Moment of Death: Gift of Life
A Reinterpretation of the Northwest Coast Image "Hawk"

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RÉSUMÉ

Irving Goldman (1975) a démontré que le terme *Potlatch* a pris un sens profane et imprécis autour duquel les anthropologues ont érigé un "mirage institutionnel" qui ressemble peu à la réalité et à la complexité de l'imagination rituelle Kwagiuł. Une fausse interprétation similaire, à laquelle les anthropologues ont malheureusement ajouté foi, se retrouve dans l'interprétation des images contenues dans l'art des Indiens de la côte Pacifique du nord-ouest. Non sans ambiguïté et en s'appuyant implicitement sur l'idée que l'art primitif se doit d'être décoratif ou représentatif, les chercheurs ont, dans leurs analyses, séparé idées et objets et divisé la culture en ses composantes matérielles et intellectuelles.

Tout récemment, les chercheurs qui se sont penchés sur les images de la côte Pacifique du nord-ouest ont tenté de "reconnaître" (Rasmussen 1974) la constellation des référents symboliques aussi bien que la logique de l'image des objets sculptés ou peints. Cette communication qui s'inspire de cette nouvelle herméneutique se veut une réinterprétation d'une de ces images, celle que les anthropologues ont conventionnellement appelée "faucon".

INTRODUCTION

Students of Northwest Coast Indian culture are heirs to the very best in two major anthropological traditions, an intellectual heritage left by the founding ancestor of American anthropology, Franz Boas, and by Lévi-Strauss, a founder and leading elder of

Structuralism. The first tradition, epitomized by Malinowski and Boas, is characterized by great fieldworkers. Boas's genius resided in the recognition and precise recording of cultural facts. An indefatigable collector, little escaped his clear eye for detail, his systematic organization and collation of data. His idea of intellectual integrity led him to shun generalization of the data, publicly at least, and to prefer rigourous specificity in recording the ethnographic fact.

The other tradition, so evidently represented by Mauss and Lévi-Strauss and aptly described as a tradition of 'armchair anthropologists', stands on the broad shoulders of ethnographic collectors like Boas (see Burridge 1975). Not having the same kind of intimacy with the people they wrote about, these scholars nonetheless perceived logic and restored meaning to the disparate data collected from traditional cultures. The genius of Lévi-Strauss's ethnology consists in the refleshing of ethnographic bones with the polychrome dimensions of human thought. 'From an armchair', his clear eyes touched here, then there in world ethnographies, as he found general meaning in the particular, peered into *la pensée sauvage* to find part of his own face mirrored there.

Janus-faced, the student of Northwest Coast Indian culture must attempt to dialectically reconcile the Boasian and the Lévi-Straussian traditions. While their contributions clearly exceed the limits of the Northwest Coast, we are indebted to one for providing ethnographic material of incredible richness and texture, and to the other for offering not only new insights into ethnographic data, but the theoretical tools to re-think — to re-anthropologize — the recorded life of an Indian people. Slipping once again uncomfortably into the tension between these two traditions, we have the equipment to re-collect and re-cognize (after Rasmussen 1974) some of the meanings in the images of human thought.

This paper addresses itself to the problem of interpretation and reinterpretation of Northwest Coast images, a task that has been pioneered through the work of Boas and Lévi-Strauss. At the onset, we must recognize our indebtedness to not only these great thinkers in the traditions of Northwest Coast ethnology, but to the great thinkers who create the images, the carvers and painters in traditional Northwest Coast society. Clearly, Boas and Lévi-

Strauss have acknowledged a similar debt as they recognized that the visual images created and used by traditional Northwest Coast people meant something, that they were communicative. Boas saw the images as representations or 'signs' marking points in a system of crests — as 'visual nouns' that made clan distinctions and affiliations visible. Lévi-Strauss's approach to these same images has been to view them as ideas expressing a system of relations, as 'visual predicates' that make sensible, like myths, the sociological armature of Northwest Coast thought. Generally, he has seen the visual images on the Northwest Coast as paralleling or having congruence with the images in the myths — the logical structures contained in both kinds of images being aligned with the structures of sociological reality.

Roughly divided into two parts, the argument presented here moves from the logic and illogic of the interpretation of a single image labelled "Hawk" within the Boasian model of Northwest Coast "art", to an analysis inspired by the work of Lévi-Strauss that probes the structural logic ensconced in the image itself.[1] Because this visual image was part of a highly conventionalized repertoire of traditional northwest Coast images, the analysis will pertain generally to all parts of this cultural area.[2] Specific ethno-

[1] Lévi-Strauss's work has been characterized by a consideration of visual images as constructions shaped and derived from intellectualizations on the human condition. Now classic examples of his thoughts on visual images and image making include, to mention only a few, his analysis of split representation in Maori face paintings (1963: 239-263; see also E. Schwimmer, this volume, pp. 201-222), his considerations of the artist in traditional society as *bricoleur* (1966: 16-17 *et seq)*, and his approach to visual images which postulates that objects, like myths, are sensible models of abstract relations as well as a source for aesthetic contemplation. *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26). His most recent works on North-west Coast myth and ritual uses as focal point the logic contained in *Kwagiuł Dzonoqwa* and *swaihwé* masks as they are related to the logic in Coast Salish *xwéxwé* masks. (1975, 1977).

[2] "Traditional Northwest Coast images" has a double meaning, for it also denotes those images that *anthropologists* have traditionally described as Northwest Coast art. As Wayne Suttles has pointed out for many years, this designation is imprecise, for what has generally been acknowledged as Northwest Coast images are for the most part from the northern and middle (Wakashan) groups on the coast and only marginally from the southerly Salish groups. Coast Salish images are indeed quite different from images on other parts of the coast. (see Suttles 1970). I too am guilty of this generalization, but for the sake of intelligibility to a general audience, and because the scope of this problem requires a space of its own, I will maintain the conventional term "Northwest Coast", acknowledging here the distinctiveness of Coast Salish culture. I am therefore excepting for the time being, all Coast Salish images when I make reference to Northwest Coast images.

graphic data will, however, be drawn from the *Kwagiuł*,[3] though any one of the other coastal ethnographies would have provided an equal amount of data to support this argument. (See for example, McLaren 1977 for the Haida, Tsimshian, and Tlingit cases).

