as the house. The focal point of each Nuaulu village is the suane or village ritual house, which consequently lies in the very centre, where it is visible and easily accessible to all (figure 5). Not only is the suane the
location for *kahuai* dances and traditionally the meeting-place of elders, it is also the focus of ritual activity in its own right. The traditional house or *numa mone* at once mirrors and contrasts with the *suane*. In construction and basic plan the *suane*, in which there is little variation from village to village, resembles the ordinary traditional house of the Nuaulu; built on piles off the ground, it has the same conspicuous swallow-tailed gable, the numerous solid hardwood supporting posts and roof of sago palm thatch. But in several respects the two structures are rather different. Not only is it much larger and without walls, but its orientation is different. This is crucial. While, in common with all Nuaulu houses, the roof ridge runs parallel to the coast, along an east-west axis, the entrances are not, as in most Nuaulu houses, oriented along a mountain-sea axis, but run at right angles to it, as follows:

![Diagram](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

This is so that the entrances are in alignment with the diurnal path of the sun, from sunrise to sunset. In the correct ritual sense the *sine* of a *suane* (in contrast to ordinary dwellings) facing the rising sun is regarded as the front and it is the entrance on this face which marks the ritual point of departure in its construction. A further entrance, set in the middle of the side nearest the sea, is used only on the occasion of important *suane* festivals, such as the *hunuhatai otua*, lit. 'fire of hunuhatai'.

The latter is held at a prescribed time after the completion of a new ritual house and after it has been used for a specified period of time for the *kahuai* dance. It is said to terminate all ritual involved in *suane* construction. This festival, which only occurs, at its most frequent, each 10 to 15 years, is the only time when the fireplace in the *suane* is used, and the only occasion also when the *sasara*, the shelf built above the east door, is used, when bones of the sacrificial marsupial cuscus are placed there for the ancestral spirits of the autochthonous clan Matoke, guardian of the *suane*. The village ritual house also differs from the ordinary traditional house in the presence of a single central upright, which, although also undoubtedly a structural necessity, has certain ritual connotations. The large *tihana onate* drum on the right hand side of the
entrance on the seaward aspect of the suane and greater attention to decorative carving also differentiate this from the dwelling house.

In referring to the suane recurrent emphasis is laid on its sacredness and, almost equally, its maleness. Women only enter under its eaves to take part in kuhuai dances, and only then at the express invitation of men. The suane is undoubtedly the most salient feature not just of the Nuaulu village but of their entire social and ritual organization.

Not all symbolism is symmetrical. Immediately to the seaward side of the suane is the tuaman tiai, a piece of ground measuring approximately the area of the suane itself — about 200 square metres — and used principally for the awoti dance. Building on it, except for a ritual structure known as the sabua, which is erected in conjunction with certain suane festivals, is strictly prohibited. Similarly, the sone (Cordyline fruticosa), wainite (Languas speciosa), kokine (Musa sp.) and other bushes planted on it for use in religious ceremonies may never be uprooted or tampered with outside a ritual context, on pain of death.

Surrounding the suane on every side is the general living area of the village, the principal features of which are the houses, or numa. Also within this area are situated a variety of other structures, including drying platforms, timber stores (heute), storage huts for coconuts, nurseries for clove seedlings and copra-drying huts. As such, it constitutes the ‘mundane’ sector of the village in which all the normal business of village life takes place; and yet, even here are found structural features imposing some degree of order. While the precise location of houses within the area is not ordinarily determined by such cosmological injunction, so much as kinship affiliation or marriage rules, houses themselves are bound by very definite rules relating to their orientation, structure, construction and behaviour with respect to them. An exception to this general rule, however, is the location of the house of the yonate Matoke, the ‘lord of the land’, which must always be sited in the northeast corner of the village (figure 5). This, you will recall, is consistent with the southwest-northeast (FEMALE:MALE) diagonal axis of the numa mone. But those expecting some neat symmetry in the symbolic organization of geographic space must be disappointed. Beyond the village level sacred power emanates not from the northeast, but to some extent from the northwest, from the mythic mountain of Nunusaku at the source of the three major rivers of West Seram — the Eti, Tala and Sapalewa. The history and geography which have conspired to create this curious cosmography have yet to be accommodated within it.

