

A Structural Approach to the Tsimshian Raven Myths: Lévi-Strauss on the Beach

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RÉSUMÉ

Cinq mythes du cycle tsimshien du Corbeau, recueilli par Franz Boas, sont analysés selon la perspective structuraliste. On insiste sur les modalités d'oppositions binaires qui forment les structures essentielles des mythes, de même que sur la notion de transformation. Le caractère principal est le Corbeau, le «déseigneur», qui est le médium entre le monde des esprits et le monde de l'homme, entre la nature et la culture. Les mythes sont perçus comme servant à communiquer les valeurs sociales: les actions incorrectes ou antisociales du héros conduisent au désastre. De plus, les mythes ont une fonction épistémologique: ils expliquent aux Tsimshiens la genèse de leur monde et ils identifient les forces qui soutiennent la réalité matérielle.

INTRODUCTION

Much published structural analysis has concentrated on mythology (Lévi-Strauss, Leach, Maranda, Hammond-Tooke; see bibliography). One of the most significant contributions to this analytic approach has been the work of Lévi-Strauss, most notably his four volume opus magnum "Mythologiques". This present paper is a structural approach to the mythology of the Northwest Coast Tsimshian Indians. It employs variations on structuralist techniques, particularly those developed by Lévi-Strauss.

The myths here considered were collected from the Tsimshian by Franz Boas. As the stories progress, a series of transformations

occur. The "hero", or central character, battles against various uncontrollable forces and is gradually changed. In these myths important social and moral elements or values of the culture are mirrored against opposite elements or values. The transformations which occur in the main character, Raven, occur in terms of these oppositions.

Raven is an example of a character type found in all mythologies: the trickster. The trickster moves between the static state of the animal-spirit world and the state of constant change which is the world of man. He exposes the contrast, reveals the dialectic. Thus light arises from dark, heat from cold, and mortality from timelessness. In these transitions it is most often the trickster who is the agent of these transformations. In the end, however, it is Raven himself who is altered the most.

The myths transmit cultural messages. These messages we find to be packaged in codes, generally in imagery related to sensory aspects of the material world. Thus we find contrasts of visual (e.g. light-dark), tactile (hard-soft), auditory (loud-quiet), and other sensory factors. The characters, the trickster and his foils, are seen to move among these elements and at the same time are a part of them.

This paper experiments with a formula for mythic analysis constructed by Lévi-Strauss (1963). The formula:

$$\frac{fx(a)}{fy(b)} :: \frac{fx(b)}{fa^{-1}(y)}$$

describes the way in which a myth manipulates oppositions. X and y are functions, a and b are characteristics of these functions, and a-1 stands for an original state as it is transformed.

The message of a myth concerns man's understanding of the universe. This understanding necessarily relates to the problem of logically opposed pairs. This study of Tsimshian mythology tries to delineate some of these oppositions and show how they relate to Tsimshian cosmology.

To the Tsimshian Indians of the Northwest Coast the universe was as much vague and spirit filled as it was immediate and tangible. Behind any material object or creature stood a non-material force that supported the substance of solid things. The two aspects of real-

ity were not divorced from one another but were two faces of the same thing. These two sides of reality came together in the native mind through concepts of mediation, these concepts being made comprehensible through the medium of myth.

For the Tsimshian the primal mediating force between the non-material and the concrete was represented by the figure of the Raven. In its worldly guise, the raven occupied the same environments as man and competed with man for food. But a difference existed in that the raven ate its food uncooked, and it spent most of its time in those parts of the environment which were transitional between contrasting aspects of the universe. The raven was seen either on the beach, in the liminal space between land and sea, or in the sky, aloft or perched on a branch, between earth and heaven. The spirit behind the raven was associated with these transitory aspects of the universe. This spirit was Raven, also known as Txamsem or Giant. Raven was not only the major mediating figure between the incorporeal and substantial worlds, but also was seen as the creator, the force that disrupted the timeless and static universe which existed before the material world coalesced.

Myth tends to deal with important sociological aspects of a people's reality. Very often we find social prescriptions dealt with by inversion. A social convention is not followed in the myth and this sets off disturbances in the world where the myth occurs. We shall see that in the Tsimshian Raven myths this is what occurs: a contra-social action by a father leads to his son's death and sets off a series of disruptions through the universe. We will observe the oppositions and contrasts that are involved in composing the people's sense of reality. In seeing how these relate to basic patterns of social organization, we will be moving in the direction of trying to understand the structure of consciousness. The more particular aspect of social regulation relates to one culture (here Tsimshian), but the way in which the relevant information is packaged and communicated relates to universal human adaptation.