The first part of the argument reworks the logic of Boa's interpretation of the image he labelled "Hawk". Through this exercise a new noun supplants the old identification, and it is at this point that the argument takes a new direction. The second part of the argument has the elusive dimensions of a Möbius strip, whereby, while tracking the surface logic of our newly-named image we suddenly find ourselves traversing simultaneously the inside and outside of an intellectual construction. This is an illusion of course, as in the Möbius strip. The contour of the argument simply follows that unthinkable twist in Northwest Coast visual logic when the image portrayed ceases to be a thing or noun and instead becomes a thought in action, a cognitive process made visible.

The analysis itself has as a foundation the idea recognized by Boas and to a greater extent, employed by Lévi-Strauss: Northwest Coast images form part of a cognitive system and, as such, are communicative. Given this point of departure, it becomes possible to recognize — by recognizing — the highly conventionalized forms in these images as part of a system of logical relationships that can be described and explained as operating within a semantic domain of symbols and metaphors.[4] If we are to analyze the logic of this kind of thinking — using the image 'Hawk' as both our example and our foil — then images must be not only placed within their ritual context, but the "language" of ritual, including its attendant cosmological and mythological elements, must serve as the framework of the explanation.[5]

[3] *Kwagiuł* is the term employed by the U.B.C. Museum of Anthropology in lieu of the more traditional *Kwakiutł* that has appeared in the ethnographic literature. The former term is prefered by the *Kwagiuł* people.

[4] Victor Turner has, of course, applied much the same approach to the symbolic domains in the Ndembu ritual sphere (1967; 1969) and his influence will be implicitly apparent in my iconographic interpretation of Northwest Coast visual images.

[5] Clearly, many anthropologists have argued this same point. One anthropologist who argues this point convincingly is Bloch in "Symbols, Song, Dance and Features of Articulation" (1974). What he has said about interpreting ritual is easily applied to an explanation of visual art: "The experience

Germane to this analysis in particular, and in general to all considerations of visual images used in the ritual processes of traditional societies, is the collocation of ideas and thinking — the restoration of a mental template to material culure. As analysts, we must be prepared to drop our culturally specific notions about "art", and with it some of our visual illiteracy, and look at the visual images of other people as something besides a collection of "things". Instead, new optics are required to view visual images as potential 'texts'. Just as Lévi-Strauss has had much success with analyzing a corpus of myth varients (e.g. the Asdiwal myths, 1967) as a text, we can now begin to look at corpora of Northwest Coast artifacts as "image texts". The vast collections of Northwest Coast material culture suggests this analytical format because it is not difficult to conceptualize and to assemble, for example, a corpus of 'all raven rattles', or 'all frontlet headdresses', or 'all Chilkat blankets', and then to approach that corpus as a 'text' for interpretation[6].

With this optic, using a philosophical approach based in hermeneutics and a methodological approach derived from Lévi-Strauss's notion of *armature* as it applies to myth collections, it is possible to approach collections of "image texts" as a formalized system of communication with discernable *codes* and *messages* (Lévi-Strauss, 1969: 199). Because these "texts" are visible and because as analysts we are actively involved in discourse with the objects by virtue of our "beholder's share" (after Gombrich 1969: 181-202), we enter with the objects into the hermeneutic circle of understanding, interpretation, explanation, and validation. (After Ricoeur 1969: 55; 1971: 549-550).

Whereas Lévi-Strauss applies the term *armature* "to a combination of properties that remain invarient in two or several

of the ritual is an experience fused with its context and therefore only an attempt to explain what this event as a whole is for an explanation of the content. An attempt to link the context of ritual to the world or society directly does not work because in secular terms religious rituals are misstatements of reality... In other words, because the units of meaning are changed so that they can serve purposes only for religious events, and since they are inseperable from the context, there can be no explanation without an explanation of what the event or the context is" (1974: 77).

[6] This was basically the approach developed and used by Wilson Duff (and by extension, myself and his other students) in looking at Northwest Coast visual images. See, Duff 1975.

myths", it is possible to use the same term to describe visual elements or properties that remain invarient in a corpus of artifacts. (Ibid.) Training our eyes to perceive the Northwest Coast artist's selection and exploitation of the contrasts and combinations in creating form will sensitize us to *codes* that serve to distinguish different meaning within a given *armature* (Lévi-Strauss uses "myth"). *Message,* the subject matter of an individual artifact may be seen throughout a visual *armature*: e.g., the "raven" image on all raven rattles. Similarly, a visual *message* (e.g., a "raven" image) may transverse several corpora. A "raven" image may appear on a bracelet, a horn spoon, a frontlet on a headdress, etc.

But Northwest Coast images are seldom as simple as a singular image or "message". The artists who created these forms used many codes to make visible contrasts, similarities, and ambiguities in a large and rich repitoire of visual forms.

Therefore this analysis will not be dealing with a Northeast Coast visual "text". Instead we are working at a more fundamental level of reinterpreting a single image — "Hawk" — then moving toward an interpretation of that image as an element of a code. The analysis points to the conclusion that when this visual code is found within a Northwest Coast visual *armature,* it constitutes a potent part of the message. At this point, visual images cease to be merely 'things' or nouns adorning our museum shelves and present themselves as elements of a syntactical structure — as predicates in discourse.

NORTHWEST COAST INDIAN ART: ANOTHER INSTITUTIONAL PHANTOM FROM THE BOASIAN ERA

Irving Goldman (1975) has demonstrated how "The Potlach" became an imprecise concept around which anthropological thought constructed an 'institutional mirage' that had little to do with the reality and complexity of *Kwagiuł* ritual imagination. A similar *'miss-construction'* that was also given unfortunate professional authenticity was the interpretation of visual images in Northwest Coast Indian "art".