As with the symbolic order of the house, so in the symbolism of the Nuaulu village plan there are several separate contexts in which the opposition MALE:FEMALE occurs — certainly three, and possibly four. The first two conform to the MOUNTAIN:SEA, SUNSET:SUNRISE axes. The third is a concentric symbolism in which the centre of the village is associated with MALE and the periphery with FEMALE.
1. suane, village ritual house, 2. numa onate matoke, house of the ‘lord of the land’, 3. heute, timber store for ritual house, 4. sacred bushes, 5. tuaman tiai, dancing-ground, 6. bosune, menstruation hut. Directions of ritual movement: diagonal (towards the NE locus of the SACRED) and circular.

Figure 5. Summary of the major symbolic dimensions of the Nuaulu village.
(figure 5; Ellen 1978:36-41) — a centre-periphery contrast in which the MALE:FEMALE associations are far less ambiguous than in the case of the individual numa mone. Indeed, the ambiguous gender affiliations of the house appear yet more confusing in the village context, where the house is MALE in contrast to the FEMALE bosune (menstruation hut). Females, in this model, are only temporary residents in the house.

Thus, the symbolic dimensions of the village reflect both the consistencies and the contradictions of the house. There is a basic congruence between Nuaulu house and village plan. This much one might expect. Both exist on the same conceptual plane: at once physical and apprehended with the senses of sight and feeling, they can be concretely experienced in precisely the same ways, as inhabited spaces. Yet despite this basic similarity there are important differences between them: certain symbolic relations cannot be expressed in one or the other; neither can one be reduced to the other: the circular symbolism of the village cannot be reduced to the house; likewise all the binary oppositions of the house cannot be reduced to those of the village. There are also contradictory oppositions running through both; and contradictions between them e.g. in terms of male:female contrasts. At the same time, the village plan stresses other relations which are ambiguous at the level of the house, such as with respect to the centre-periphery axis. It is important, therefore, not to use the village level to clarify or explain symbolic relations at the level of the house in any simple-minded way. The connections between these different symbolic registers are partial and variable. For example, context affects the visibility of connections between different domains, situations, and practices, and how they hang together as a whole. On occasions, the links between Nuaulu birth symbolism and house symbolism are associated and emphasized (as in ceremonies for bringing new babies into the house); at other times the house symbolism will be linked and paraded in such a way as to show connections between it and the symbolism of the village plan (as in the rites concerned with the building and ceremonial opening of a new house, or for ‘cleaning’ the village).

From this it must be clear that I would find it impossible to provide the kind of symmetrical recapitulation of symbolic coordinates of Nuaulu village space given by Barraud (1979:58) for Tanimbar-Evav. To compress all symbolic domains together into a totality is artificial and certainly does not reflect ‘local models’, or symbolic consciousness. This is evident from the contradictions and problems which emerge by juxtaposing the symbolisms of different domains. If we compare Nuaulu house and village plan symbolism, probably among the more logically consistent and shared domains because of their material referents, one finds that it is impossible to resolve the diagonal MALE:FEMALE axis of the house with the MALE:FEMALE::centre:periphery contrast of the village. In terms of the symbols of the village alone, MALE is the
central, and therefore dominant, value associated with the village. Yet activities in the village and garden area (the ‘domesticated’ zone) have overall FEMALE associations, which are sometimes contrasted with the MALE qualities of activities such as hunting, conducted in the forest (the ‘non-domesticated’ zone). Thus, the centre:periphery opposition appears completely inverted in its link to the FEMALE:MALE contrast. Moreover, villages themselves may be contrasted in gender terms, by way of asserting their mythic and historical relationship.

Similar data have recently been yielded by Barnes (1980:93) for Kédang. He notes, for example, that although ‘full moon’ and ‘interior’ are regarded as superior, while ‘female’ is inferior, women are nevertheless associated with ‘interior’ and with ‘full moon’. In the same volume, Schulte Nordholt (1980:240) provides a closer and more extensive parallel in illustrating the multiple and apparently conflicting usages of the MALE:FEMALE dichotomy among the Atoni of Timor. There is therefore nothing very surprising about this. To begin with, MALE:FEMALE is simply a convenient means of giving lexical and semantic forms to notions of opposition and complementarity conceived to be as basic as the biological division between the sexes, just as in plumber's argot ‘male’ and ‘female’ are used to refer to parts of joints. This is so despite the more obvious allusion to copulation (one might almost say coupling) in this case. It is precisely such basic categories which we would, surely, assume to be used in a wide range of different and sometimes conflicting ways (MacCormack and Strathern 1980).