In dealing with his environment man processes data in terms of contrasts — a binary complex. But there is an inherent ambiguity in the concept of duality, for between the two oppositions is always a mediating force relating the two. Thus there is a triad co-existent with, or in the same space as, the duality. We find then in the Tsimshian concept of the duality of universal nature — material versus

immaterial, world of man versus world of spirits — that there is always a mediating force. There is always something to bridge the gap. We might imagine the beach that lies between land and sea is a part of both but at the same time neither. It is a thing unto itself. As we look at the Raven myths we will see that there are many aspects of this particular “culture hero” that join two sides of a duality, but at the same time he is a thing separate. We shall see Raven as a creature of the beach, between land and sea, and as a creature of the air, between heaven and earth. And in terms of man’s place in the cosmos, we will see Raven as a creature with both human-ness and non-human-ness, a being that the Tsimshian identified with yet which also represented the world opposed to man’s, the world of spirits. Between worlds Raven was the mediating force and the agent of transformation.

This paper will present an analysis of the structure of five of the Tsimshian Raven myths. These myths are part of a cycle of 38 Raven myths collected by Boas. This analysis will involve a study of contrasts found both within and between myths. Such a structural approach, following the directions pointed out by Claude Lévi-Strauss, follows the assumption that human consciousness comprehends the world through the contrasting of opposites. Reality is the result of complex organization of such oppositions as light-dark, hot-cold, up-down, pain-no pain, and so on. As such basic intellectual processes are true of all men, an analysis of the art, literature, or social organization of any society should reflect these processes.

To more clearly see how these changes occur within the myths we are studying, the analytical concepts of armature, code, and message will be referred to. By armature we mean a combination of properties which remain invariant throughout several myths; code refers to the pattern of functions ascribed by each myth to these properties; message is the subject matter of an individual myth (definitions from Lévi-Strauss, 1969: 199).

In the myths here being studied armature refers to an invariant combination of elements: the search for food of the main character, the constant travelling from one place to another, and a turning point in the middle of each myth where the fortune of the hero reverses. This combination of elements is a flexible but nonetheless permanent program inside which changes in code are inserted.

Code refers to the design of the program in any particular myth. More particularly, it refers to the detailed ways in which the armature elements are presented, using contrasts between tangible qualities. We see in different myths different codes, all basically related to man's sensory experience, are used. For example in Myth 1 the search for food is, in part, couched in visual terms as light (fire) in contrast with universal darkness. This produces a luminescent being who because of his demands for food is made into a black Raven. In other instances we will see the same search for food expressed in digestive (gustatory), auditory and tactile terms.

Message refers to the subject matter of an individual myth. As the whole Raven cycle deals with an essential discontinuity, the reverberations caused by the discontinuity, and its eventual resolution, there is one basic message throughout. The superficial subject matter varies, but the real statement about human social relations is again and again repeated, using different codes. Put simply, the message of the Raven myths is of the necessity for cultured beings, spirits or men, to observe social conventions.

As a final point on the concept of message, it should be noted that various authors (Lévi-Strauss, 1969; Beck, 1978) have used the concept of message when comparing changes that occur in a myth (or folktale) when it passes from culture to culture or from one social stratum to another. In these cases message is seen to alter and often invert as the various social groups absorb and individualize the stories. In the Raven myths we find many alterations of code and inversions of elemental detail, but these changes simply augment one another. They do not alter a basic, constant message.

Mythology is a form of human communication. Culturally important ideas are transmitted person to person, generation to generation, through the medium of myth. Generally the types of messages communicated deal with social cohesiveness. The story line of myths usually deals with nuclear family relations. Usually the story passes on information about correct (or destructive) social interaction in a family context. We will see that in the Raven myths an incorrect action by a father (giving too much care and attention to his son) leads to the death of the boy. This destructive action sets off a chain of events that is universally calamitous. The social message about how to care for a son is thus subtly but powerfully communicated.

A simple message is being passed through the culture, but at the same time there is always a hesitancy or ambiguity involved. Things are not easily understood and cannot be perfectly explained. Inconsistencies abound in mythology. Thus as we look at the Raven myths we will see that in the first myth the father who originally heaped excessive attention on his son, eventually rejects the youth and expels him from the community. And in the last myth we will see Raven, at first an epitome of greed and trickery, eventually reversing his role and being generous. So the myths pass on rules and explain the universe, but at the same time do not leave the individual actor with a total understanding of the world around him. Myth functions, in part, to perpetuate ambiguities essential for the preservation of cultural and behavioral flexibility.

I

In interpreting their experience the Tsimshian, as all cultures, constructed their own unique complex of oppositional relations. Basic black / white, up / down, type contrasts were mixed with other cosmological concepts which allowed for a connection of opposites. Hence the concept of height is related to the supernatural and otherworldly, whereas places near the ground are linked to the world of man. The creatures of myth mediate these two realms. The opposition of east-west, or in Tsimshian, towards land versus towards sea, also relates to a difference between the unknowable and the everyday. In this situation there exists the mediating force of the salmon and oolichan (Lévi-Strauss, 1967). These pass through Tsimshian territory on their way upstream, travelling west to east. And it should be mentioned that this is also the direction of travel that we find the hero of the Raven myths moving in. We must keep in mind these types of oppositions as we view the Tsimshian myths.