Boas's 1897 analysis entitled "The Decorative Art of the Indians of the North Pacific Coast" has survived generations of ethno-

logical studies on the coast (1897a). Until very recently, scholars have been uncritical of this formulae for decoding visual images. The disparity between the simplicity of his interpretations of these visual images and the complexity of the socio-ritual and mythological constructs which he claimed were "represented" in the images went unnoticed.

Boas's earlier work was expanded into the larger publication *Primitive Art* (1927/1955) where, while floundering in an explanation of how the culturally specific notion 'art' could be applied as a universal cultural category, he elaborated a functional approach to visual images that categorized all non-Western 'art' as being either "decorative" or "representational".

For Boas, the images were signs (although he uses the word "symbols") or indices visually suggestive or "descriptive" of Northwest Coast zoomorphic crest entities. He postulated that the 'art' was conventionalized and formalized into a system of visual elements that could be read as clues to distinguish one "heraldic design" from another. The explanation for such formalization, according to Boas, was "the adjustment of the animal form to the decorative field." (1927/1955: 183, 186, etc.). In other words, stylization was no more than the direct result of spatial constraints.[7]

Basically, Boas's model for explaining images falls short because he made the same artificial distinction that has always plagued the "anthropology of art": he separated mental from material culture, when he separated ideas from things (Kubler 1962; also, Maquet 1971). Clearly, his persistence in asking "What does it represent?" was designed to elicit a nominal response — i.e. "this visual image represents such and such a crest" — without inquiring into the logic making such images appropriate elements for a crest.

Boas did sensitize our perception of "design elements" that comprised the image of a specific form. He demonstrated that these elements could be split, disjointed, or dispersed to fit a given field,

[7] As extraordinary as this statement may be in terms of a logical explanation, it formed the basis of a model for deciphering the 'heraldic' taxonomies of visual images that survives to this day. One finds the model employed from the early ethnographers writing about Northwest Coast 'crest art' — such as Marius Barbeau's numerous Haida and Tsimshian works — to the most recent descriptive analyses by Holm (1965, 1972), and Holm and Reid (1975).

and that recognition of certain elements would point to identification of a specific animal design. He compiled these visual "characteristic elements" into a list of crest representations, a formula for recognizing wholes from parts. For example, in the designs he postulates that:

> large incisors + large round nose + scaly tail + stick in forepaws = BEAVER
>
> large curved beak + point of beak turned downward = EAGLE
>
> large long head + elongated large nostrils + round eye + large mouth set with teeth + blow hole + large dorsal fin = KILLER WHALE
>
> (Boas, 1927: 202. Note that this same kind of formulary is still in popular use, see Holm, 1975, etc., and forms the superstructure of the "renaissance" in the use of these images by contemporary Northwest Coast Indian artists.)

By-passing the interesting problem of why such an approach has persisted in the history of anthropological ideas, we can simply look at the logic of Boas's interpretation of Northwest Coast images and see that the formula is defective in obvious respects.

First, Boas' formulary of zoomoriphic images implies a sign system in which one crest name is expressed by one crest image. Even a cursory overview of Northwest Coast naming systems (i.e. personal names, mythical names, crest names) indicates for more sophistication than the simple nominative terms suggested by Boas for these visual images.

Second, the implied inflexibility of Boa's nominative interpretation of visual images does not allow for the ambiguity of some of these images or for the possibility thatone image may have more than one iconographic reference. For example, in *Primitive Art,* a painted box was interpreted by Charlie Edenshaw as depicting four images of Raven "as culture-hero". One side of the box contains the image of Raven "as a human being" and depicts a bird's head and a human hand. "Although obtained from Charles Edenshaw, one of the best artist among the Haida", writes Boas, "I consider [his interpretation] entirely fanciful" (Boas 1927/1955: 275-276).

Clearly, the inadequacy of Boas's model for interpreting Northwest Coast visual images is a subject for extended study, and is thus beyond the scope of this paper. Put quite simply, a

model that implies one visual image = one noun = one name, does not have the semantic sophistication to either represent the complex imagery found in mythical and crest names, or to account for the numerous ambiguous visual images, that fall outside his model.

A prime example of the failure of his formula, one that most clearly counters the logic of Boas's model, is the image Boas distinguished as "Hawk". By pushing the ethnographer's question from "What does it represent?" to "What is it *doing?*", the image "Hawk" is open to new iconographic interpretation. Having taken this preliminary step, the iconographic content of other images such as "Raven", "Eagle", "Beaver", "Bear", "Killer-whale", etc., will then be open to re-interpretation. A reinterpretation of the image "Hawk", the subject of this essay, will perhaps lay the groundwork for exploring the semantic complexities of the iconography in other Northwest Coast visual images, for viewing these images as a visual grammer rather than as a mere list of nouns.

Boas read the "symbols" (i.e. *signs* in contemporary communication theory; see Leach 1976: 12-13) for 'Hawk' as "...an enormous hooked beak, curved backward so its slender point touches the chin. In many cases the face of the bird is that of a human being, *the nose given the shape of the symbol of the hawk.* It is extended in the form of a beak, and drawn back into the mouth or merged into the face below the lower lip" (1927: 190; italics mine). Figure One reproduces some of the images Boas identified as 'Hawk'.

There are two problems with Boas's identification.[8] First, looking at his hypothesis that these pictorial representations, however disjointed they may be, are those of the animal named as the clan

[8] There may also have been a problem with his translation, but at this time we cannot substantiate this notion. Boas, as Goldman points out repeatedly in MOUTHS OF HEAVEN, liberally edited and "retranslated" glosses for Kwagiuł words and phrases supplied by his Indian collaborator in the field, George Hunt. In addition to the "translation editing" of Hunt's reports Boas would often leave untranslated Hunt's glosses for proper names. Boas, Goldman comments, may have had a case for certain editorial changes. "Scholars would have been served better, however, by having Hunt's translation accompanied by Boas's alternatives. The most disturbing example of editing was to introduce the foreign word "potlatch" into the texts as a substitute for Hunt's more direct translations" (Goldman, 1975: 10; see also pp. 121-131). The term "Hawk", like the term "Potlatch", may have been a scholarly attempt to draw many related associations into a single concept.