Evidence of the kind just described suggests, to paraphrase Bourdieu, that the same referent may in different contexts or in different symbolic domains have different referents as its complement, and may receive different, even opposite, properties. Symbolic objects and practices which seem to the observer to be contradictory when seen in terms of ‘successive relationships set up from different points of view’, may in fact provide no contradiction as far as the participants are concerned (Bourdieu 1977:110, 112). Since no contradiction is recognized, then no resolution or explanation internal to the symbolic system is necessary. Elsewhere Bourdieu (1970:749-50) talks of the ‘double significance’ of the Berber house, which he shows to be both opposed to the public world (as ‘nature’ is to ‘culture’), but also (undeniable) culture itself. By the same token, the Nuaulu house has a ‘multiple significance’; no more than we might expect of a microcosm.

A theory of selective representations
There is a tendency for Nuaulu to express and explain certain abstract symbolic relations in terms of the house or village space. For obvious reasons these are among the most tangible and encompassing material phenomena dominating their social experience. In this sense the house, body or village plan is a microcosm because it is a physical and compre-
hensible summary of more abstract notions. On the other hand, not all metaphors which reduce complex abstract ideas are physical in this sense; they may equally be social-relational or, more specifically, kin-based; lived-through rather than lived-in space. But kinship is also expressed in terms of other metaphors, such as terms from the botanic world (Conklin 1964, Fox 1971), or, for that matter, in terms of concrete objects, such as the house. The numa or its cognates in other eastern Indonesian languages refers to both physical habitation and a political unit. Thus the lived-in metaphor and the lived-through metaphors become inextricably bound up, feeding upon each other.

While the house as a model may clearly be idealized, abstract, generalized and consolidated, it is not necessarily formalized. This is the point at which others may have been misled. Our analytical formalizations frequently adopt a particular pattern. We isolate semantically simple components, and try to place them in equally simple relations of contrast. However, this approach is not rooted in the way the Nuaulu (at least) see the house; it is rather based upon rules of linguistic grammar, conventions of graphic representation, analytic concepts, comparative anthropological knowledge, home-baked assumptions and further simplification introduced by the analyst. The Nuaulu do not say that MALE is 'opposed' to FEMALE; or that MALE:FEMALE is analogous to SEA:MOUNTAIN. We formalize by seeing those symbolic relations in terms of conventions of perception which are not necessarily those of our informants. In other words, houses are not 'experienced' as 'front elevations', 'side elevations', 'plans' or even three-dimensional drawings, unless these selective representations are also culturally available. When anthropologists use such devices, they do so for convenience. Thus, to divide space vertically, independent of horizontal space, or space conceived of in any other dimension, may be to make unwarranted assumptions about the cultural representation of space. Houses are experienced both as lived-in wholes and in terms of the relations between their parts. But the relations between those parts are not necessarily congruent with the conventions of Western architectural drawing. We are in danger of reifying a particular kind of representation: no one level is predictably consistent. We formalize by dividing and separating, thereby denying certain connections, reifying others, and eliminating the uncertain. In particular, we appear to neglect what follows from houses being considered as organic wholes. As lived-in wholes, houses are anthropomorphized, they become animate things, like people.