Within the Tsimshian universe Raven was the creator; not the ultimate creator but the mediator, the supernatural being whose role it was to transform a universe of stillness and dark into the busy world wherein man finds himself. The first myth of the Tsimshian Raven cycle deals with the origin of chaos and the birth of Raven. The story is set in the world of the animal spirits. The spirits live, as the Tsimshian could only imagine them, in a world identical in social detail to the Indian world. The animals are perceived as supernatural

beings who live in a natural order — and who have access to powers that man does not.

MYTH 1: The world is still and timeless and dark. An animal spirit chief has a favourite son for whom he has built a bed, over his own, in the rear of his house. The chief cares for his son very well and in fact too well, washing the boy regularly and pampering him. As a result of this excessive care the boy weakens and dies. The boy's intestines are burned and his body is placed in his bed. Miraculously the next day another young man, the Shining Youth "bright as fire" appears in the dead boy's bed. This new youth is accepted as a new son by the chief and is given great affection by all the animal villagers. But the Shining Youth worries his new parents as he does not eat. Then two slaves, who eat great quantities of whale meat, tell the young man that their great appetites come from the fact that they have eaten scabs. One of the slaves tricks the youth, making out that their great appetites are pleasurable. The youth asks for and is given scabs to eat by one of the slaves, though the other slave objects. The youth develops an insatiable hunger. He soon eats his family and the whole village out of house and home and is finally sent away by his father who gives the Shining Youth gifts of a stone, a bladder full of berries and fish roe, and a raven blanket. With the raven blanket the Shining Youth becomes Raven. (Boas, 1916, page 58.)

At the outset of this myth we find the situation stated in terms which relate to oppositions. As was noted in the first paragraph of this section, the concepts of higher / lower and towards land / towards sea are important within Tsimshian world view. So when we see that the boy's bed is placed above his father's bed and to the rear of the house (meaning away from the sea, since Tsimshian houses face the sea), we see that the son is indeed placed in an honoured position, a position too honoured for a non-adult. This point cannot be over-emphasized, for it is the elemental factor of the whole Raven myth cycle. The fact that the father cares for his son so very well, pampering him, is in opposition to Tsimshian social custom. Drucker (1965) notes that among the Tsimshian, boys of 9 or 10 years were sent to live with their mother's brother, as it was felt that a father would not be strict enough with his own son. And this is just the point at the start of the Raven myth: a father pampers his son and the boy weakens and dies. This unnatural situation is the basic cause for all the turmoil which is to come and which eventually results in the origin of the material world.

The smoke from the burned intestines has risen in the atmosphere and the next day the Shining Youth appears (sent, he says by Heaven). The youth has two notable qualities: he shines in the dark

(and in the animal world all is dark) and he does not eat. We see here a relationship between the fire, which destroyed the intestines of the chief's son, and the youth "bright as fire" who has no appetite. The relevant elements are fire and food; there is a play on these elements throughout the Raven myth cycle. Fire is the transforming force which man uses to treat raw meat and make it into "cultured" food. But in Myth 1 fire is used to burn human flesh (which is inappropriate) and the result is an unnatural appetite in a miraculous being.

The pivotal point in this first myth comes when the slaves give scabs to the boy to eat. The consuming of this most unnatural sort of "food" results in the youth's transformation from having no appetite to having an insatiable one. Because of the youth's peculiar origin, related to the burning of intestines and thus being essentially related to food and appetite, when he eats the hunger inducing non-food he develops endless hunger.

The slaves are the paramount instruments of mediation in causing this transforming in the youth. They have mixed qualities as mediators. Among Northwest Coast peoples, slaves were captured enemies and thus were beings from outside the local society. They could not be considered human beings in the way in which members of their captor's society could be. Thus slaves were non-human beings and yet were at the same time another type of human being. In the Raven myths the slaves are at one extreme of a continuum, the other end of which is the spirits, the midpoint of which is man.

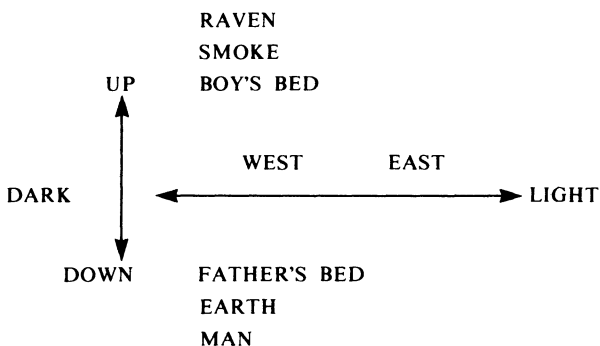
The two slaves must also be viewed as twins. Although they are husband and wife, they are two of a kind, different from all else around. Lévi-Strauss (1963) notes that twins tend to bring opposites into association but leave them individually distinct. We find this with the Shining Youth. Though at first he does not eat and then is introduced to food through the mediators, he remains apart from other beings for he eats too much. The action of the slaves is the point around which Myth 1 swings and is the cause of the great change in the Shining Youth.

A third aspect of the slaves is that they can be seen as tricksters. We conclude this because the slave who gives the scab to the youth is called "a bad man" by his wife. Lévi-Strauss (1963) finds that tricksters are mediators who bring opposites into juxtaposition. In Myth 1 we see that because of the actions of the slave, the Shining Youth is

sent away and becomes Raven the creator, the great mediator. This figure is himself in juxtaposition to the world he creates and through whom the world of man and the world of the spirits meet.