emblem, we can find a multitude of beavers, eagles, bears, ravens, killer whales, etc., being used as 'crests'. However, hawks rarely appear on crest lists except as minor crests (cf Reid, in Holm and Reid 1975: 67). There is a confusion in the ethnographic record when identifying this particular crest image — particularly among the Tsimshian, Haida, and Tlingit where it has been labelled "Thunderbird", "Moon", "Skia'msm", and a host of other creatures. This kind of confusion does not occur as frequently when other crest images are interpreted. Moreover, whereas the other 'crest animals' figure prominantly in mythology and cosmography, hawks are rarely mentioned at all — indeed in these contexts there are perhaps a dozen instances that a hawk plays even a minor role. Yet, how are we to explain 'Hawk' as one of the most frequent visual images employed by traditional Northwest Coast carvers and painters? As a dominant image in the material culture we find 'Hawk' virtually everywhere — on housefront paintings, on masks and fronlet headdresses, on boxes and bowls, on spoons, rattles, and of course, on totem poles.

The second problem is the ambiguity in the image itself. In other images identified by Boas — "Beaver, Bear, Raven, Whale", etc., the design characteristics of the visual images generally correspond to their image in nature. However the image 'Hawk' is not strictly that of a bird. Clearly it has a beak-like nose, but whereas in the natural world a bird's upper and lower mandibles form its mouth, the 'Hawk' image has a beak *and* a mouth. Moreover, the "mouth" of the 'Hawk' is not only mammalian, it is often depicted with teeth.[9]

[9] Boas also grappled with this problem in a vague manner. In *Primitive Art,* he suggests the 'Hawk' beak design originated from viewing head-on the "sharp bow and stern of a canoe with a profile of a face on each side." (1927: 236-37). His point is not well developed there or in subsequent publications and bears no relevance to the iconography of 'Hawk'.

Similarly, there were other ambiguous images, for example, an image of a raven with a 'broken' beak and human lips — the lower lip depicted as having a labret, or images that combined the design elements for sea creatures with the design elements for birds. Boas never systematically dealt with the images in *Primitive Art.* He did however, attempt to "decode" the multiple images of Chilkat blankets, as he tried to apply his own system of identification of the visual "characteristics" to blanket designs. The effort, co-ordinated with the ethnography of Lt. Emmons, stands as a monumental tomb of contradictions and confusion — a fact evidenced by its relative obscurity in Northwest Coast literature.

Checking natural history field guides, one finds that there are three true hawks *(Accipiters)* found on the North Pacific Coast: the Goshawk *(A. gentilis),* the Sharp-shinned Hawk *(A. striatus),* and the Cooper's Hawk *(A. cooperii).* Part of the larger family *ACCIPITRIDAE,* they are related to both the Golden and Bald Eagles. In the natural world, hawk beaks are not significantly different from Eagle beaks, both being "strongly hooked" and "without the tooth-like projection" found among falcons (Godfrey 1966: 86, 87-98). In Northwest Coast imagery, dramatic and obvious distinctions between bird species were made, for example, Raven's beak was shown to be long and straight; Eagle's beak was short and sharply curved. On the other hand, Northwest Coast artists were also able to depict with subtle realism the distinctions found in the natural world between related species (See for example, Swanton 1905a: plate XXII, Figs 4, 5; XXIII, Figs 2, 3; 142-142).

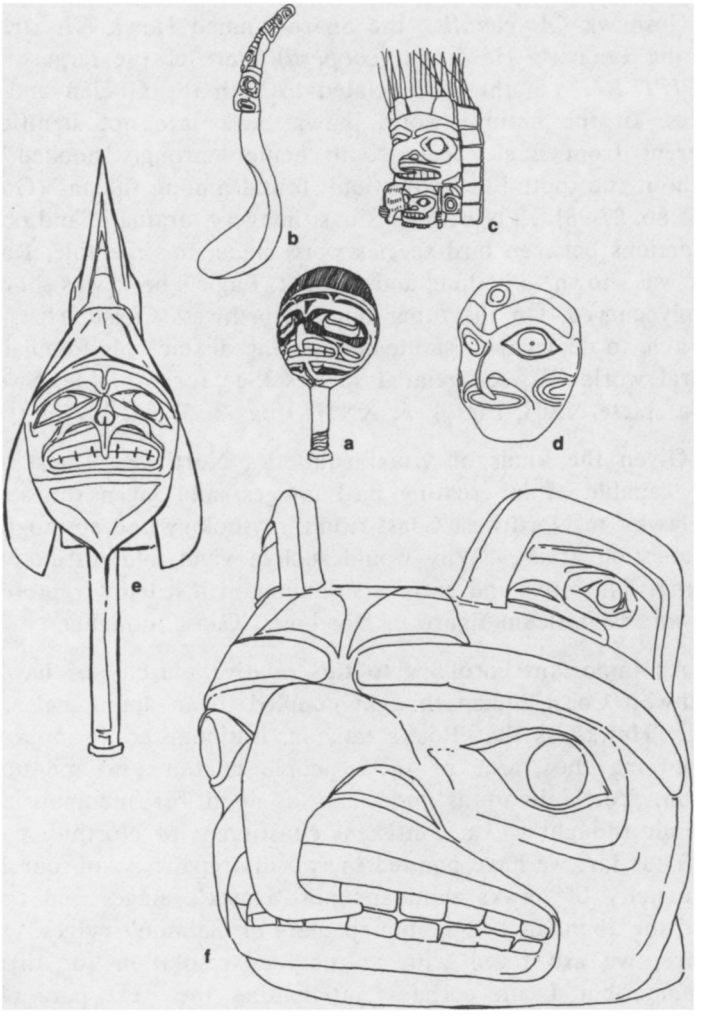
Given the kinds of visual subtleties Northwest Coast artists were capable of in creating bird images, and given the scarcity of 'Hawks' in Northwest Coast ritual, mythology and cosmography, the question arises, "Why would such a vivid and distinctive representation evolve and become so dominant if it truly 'represented' such an insignificant figure in Northwest Coast thought?"