We might reasonably expect symbolic microcosms to be anthropomorphized, even fetishized. Although section houses have to conform to basic outline patterns, there is room for individual variation; and we have seen that they are personalized through naming. The house as a whole is sacred: only traditional dammar torches can be used for internal illumination. Its construction, sometimes stretching over several years, is
punctuated by ritual: the making of its components is accompanied by ritual; they are sung about in the ahinai chants which accompany the kahuai dances (e.g. the ahinai numapatai, ahinai numa huni u, ahinai nanu hene). It is at once both natural and cultural. Its organic connections with the natural universe are evident in the ritual continuity expressed between the living trees destined to become house timbers and the house timbers themselves. The major timbers (hini) are subject to ritual from the very moment they are singled out to be cut; they are temporarily placed on racks to prevent them touching the ground inauspiciously, that is, length-wise or top-down. They must be carried to the village foot first, they are stored on trestles in timber stores (heute) which are themselves sacred. When it comes to their emplacement, they are quite literally ‘planted’ (irahu: to plant, as in irahu sikewe, ‘planting yams’), and always according to their natural orientation, that is, root end first (cf. Barnes 1974). In this respect it is instructive to compare rituals in which sacred shrubs are planted with the ‘planting’ of hini. The similarities are detailed and astonishing. The house is thus considered to be, in a very real sense, ‘living’. This aliveness is often expressed in anthropomorphic terms.

Moreover, numa mone are seldom complete. As with the suane, the clan ritual house takes many years of dedicated construction and ritual activity, and may often be repaired long before it is ritually complete. When it is finished, it may often be taken down and replaced almost immediately. This, I think, tells us something very important about its position in Nuaulu life. The building of the house is therefore one of the eternal ceremonial cycles and a focus of ritual which regulates the Nuaulu conception of time. It is a series of fixed points. So, there is a notion of an ideal house which is only temporarily realized, but which people are always striving toward.

But the house is not simply a physical metaphor, since (quite apart from the semantic conflation apparent in the word numa) it is based on assumptions concerning social organization and cultural attitudes. Thus we have ‘the end where the females sleep’, an end which is sacred not because of itself, but because it is where rituals are performed, and a diagonal symbolic axis which relates to the ceremonial seating arrangement. In other words, symbolic relationships embedded in the fabric of the house mirror activities performed in it.

Ethnographers like the elemental and ruthlessly seek out logical reductions to basic patterns (as in a sense they must). The compunction which they, as anthropologists, share with most members of the dominant establishment of science and scholarship is thus an irresistible (but understandable) temptation to subscribe to the simple. This is underscored by basic methodological canons. But we should not confuse the economical explanation with oversimplification, nor fail to distinguish between true symbolic microcosm and figurative language, and mne-
monics. Such an overriding obsession with logic and the simple led some years back to some forceful remarks by Maurice Bloch. For Bloch, ambiguity itself has social usefulness. It has illocutionary rather than propositional force, semantic effect dependent on a string of words in context, rather than on the meaning of particular words. Any attempt to explain such statements by putting them into logical arrangements 'is doomed to failure because it overlooks the fact that these statements are couched in a language where reason has been from the first excluded by the effects of formalization and the subsequent transformation of the units of meaning which it produces' (Bloch 1974:75).

Conclusion
The problems faced in analyzing the house as a microcosm stem in part from all that has just been said, but also from its construction in terms of two basic classificatory logics, which are themselves undeniably universal. One is an order relative, dependent and responsive to humans; the other independent of the location and orientation of people. The first begins from the individual and works outwards; and because the individual is a three-dimensional object hanging in space, this outward movement can be seen ideally in terms of concentric spheres of indefinite outward extension in which the body (or mind) sees itself as part of an increasingly larger entity. But we live on the ground, and this means that in constructing the symbolic space around us we are inclined to begin with a circular horizontal plane. Moreover, spheres are more difficult for the human mind to deal with, without concrete experience of these ideal geometric forms. Thus the village and wider geographical space works from a basic horizontal two-dimensional plane: we construct space in terms of concentric rings. Further simplifying the spherical lived-in world we divide space horizontally (rather than vertically), beginning from ground level and working upwards and downwards. The best model we have of this is the layer-cake or contours of height and depth. The other classificatory orientation is a binary division of space in which the body is not simply the central point of reference but rather a template providing a series of contrasts based on fixed points and processes which can be imposed on the outside world, and which are independent of ego. But the binary oppositions which we link to fixed points in the universe are themselves ultimately modelled on the human body, in the anatomical symmetries which allow us to divide the body into halves. Houses, like humans, move around; their orientation is relative. It is because of the interplay between an inevitably relative ego-centric division of space and a desire for fixed systems of dividing space independent of human beings that some of the contradictions about which I have spoken arise. It is also for such reasons that the house (and of course other means by which humans temporarily transform their physical environment so that its natural and cultural qualities
become ambiguous) provides such important metaphors for the expression of social relations and cultural values. The pre-eminence of the house as microcosm stems, therefore, from a combination of sociality and physicality. But the contradictions which its analysis generate are themselves a cautionary reminder that microcosms cannot provide us with any convenient and primordial concordance of symbolic relations, but only a way into a symbolic system which is in a constant condition of mutual reflection, refraction and change. Reductionism provides only an illusion of certainty and uniformity.