The great appetite of the youth results in his father banishing him. We thus see a complete reversal of the first part of the myth, where the father was over-attentive to his son. In the second half of the myth the father is guilty of extreme under-attention and actually expels the Shining Youth. To leave the spirit world and seek his fortune the Shining Youth dons the raven blanket and becomes Raven. Raven ascends and travels east, over the sea.

DIAGRAM I



We have noted various opposing forces and elements in Myth I. They can be summarized as:

<i>higher</i>	<i>lower</i>
east (towards land)	west (towards sea)
dead boy — Shining Youth	Shining Youth — Raven
burned (cooked) intestines	raw meat — super appetite
— no appetite	
excessive attention by father	rejection by father
stasis	movement

These oppositions swing around the incident of eating the scab. From the earth-bound world arises Raven, moving from the still

timeless spirit world to the unpredictable world of man. The over-attention of the father at the start of Myth 1, followed by the burning of the boy's intestines, has led to the miraculous arrival of the Shining Youth with an unnatural (negative) appetite. The eating of the scabs results in a different (positive) unnatural appetite and ends in the rejection of the boy by his father.

The primary oppositions in Myth 1 can be better seen by adopting the Lévi-Strauss (1963) formula.¹

$$\frac{fx(a)}{fy(b)} :: \frac{fx(b)}{fa^{-1}(y)} \quad \text{where } fx \text{ and } fy \text{ are functions, } a \text{ and } b \text{ are characteristics of these functions.}$$

We can substitute:

$$\frac{\text{overdemanding father}}{\text{loss of son}} :: \frac{\text{overdemanding son}}{\text{fatherlessness of a lost person}}$$

That is, the over-demanding (of affection) by the father for the son *is to* the loss of the son *as* the over-demanding (of food) by the son *is to* the fatherlessness of a lost person (Raven). Again, it is the slaves who are the central point around which this opposition swings. A diagram helps to see the progression of events in Myth 1 (see Diagram 2).

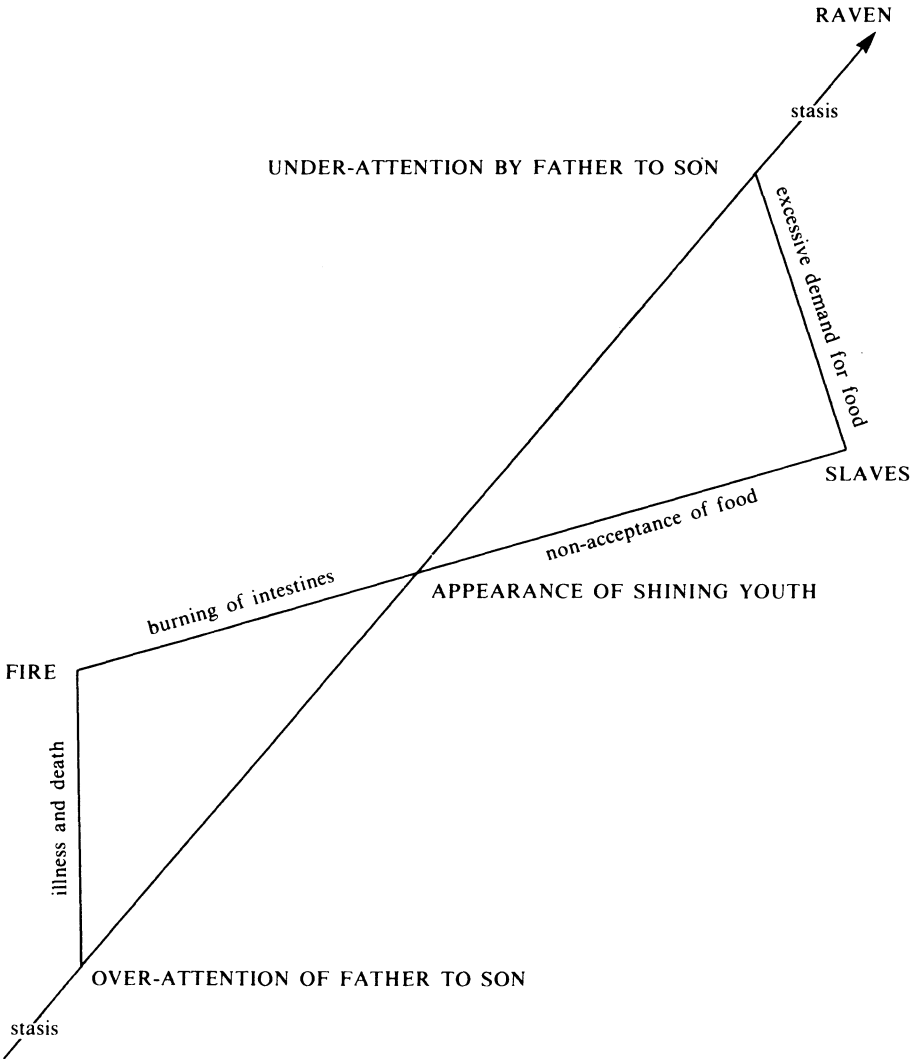
The message in Myth 1 is implicit in the formula we have arrived at: the incorrect social action is threatening to the very roots of the culture. It will lead to destruction if something is not done to rectify the situation. What in fact the father does, does solve the problem in the animal village but does not correct the situation more generally. Thus a seed of destruction is planted in a hitherto stable universe.