An important corollary to this relative scarcity of hawks in Northwest Coast Indian thought coupled to an abundance of the image 'Hawk', is that Boas's now institutionalized formulary for deciphering the "art" of these people contains no mention of salmon. Yet, salmon as food and as food for metaphoric and symbolic thought was a consistent constituent of Northwest Coast life. Thus far, we have pointed to two discrepancies: on one hand, the paucity of hawks/abundance of 'Hawk' images and on the other, the abundance of salmon/paucity of 'Salmon' images. On the surface, we are faced with an obvious resolution for this discrepancy, but I am perhaps anticipating the next part of my argument.

HAWK EYE, ARE YOU REALLY A SOCKEYE?

In contrast to the scarcity of hawks in the natural and cultural worlds of the Northwest Coast people, there is an abundance of

FIGURE 1



Images on these objects were identified by Boas as "Hawk": a) a Shaman's rattle; b) a Horn spoon; c) a Fronlet d) a Mask. (Illustrations from Boas, 1927/1955: 191.)

Examples of images identified by Holm and Reid as "Hawk or Thunderbird": e) a Raven rattle; f) and a Headpiece with carved scullcap. (Author's drawings from photographs Holm and Reid, 1975: objects 78, 67).

salmon. There are five species of salmon on the coast and their presence was central to almost every aspect of native life.[10] Their anadromous journeys calibrated the people's calendars (see eg. Boas 1916: 398-399; 1909: 412-413; etc.) and signaled population movements from winter villages to summer camps.

The dispersion of the community took place during the fishing seasons as individual households moved to specific river locations inherited from their ancestors. An analogous dispersion took place in the natural world as the population of migrating salmon (the run) broke into smaller schools as 'siblings' entered specific parent streams. The salmon returned to their place of birth to spawn and to die. The people returned each season to harvest this primary food source — the salmon was their gift of life.

Salmon fishing, as all food gathering, was a secular activity taking place in what traditional Northwest Coast people regarded as a profane time of year — in contrast to the sacred time of winter and its ceremonials. Susan Reid (1972; n.d.) has writen extensively of the opposition between profane *(baxus)*/summer and the sacred *(tsetseqa*/winter concepts among the *Kwagiuł,* and has characterized their structure in *Kwagiuł* thought as a continuum in which the seasons were never completely given over to either *baxus* or *tsetseqa.*

This conceptual continuum balancing notions of seasonal profaneness/sacredness was generally shared by other Northwest Coast groups, and if we look at the ethnographic accounts of salmon fishing among the Northwest Coast people, we can see a pivotal point in this continuum. The end of the winter ceremonials was the beginning of activities surrounding salmon fishing; the sacred

[10] *Oncorhynchus* is the classification of the Pacific Salmon and includes the five anadromous species found on the Northwest Coast: 1) *O. keta* — also called chum, keta, or dog salmon; 2) *O. nerka* — sockeye, redfish, flueback, Fraser River salmon, or red salmon; 3) *O. kisutch* — coho, kisutch, silversides, skowitz, or hoopid; 4) *O. gorbuscha* — pink, or humpback; and 5) *O. tshawytscha* — Quinnat, Chinnok, Tyee, King, Columbia, Sacramento, and Spring (Townsend and Smith, 1902; Schwiebert, 1970). *Salmo gairdneri* (also called Steelhead, Winter Salmon, Hardhead, Salmon-trout, or Square-tailed Trout), is generally regarded as a salmon, but in reality is a trout that resembles an Atlantic salmon. It makes anadromous journeys to spawn, but unlike the Pacific salmon, it does not die after spawning, but returns to the sea. (Ibid.).

community had disbanded and groups of individuals began fishing, hunting, and gathering food. The interface between the two seasons was the solemn and elaborate "first-salmon" ceremonies (Gunther 1928; all major Northwest Coast ethnographies). Prayers were offered to the first-caught salmon, and ritual scenes reminiscent of mythological scenarios describing the arrival of the first salmon at the beginning of time were once again enacted.

The ceremonies marked the time of renewal for both men and fish. The salmon returned to their natal streams in spawning pairs. Once the redd was complete, the pair died, the continuity of their species ensured. Humans continued too, because their food supplies were renewed. For the first time in months, fresh fish was consumed and abundant harvests were dried or smoked to replenish dwindled winter reserves.

After meals, the bones of the salmon were carefully gathered and returned to the water. The people believed that like most animals populating their world, salmon were beings having both a human and an animal nature. Salmon-people transformed themselves into salmon, swam to human fishing camps, and gave their bodies as food to the people. In return, the people enacted a 'ritual of rightness' by returning the salmon's bones to the water in order that the bones be refleshed and the soul of the salmon could thus swim back to the Salmon villages of the underworld. This cyclical exchange — salmon giving of themselves to people and people returning the stuff of regeneration to salmon — ensured not only the continuity of the salmon runs each season, but the continuity of life itself. It is not surprising therefore, that the image of 'Salmon' in Northwest Coast myth and ritual is a dominant one — repeated and reworked in a host of themes and permutations.[11]

As an image in Northwest Coast ritual and mythology, salmon is associated with ideas relating to notions of wealth, supernatural power, reincarnation/regeneration, transformation, and the antiquity and the nature of the synthesis between supernatural and social experience. For example, the salmon is addressed as "Weight-

[11] See, for example, Boas 1916: 857, 304-05; Swanton 1905: 146; 1908a: 689-702.

Giver" (Boas 1930: 205) and "Abalone-Maker" (Boas 1921: 676). Heavy weight is a synonym for rank and wealth.