NOTES

1 The Nuaulu fieldwork discussed here was conducted for 18 months between 1969 and 1971, in 1973 (3 months), and again in 1975 (3 months). On all of these occasions I have been generously sponsored by Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia (the Indonesian Academy of Science). For financial aid I would like to thank the Social Science Research Council (Grant nos. S68.8243 and HR3410.2), The Central Research Fund of the University of London, The London-Cornell Scheme for East and Southeast Asia, and the Hayter Travel Awards Scheme.

My interest in all aspects of the Nuaulu house developed from the first day of my encounter with them and is unlikely to end until whenever I pay my final visit. Not a day went by in the field without some increment to my knowledge of Nuaulu houses. This is unremarkable enough, since so much of what the Nuaulu do either takes place within houses or in relation to them. For this reason it is difficult to single out any one person who has (more than anyone else) contributed to my appreciation of what was going on. From my notes and records it is clear that without some long conversations on the subject with Sekanima Nepane-tomoi'en, Natuniane Pia (kapitane Pia, Bunara) and (as always) Komisi (yonate Somori, Ruhuwa) my understanding would be deficient in several significant respects.

2 There is some variation in the size of such houses. In practice it was found that numa mone in Ruhuwa varied in width (gable end) from 600 to 1030 centimetres and in length from 760 to 950 centimetres. A detailed account of the physical construction of the Nuaulu house remains to be written. For some details see Ellen 1983a.

3 The figures for each hamlet are as follows:

|          | Ground level houses | Pile houses |
|----------|---------------------|------------|
| Aihisuru | 8                   | 9          |
| Bunara   | 20                  | 11         |
| Hahuwalan| 8                   | 3          |
| Ruhuwa   | 17                  | 9          |
| Watane   | 14                  | 7          |

Further details, including plans, are provided in Ellen 1978.

4 Other personal names for clan sections include the following: Ai inana, Numa patai, (numa onate Somori) referring to types of tree in which snakes (totemic for Somori) live; Ninita (numa kapitane Somori): lit. 'mirror'- allusion to marital alliance with Nepane-tomoi'en; Pina wasa (numa onate Nepane-tomoi'en): type of bamboo used in house roof; Tomoi'en (numa kapitane Nepane-tomoi'en): type of bamboo (tomone) from which the clan section originated; Nanu hene (numa onate kapitane Sonawe aipura).

5 The one exception, which — as it were — proves the rule, is with the ipan Sonawe-aipura, where houses are oriented in the opposite direction, with the ridge aligned along the mountain-see axis. Behaviour with respect to order within the house is accordingly modified to the orientation of the house, except for sleeping postures, which remain
Microcosm, Macrocosm and the Nuaulu House

east to west. Nuaulu believe they will die if they sleep along the mountain-sea axis. The origin of this exception, which lies in antiquity, was not known and neither did there appear to be much speculation on the matter.

6 This is the Nuaulu term for the structure commonly known throughout Seram and Ambon-Lease (Haruku, Saparua and Nusalaut) as the baileu. Cooley (1962:8-13) discusses the etymology of this central Moluccan term in his treatment of the subject for Ambonese villages.

7 The basic dimensions of the suane in Ruhuwa are as follows: height at apex 660 centimetres, length 1330 centimetres and width 1260 centimetres. The height of the floor above the ground level is 150 centimetres.

8 While it is generally true to say that the arrangement of clans within the village is not based on ideological concepts, the fact that the clans Sonawe-ainakahata and Matoke are forbidden by tradition from dwelling near the sea or contaminating themselves by having any connection with it, has meant that the households of these clans are usually distributed toward the mountainside of villages. In cases where members of these clans feel that excessive sickness and misfortune is attributable to inefficacious location of houses, households will be moved further inland.

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