This first myth is communicated in terms of visual and gustatory codes. In the primeval darkness light exists only in the form of fire which the (cultured) spirits use for cooking. When the intestines are

¹ In this formula *a* and *b* are terms (e.g. father, son), while *x* and *y* are functions of these terms (overdemanding, loss). "A relationship of equivalence exists between two situations defined respectively by an inversion of *terms* and *relations* under two conditions: (1) that one term be replaced by its opposite (in the above formula *a* and *a-1*); (2) that an inversion be made between the *function value* and the *term value* of two elements (above, *y* and *a*)." (Lévi-Strauss, 1963, p. 228).

The formula is an attempt by Lévi-Strauss to construct a universal statement of progression and transformation in myth. It suggests that there is always a major transformation wherein a change in a main character occurs.

DIAGRAM 2



burned (treated like food), the result is the appearance of the Shining Youth, a creature of light in a world of darkness. The essential relation between the Shining Youth and cooked food leads (through the slave sequence) to the boundless hunger which necessitates expulsion. The gift of the raven blanket returns us to darkness once again. The body of the Shining Youth is cloaked in black as he sets out into the darkness.

In our discussion of the visual code we can see a gustatory code emerging as well. The too-well cared-for boy's intestines are cooked as food. The slaves give non-food, scabs, to the Shining Youth. He then swings from no appetite to too great an appetite. These visual and gustatory domains form binary oppositions. They are codes which serve to symbolically express the sense of disturbance which will occur if actions threatening to culture are perpetrated. These codes are intertwined around the properties of seeking food, traveling, and reversals of fortune which were above defined as aspects of armature. This complex communicate the message.

So Raven is sent out into the world. The burning of the boy's intestines left a cosmic gap which caused endless hunger. This is an instability in the order of the universe of the animal spirits and they send him out of their world. Raven's only choice is to go desperately seeking relief for the burning in his belly. It is in taking to wing and flying over water that the Shining Youth really becomes Raven. Thus in a sense Raven is born of water as the Shining Youth was born of fire. Aloft, neither in the world of spirits nor the world of man, between heaven and earth, Raven flies east towards the Coast, to the home of the Tsimshian.

II

The cycle goes on to describe Raven's arrival on the mainland and his endless search for food. He restlessly wanders, overturning and upsetting things in his desperation. As the character of Raven becomes clear we see him as a classical figure of myth, a trickster and thief who has no inhibitions about how he satisfies his needs. Raven is the epitome of disorder in the static and changeless spirit world. His relentless wandering, and the poking around with his beak, constantly upsets things. This new order he initiates is the changeable but generally predictable material world.

Raven's qualities span the intangible world of the spirits and the material world of man. He is thus an essentially ambiguous character. This can be seen in the various myths which follow his wanderings. At times he is a powerful thief and trickster; at the other times he is the victim of even very weak enemy forces. At times he is arrogant but at other times he is a tragic, even pathetic figure. These various aspects of the mediator and great transformer, Raven, can be seen in most of the myths in the cycle. We will look at two of these, observing the character of Raven. We will see how his characteristics relate to Tsimshian culture, and observe how the various myths in the cycle are related one to the other. We will see, too, how the system of oppositions established in Myth 1 continues on. The structure is maintained while the same theme reworked in different harmonies.

MYTH 18: Raven appears with a slave to help him in his endless quest for food. They arrive at a village and Raven instructs his slave to tell the people that a great chief, wearing abalone ear ornaments, is walking on the beach in front of the town. One of the village chiefs invites Raven and his slave into a house to eat. Raven instructs his slave to tell the chief that he would like to eat. But the slave, being greedy like his master, tells their host that the great chief (Raven in disguise) does not want to eat. So the slave gets all the food, Raven none. Raven is angry and when the two have left the village, Raven builds a bridge over a deep canyon out of a skunk cabbage stem and forces his slave to walk on it. The bridge collapses and the slave plummets, his belly bursting when he hits the bottom. Raven flies down to the bottom of the canyon and eats the contents of the slave's stomach, taking the food into his hands and eating every bit. (Boas, 1916.)