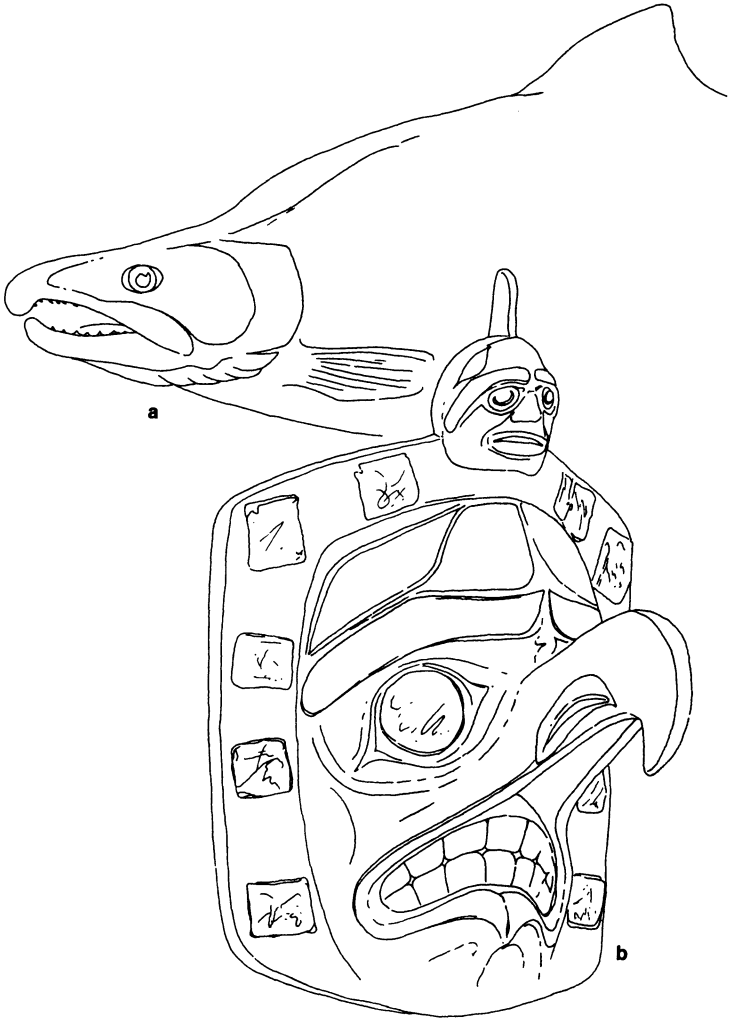
In Kwagiuł myth, abalone is a treasure source from the sky called *Abalone of the World* (Boas 1930: 60ff; Goldman 81-82). For the Kwagiuł, an abalone shell is a prestigeous item of adornment owned by wealthy people. In Northwest Coast myth, Salmon has a symbolic association with copper as both stand for treasures of the sea (Goldman, 1975: 82, 29, 242-43; Curtis, 1915: 156-158).

Salmon, as we have noted above, have an animal and human identity. In the natural world, Salmon-people appear as fish; in the supernatural world, they shed their fish identity and appear in human form. The children of the Salmon-people often live in human villages as twins, and bring to their parents wealth and good health

The vital exchanges between men and fish, between natural and supernatural realms, are potent and persistent themes in Northwest Coast myth and ritual. Supernatural and social experience are synthesized in the transformation of supernatural humans into salmon offering themselves to humans, in the transformation of salmon into wealth (which is a prerequisite for obtaining supernatural power), and in the transformation of fish bones into salmon bodies to carry home again the supernatural souls of the Salmon-people. This "cosmic circulation", in Goldman's terms, is characterized by the antiquity of the myth world facing the present, as original donors pass power (wealth) to present recipents. This parallels the circulation of wealth (power) in a temporal sphere. "Neither pair is independent of the other, since the ancestral and supernatural beings live in men, and men face each other in the guise of ancestors and supernatural beings" (Goldman 1975: 127). Implicit in these supernatural and social cycles is the regeneration/reincarnation of life.

The paradigmatic associations between wealth, supernatural power, and reincarnation are based on transformations of food (salmon) into wealth, wealth into supernatural enlightenment, superatural power into wealth, food (salmon) into supernatural entities (Salmon-people), human death into life of the first-born, and finally, wealth and power of the ancestors (supernatural beings) into wealth and power of the present population.

FIGURE 2



The reinterpreted "Hawk": "Salmon" as a Northwest Coast Metaphoric Image, or "Salmon-ing" as the Image of a Moment of Transformation.

a) Profile of a Sockeye Salmon. *(Oncorhynchus nerka).*

b) Fronlet from a Bella Coola or Bella Bella ceremonial headdress. (Author's drawing based on a photograph in Holm and Reid, 1975: object 71). Holm and Reid have not identified this image as "Hawk", however from their descriptions of similar images, the identification as such is implicit.

These potent themes come together in the interaction of fisherman and fish in the *Kwagiuł* "Prayer to the Sockeye Salmon" (Salmon, conceived of as great supernatural beings were addressed as "Swimmers" me'mE$^{\epsilon}$ yo'xwEn; Boas, 1966: 155; 1921: 3121):

> *Oh Swimmers, this is the dream given by you, to be the way of my late grandfathers when they first caught you at your play. I do not club you twice, for I do not wish to club to death your souls so that you may go home to the place where you come from, Supernatural One, you givers of heavy weight* [meaning wealth/supernatural power, see Goldman 1975: 82-83]. *I mean this Swimmers, why should I not go to the end of the dream given by you?... This is your own saying when you came and gave a dream to my late grandfathers. Now you will go.*

Before the woman cuts the salmon, she adds to the fisherman's prayer:

> *Welcome, Supernatural One, you Swimmer, you have come to me, you, who always come every year of our world, that you come to set us right, that we may be well. Thank you sincerely, Swimmer. Now I will do that you come here for that I should do to you.* (Boas 1930: 205; 1966: 159).

If we move from the image 'Salmon' in myth and ritual with its retinue of symbolic and metaphoric referents, the question now becomes, 'How can we link these experiences of 'Salmon' with a visual image in Northwest Coast material culture?'