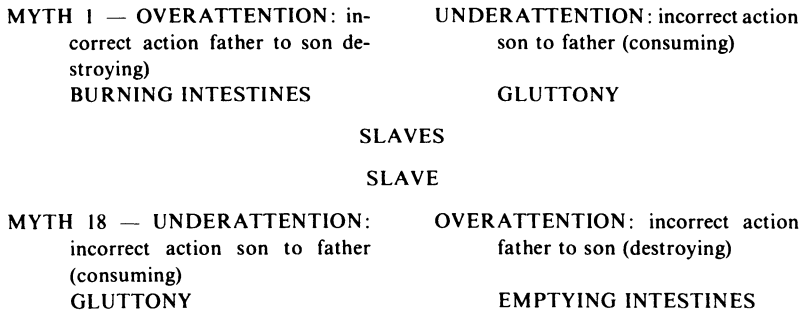
Parallels exist between this myth and Myth 1. As the Shining Youth arrived at the house of a chief and was welcomed, so is Raven in Myth 18. The fact that Raven is referred to as a great chief with iridescent abalone ear ornaments places him in the position of an exceptional outsider, as was the Shining Youth. As in Myth 1, Raven does not eat in the first part of the myth and over-eats in the second part. And in both of these myths it is slaves who are the major forces of mediation. In Myth 18 Raven at first gets little food for he is tricked by his slave. Thus in both Myths 1 and 18 the slave is a trickster who tricks Raven; in both myths this trickery is the turning point.

The slave in Myth 18 is autochthonous, having been created by Raven from a piece of rotten wood in Myth 17. Thus the slave's very being mediates between non-life and life. As in Myth 1, the incident

with the slave is directly related to food. A superficial difference exists in the ways in which the hunger of the Shining Youth / Raven is satisfied. In Myth 1 the village is emptied of food through the Shining Youth's endless appetite. In Myth 18 the slave's guts are emptied. Raven is almost cannibalistic — almost but not quite. He eats the food from the slave's belly but not the slave's flesh. These two incidents of gluttony have an essential quality. Both involve taking all the food from one's kin, and result in either threatening or causing death.

A further parallel between the two series exists. Myth 18 ends in a similar way to that in which Myth 1 begins: the slave's guts are emptied out of his body as the boy's intestines are removed. The incident in Myth 1 is in fact the cause of the incident in Myth 18. A chart comparing these two myths helps to see the parallels — see diagram 3

DIAGRAM 3
Comparison of Myth 1 with Myth 18



Things are not always straightforward in myths and ambiguities continually appear. So we find that although there is a direct parallel between Myth 1 and Myth 18, there is also a reversal. But both relate to a similar theme: to demand more than what is rightly one's due is unnatural (whether that demand is for affection or food). Such unnatural demands upset the order of the universe.

trickery of a created person :: trickery of Raven
hunger of Raven :: destruction of a glutton

The driving force in Raven causes him to destroy his own creation (his son) just as Raven's father banished him.

The message in Myth 18 is the same as that of Myth 1: incorrect social action leads to chaos and disaster. The armature relates to the search for food, travelling and reversals in fortune. The primary code in Myth 18 is one we saw earlier used in Myth 1, a gustatory code. Binary oppositions of too little and too much food exist in both halves of Myth 18. Raven's emptiness and the slave's gluttony in the first sequence are opposed to Raven's gluttony and the slave's emptiness at the end. The incorrect action of the slave in eating his father's (i.e. Raven's) food in the first part is countered by the equally incorrect action of Raven tearing the food from the belly of his own son in the second. It is quite clear, here, how code and armature interact and work together to convey a message of proper social action.

Myth 26 presents us with an ambiguity of a different sort. Here Raven's fortunes are reversed. The culture hero and great transformer is thwarted in his attempts to get food. Now he is left pathetic, helpless, and earthbound.

MYTH 26: The myth begins with Raven, thinking quietly, on the lookout for food. Coming to a great plain, he sees a large house and hears people singing. As he approaches, a voice calls him great chief, invites him in, and he enters proudly, seating himself before the fire. There are voices but no visible beings for this is the house of chief Echo, one of the invisible spirits. Food is miraculously (invisibly) prepared and presented to Raven, in dishes which appear to move of their own accord. There are large pieces of mountain goat and mountain sheep fat hanging on the walls of the house and, while he is eating, Raven plots to steal these. But as soon as he thinks of this, he hears women laughing and saying that they know Raven is plotting a theft. He feels ashamed. These spirits are not only invisible, they can read thoughts. Raven jumps up impulsively, snatches up some meat, and heads for the door. But before he is able to escape a large stone hammer beats him on the ankle and he is badly hurt. He is dragged and cast out. He lies in the dirt crying from hunger and pain. The next day he takes a stick and tries to walk away. (Boas, 1916.)

This myth is unique among the Raven myths for the only character to actually appear is Raven. Yet the forces he must deal with are completely beyond his abilities. As in Myths 1 and 18, he is offered hospitality by a chief. And as in the other myths the central elements are Raven's hunger and greed. These inspire trickery and thieving. Again the food he gets is enough to satisfy his endless appetite.

In a way this unusual myth takes us to the bare bones of the Raven cycle and perhaps of all mythology. The "hero", in his quest, must deal with incomprehensible forces. These invisible forces are

what men, too, must deal with. The rules and mores of culture are such invisible forces. If one goes counter to these rules, one can expect disastrous consequences.

The point of transition in Myth 26 is the laughter of the women. On entering the house and being treated like an honoured guest, Raven feels pride; with the laughter of the women he feels shame. Thus the change that takes place in this myth is not cosmic or even mortal life-death. Rather it is a change in a person's sense of self worth, his ego. In the end, Raven is reduced from pride to pathetic weeping and hobbling.

The women are the force of mediation between the states of Raven's mind. Once he is seated and eating, the only voice he hears is that of the women. The transformation in Raven's character is accomplished through the mediating force of a power which scorns him with female voices. Presumably, being laughed at by women is something that would never happen to a Tsimshian chief. A completely disconcerting situation arises in reply to Raven's anti-social inclinations towards greed and thievery. We once again see the theme of incorrect action and disastrous results repeated.

The action of Myth 26 can be summed up by expressing our formula:

$$\frac{\text{pride of Raven}}{\text{humility of invisible spirits}} \quad :: \quad \frac{\text{laughter of invisible spirits}}{\text{the shame of a humiliated person}}$$

Chief Echo, who is obviously very powerful, offers food and shelter to Raven, a weaker person, and even calls Raven "great chief". Chief Echo is of great strength and yet can be humble. Raven is also of the spirit world but his tragic flaw, endless hunger, makes him weak. Rather than being humble, he will only ever be humiliated.

In terms of our analysis of armature, code and message, we once again note the similarities running through the myths of the Raven cycle. The message is in essence the same as in the myths previously cited: an anti-social act leads to turmoil and the downfall of the actor. In the instance of Myth 26 the negative act is not within a kin group. Rather it deals with the treat to society when hospitality is answered with aggression and theft. It becomes apparent that the theme of correct versus incorrect social action is, throughout the myth cycle, related to various types of social relationships. Society is

built on a framework of such relations and when these are threatened, the whole fabric of social structure is threatened.

Again we find systems of codes intertwined around the armature of searching for food, movement and reversal of fortune. Minor codes in Myth 26 augment a major, gustatory code. The strongest of the minor codes is that related to sound. The impact of the sound images arises as the spirits Raven encounters are perceived only by the ear. At the very start of this myth we find Raven quietly thinking. Then he comes to the house which has beings who make noise though they have no bodies. So the beginning quietness has its opposition in creatures whose very being is noise. The auditory code is similarly complemented by the visual. Things are either there or they are not; visibility opposes invisibility. There is another code which here comes into play, that of emotion. As noted in the formula above, this myth counterposes pride and shame. These are communicated through the laughter of the women (in response to his pride) and the crying of Raven (in shame at being thwarted).

These various codes are on a level separate from the primary, gustatory code. It is Raven's hunger which causes him to travel through the forest and onto the plain. It is hunger that leads him to attempt the theft of food. He goes from an environment of no food to one where he is surrounded by the raw meat hanging on the walls. He is fed all he can eat but still wants more. A very great hunger and a very great supply of food are here opposed. The uncooked meat hanging on the walls is in opposition to Raven's hunger, the mediating force is the cooked food offered to Raven which he devours but "rejects" in trying to steal the raw food. Raven rejects hospitality as he rejects the cooked food of Chief Echo. He is thus rejecting culture for nature. The results are calamitous. Again the message of correct social action is communicated through the code.

III

The adventures of Raven continue as he relentlessly searches for food. He wars with supernatural forces, thieving and tricking various animal spirits, sometimes getting food but never satiating his hunger. In Myth 36, Raven steals food from the wolves but is found out. He flees north, paddling on a log. This sets up Myth 37, in which Raven's frantic quest is ended. This is not necessarily the end of Raven,

as we shall see in Myth 38, but it is the end of his nomadic wanderings. And more, it is the end of the spirit world. Now time and space begin as man perceives them. Raven is the mediating force that brings about this transformation: while he wanders the universe is in a state of flux between the world of spirits and the world of man. As was said before, the trickster brings two states into juxtaposition. As long as Raven exists incarnate and active, this juxtaposition exists. But when Raven's restlessness ceases, the spirit world retreats and time begins. It is the era of man.

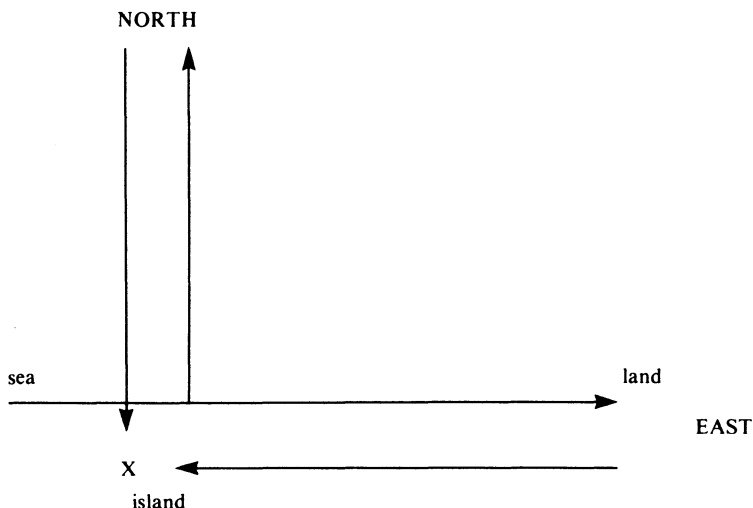
The potent symbol of the arrival of the new area is the solidification of the formerly incorporeal universe, signified by spirits turning to stone. In the world of man things are substantial and predictable.