Looking at the natural image of salmon in the real world suggests an obvious answer. When the migrating salmon returns from their mysterious ocean odyssey to the brackish estuarine waters of their parent river, each fish's body begins a startling metamorphosis that transforms not only the colour of its skin, but the shape of its body. Both male and female salmon of all the anadromous Pacific salmon go through this change, though it is more extreme in the male than in the female. The body of the salmon thickens and the once silvery scales become deeply imbedded and brilliantly red. The salmon's head turns green in colour, the jaw becomes elongated and the cartilaginous snout curves hook-like into a toothed mouth. Its digestive organs athrophied, the salmon no longer seeks food. Instead it pushes fresh water once again over a body long accustomed to salt and struggles upstream to spawn with a body heavy with milt or eggs. "The spawning rites

of the salmon begin in this somber mood," writes the naturalist and artist Schwiebert, "with new life literally coming from a ritual of death." (1970: 30).

Returning to the visual image 'Hawk', one can now offer the obvious reinterpretation: face of a person yet also the face of an animal, a hooked nose that curves toward and sometimes enters a toothed mouth — this is the visual image of the Supernatural One, the Swimmer, the supernatural salmon that is at once fish and human. Wealth-bringer, food-giver, 'Salmon' as an appropriate image of the cosmic cycle of decay and rebirth figures preeminently in the thought and the visual thinking of the Northwest Coast people. It is, therefore, not 'Hawk' that has dominated as a key visual symbol in Northwest Coast design repertoire, but 'Salmon'.

* * *

The reinterpretation of 'Hawk' as 'Salmon' is intellectually "tidy", but clearly, given our earlier critique, it is not very satisfying. We have simply used Boas's formula to rethink the key elements of an image and have moved to supplant one nominative term with another more logical noun. At this level, we are still letting the image "represent" or describes another reality to us without probing the visual thinking in the image before us. Our visual image 'Salmon' has a new name, but now me must ask a new question, "What does 'Salmon' mean?".

SALMON, WHAT IS THE DREAM GIVEN BY YOU?

Probing the visual image 'Salmon' requires apprehending or at least disengaging and then reconstructing some of the elements within its discourse. For example, we have already mentioned the transformative nature of the Salmon-people and aligned it with the human/fish features of the visual image. At this semantic level, 'Salmon' is the image of the act of transformation. This iconographic interpretation takes its cues from the visual portrayal of human (or of salmon features) 'caught' in the act of transforming. In addition the interpretation is supported by symbolic and metaphoric referents that connect the ritual and mythological image of salmon to the notion of transformation. But having gone this far, we can now see that we have touched but the tip of the iceberg

as we begin to unfold the polysemy of the image 'Salmon'. (Figure Two)

While one cannot even begin to suggest that the Northwest Coast people's picture of the world was formed solely on the salmon runs, the analogies evoked by this dramatic natural phenomena are particularly potent. Using the combined media of ritual, myth, and visual images, it is possible to explore the multivocal referents that shape a constellation of meanings around the relationship between humans and salmon. No analysis can chart the entire complex, but fixing on a single point in this multi-dimensional blueprint will provide at least a partial sighting from which we may glimpse some of the symbolic relationships.

Without elaborating here the ethnographic details, we can briefly note that studies of Haida, Tsimshian and Tlingit imagery in the north (McLaren 1977) and *Kwagiut* imagery in the south (Reid 1972; Golman 1975; Boas 1916, etc.) have linked key Northwest Coast concepts concerning wealth, supernatural power, and reincarnation to a constellation of symbolic referents that include the following: *copper; the colour red — particularly red cedar-bark and red paint; salmon; flicker feathers; abalone; crystals; and light.* While focusing on any one of these referents as a dominant symbol will form a cogent outline of the relationship between these three key concepts, the whole constellation of meanings may be set into almost dizzying motion by predicating their structure on the cultural theme of cannibalism that permeates religious thought and image on the Northwest Coast. A demonstration of what I mean here will begin by returning to the visual image 'Salmon'.

'Salmon' is depicted with a hooked nose that extends from the face and quite often recurves to enter its mouth. A Freudian analysis might postulate that 'Salmon' is an image of "sexual activity of the most unthinkable kind" if we were to accept the *nose/penis, mouth/vagina* symbolism common to that construct. Still, one might suppose, the image interpreted in that light would align with 'Salmon' as a symbol of regeneration. But this kind of interpretation uses "outside" logic to unfold an "inside" image — and the result, while it may appeal to the less adventurous is still far from satisfying because we are simply engaging our own mythology.

The 'Salmon' image interpreted as an image of symbolic action takes on a new life, however, if we look at the logic of what is taking place visually. Quite literally, the 'Salmon' is devouring itself — which is surely the ultimate in cannibalism. The analyst does not have to look very far in the Northwest Coast ethnographic record to find a distinct analogy between cannibalism and reincarnation/rebirth.[12] Both are transformation devices frequently employed in myths and rituals.

Cannibalism is the ultimate act of devouring or swallowing because the actor eats his own kind. Devouring is a key concept on the Northwest Coast, a metaphoric process that yields particularly vivid transformations of wealth, supernatural power, and reincarnation. The *Kwagiut* used this image for all levels of experience. In ritual we find chiefs giving feasts described as the host swallowing his guests (guests are called "salmon"), some chiefs were said to "swallow whole tribes" (Boas 1966: 192-193; see also Boas, 1897b: 559). One of the principal ceremonies in the *tsetseqa* is the *hamatsa* or Cannibal Dance. The dancer, has been captured and possessed by *Baxbaxualanuxsiwae,*[13] a horrifying "Man Eater of the Mouth of the River" described as 'having mouths all over his body' (Boas, 1897b: 395; 1966: 173; Kobrinsky, 1977). The *hamatsa,* in a possessed and frenzied state cannibalizes corpses and bites chunks of flesh from peoples' arm. In myth, we find numerous examples: Thunderbird swallows *Sisuił; Dzonoqua,* a wealth-woman and cannibal, swallows children. In cosmological imagery, heaven swallows the sun; just as the river swallows salmon (Boas 1897b: 394).

As Goldman has pointed out, devouring is based upon killing, and the action of swallowing engages the process of conversion and ejection. The cycle is completed when the eaten is vomited or expelled as a new life form. Compressed into absolute fundamentals, the cycle of life, death, and rebirth is animated by the process of

[12] Indeed, this analogy may be found in many cultures. A notable North American example is the Athapaskan *Windigo,* a cannibal of the forest who devours his own lips (Riddington 1976; Turner 1977).

[13] Baxbakwalanukwe, is the second child of Thunderbird (Boas, and Hunt 1905: 167). Baxbakwalanukwe ("Man Eating Spirit"), is a man-eater like Baxbakualamuxsiwae, and is the second child of Thunderbird (Boas and Hunt 1905: 167).

transformation. What happens in the belly of the cannibal is the twist of the Möbius strip, the switch that converts our moment of death back into life. The life cycle imagery, Goldman writes, "is at once concrete, vividly effective, and in its compression generalized and abstract enough to stand for a cosmic principle" (1975: 202).

Transformation as a cosmic principle needs such devices, for in itself the moment of transformation, the bringing together of two opposite qualities and exchanging one for the other — be it old for new, life for death, male for female — is not really thinkable. But by setting the process in a sequence of events — or in a sequence of images — transformation is made visible and thinkable (after Reid n.d.: 59). Reid and Goldman have each noted that for the *Kwagiuł,* death and rebirth imagery has been particularized in the action-image of cannibalism. "Transformation is put into terms of digestion and is therefore set into the temporal sequence of eating, ingesting, and ejecting. As in the rebirth image, we have the sequence through death to life" (Reid n.d.: 62).

Masters of transformation imagery, the Northwest Coast people found countless ways within their ritual and mythological imaginations to convert animate into inanimate, animals into humans, process into a series of events, things into ideas, and *vice versa.* They used the image 'Salmon' as a symbol for reincarnation/regeneration by temporalizing the image and making the transformation visible. The *Kwagiuł,* for example, conceived of twins (who are two bodies sharing the same soul — a sort of spontaneous reincarnation) as being supernatural beings, the only humans possessing inherent supernatural power or *na'walak*ᵘ (Boas 1966: 166-167). by the *Kwagiuł* as the human manifestations of salmon (Boas, 1916: 163-164, 1921: 681 et seq, 1932: 203; Golman, 1975: 180-181) and were kept from going too near the water lest they be "retransformed" into salmon (Boas, Hunt, 1905: 375; Boas 1932: 203). Twins and spawning salmon were the same colour for, as Boas recorded, the bodies of twins were "always painted red" (1932: 203-204). Like salmon, twins assured wealth and good health. Like a salmon, a twin was a reincarnated soul, but unlike a salmon the twin's rebirth was spontaneous, temporalized in "twoness".

Another way the *Kwagiuł* conceived of the rebirth transformation was in the doubleness of the two-headed supernatural serpent,

the *Sisiuł. The Sisiuł's* image is of a united duality — twinness in the lowest common denominator of a single body. In the visual image the two identical serpent heads are joined by a single human face. Locher writes that one of the *Sisiuł's* many supernatural qualities was the ability to instantly come back to life after being slain or devoured (Locher 1932: 9-11; see Boas 1910: 3-4). The *Sisiuł,* capable of infinite self-regeneration, was described by the *Kwagiuł* as the "Salmon of the Thunderbird" (Boas 1935: 146-7; Goldman 1975: 76, 115).[14]

Moving to another point in the constellation of *Kwagiuł* symbolic referents for salmon, we note that there is a revealing link between 'copper' and 'salmon'. In prayer and in ritual, coppers were addressed as "Great Steel-head Salmon" and "The Great Supernatural One" (Boas 1930: 186-187; Goldman 1975: 226). Coppers, Boas recorded, were said to smell like salmon (1932:228). Moreover, copper and the colour red were both called *tlaq* by the *Kwagiuł.* The symbolic associations between the colour red, the red bodies of spawning salmon and the transformation of rebirth come into focus as the ethnographic record informs us that on the Northwest Coast, "eagle down and red paint were much used by shamans and are spoken of in the stories as the principle media of restoring the dead to life" (Swanson 1908: 455; Boas 1916: 588, etc.). Red as a colour symbolized supernatural intervention and curing; copper as an indicator of wealth and supernatural power, symbolically 'cured' people of poverty, but were actually used in curing diseases (Boas 1932: 182, 184, 191, 228, etc.). At the semantic level, salmon symbolism is coextensive with *red* and *copper* for, as we heard in the prayer to the Sokeye, salmon came *'to set the people right, that they may be well."* Salmon, through the gift of themselves, are "Weight-givers": sources of wealth. As I have written more extensively elsewhere (McLaren 1977), wealth on the Northwest Coast was a prerequisite for spiritual enlightenment — and *vice versa.* Two sides of the same coin, material wealth and spiritual rank formed the coinage of human power.

[14] The *twin/salmon* in the every day "real" world of the Kwagiuł may be seen as the inversion of the *sisiut/salmon* in Kwagiuł myth, for the sisiut was a cause of sickness and death, whereas twins were harbingers of health and life.

The metaphoric links do not stop here. An infolding of the symbolic referents whose path we have just traced, takes place when we discover that in *Kwagiuł* thought, not only are coppers conceived of as salmon, but the red shields are symbolically fed salmon. Coppers then, are ultimate in cannibalistic self-devourers (Goldman 1975: 191, 226, etc.; Boas 1930: 185, 186-188).

Salmon are cannibalized as well by humans. In the contractual arrangement between themselves and humans, the Salmon-people gave the ultimate gift of life. Much more than providing food for human life, they were a source of wealth and spirit for human continuity. The "dream" they gave was that, though men like salmon must die, the universe devouring itself promises rebirth.

The visual image 'Salmon', seen as the predicate in a potent message, contains all of these symbolic utterances — and undoubtedly many more. By temporalizing the image as event, the Northwest Coast image-makers have made visible a moment in the ideal process of cyclic regeneration. 'Salmon' as a visual image, is a verb in any message about transformation: 'Salmon' is essentially "salmon-*ing*". The visual image has engaged us in its discourse by synthesizing the concreteness of its visual form and the abstractness of its visual thought. 'Salmon' bids us *"to go to the end of the dream"* as it makes thinkable the transformation of life and wealth into the poverty of death.

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