MYTH 37: Raven returns from the north wearing his old Raven blanket. On arriving he gives a feast for the spirits. Raven invites the spirits to his new house, on an island, and holds the first potlatch. When his guests have all arrived, he addresses them saying he wishes they would turn into rocks. The spirits do become rocks and then Raven himself decides to become a rock. Only one spirit, the devilfish (a kind of octopus) refuses to become a rock but he must remain at the bottom of the sea. (Boas, 1916.)

As a potlatch is the ultimate statement in sharing property, Raven, a great symbol of greed, gives up his past inclinations and offers to share. The powerful shaking force of universal instability is thus subdued. The consequent stasis is symbolized by the spirits turning to stone. This all takes place on an island; that is, a place that is neither land nor sea but in between. It contains conceptual elements of both. The spirits become stone thus become attached to — become a part of — the earth, no more to roam as they did. So things solidify, and the ephemeral timelessness of the spirit world coalesces into the material world. The great mediator has accomplished the last great transformation. The few spirits that do remain must stay away from the world of man for now they will be susceptible to corporeal injury. This is seen in Myth 37 where it is said that if the devilfish leaves his place at the bottom of the sea he may perish. And we shall see in Myth 38, if a spirit living in the mountains comes down to the world of man he is in danger.

Raven comes to rest on an island, west of the land where he first travelled to, south of the north country where he next went to. The island is neither land nor sea, jutting up and filling a space between the sky and the surface of the world.

DIAGRAM 4



Until this myth the Raven cycle delivers its message of correct/incorrect social through inversions. Through portrayal of the disastrous consequences of incorrect action, correct action is implied. But now we find a significant reversal, both in the character of Raven and in the method of communication. A correct action, of generosity by Raven, leads to a positive situation — the end of turmoil and the start of the world of man. So correct social action leads to stability.

The armature, however, remains unchanged. Raven travels from the north, holds a potlatch, and all the spirits come to receive gifts and food. The reversal of the situation is now really a reversal of state. The incorporeal spirits turn to stone. This latter limb of the armature relates directly to the code which strikes the strongest chord in Myth 37, tactility. The change from a non-material state to a solid state signifies not only the end of the spirit world but also the end of Raven's wandering. This is the final conclusion to the original problem which the messages in the various myths refer to. Corporeal life, signified by the devilfish (or by implication, man) lies at a mid-point between these two extremes of solidity/insolidity. The transition from incorrect to correct action is further expressed by a code of

old / new: Raven arrives from the north in his old Raven blanket, but builds a new house. The potlatch represents the transitory stage from the old to the new covering. It is through the giving of the potlatch that Raven reverses disorder, acts correctly, and stabilizes the universe.

IV

The cycle does not end with the petrification of Raven. He is the creator, a child of heaven, and is immortal. The final myth, Myth 38, concerns his further adventures and his relations with man.

MYTH 38: It is the period just prior to the arrival of white people. A great Tsimshian chief has built a new house which is very beautiful and becomes famous. Raven hears about this house, comes to look at it and is shot and wounded. Years pass and a new character, a man, is introduced. He has lost all his goods, and those of his wife and children, through gambling. The man goes away and wanders aimlessly in the mountains. He eventually comes to a great plain and on crossing the plain finds a deep valley with a house at the bottom. This is Raven's home. The spirit introduces himself and says that he has known about the man ever since the man left his home. After feeding the man, Raven sends two pups he has up into the mountains to get food. The pups are transformed into a pair of "hau hau", frightful roaring monsters. They go to their work and throw down many mountain sheep. Raven wraps the meat around a stick, squeezes out the fat, and gives it to the man. The man is then able to return quickly to his home on the coast, his trip made easy by Raven's "magic". Raven flattens out the mountains in front of the man and these make terrible noises as they return to their original shapes. On returning home the man distributes his new wealth among his kinsmen. (Boas, 1916.)

This last myth is a bit problematic. Boas seems to reject it as an integral part of the cycle. He suggests (p. 723) that it is a recent conglomeration and he points out certain elements such as the two dogs, the wounding of a giant who visits a house, and a deep valley which is the home of a spirit. These elements are, says Boas, taken from other myths, some Tsimshian, some Kwakiutl. Thus Myth 38 is a pot-pourri of bits and not traditional. But such elements could be isolated in any myth. For myths, particularly myths in the same cycle, are very largely recombinations of similar elements. In myths dealing with the same theme, such as the Raven myths, this interchangeability is functional as it reinforces the message. Further, Boas does not deal with the essential point of Myth 38, which is that Raven is still alive. The people of the Northwest Coast believe this to be true. Aurel Krause writing in 1885 cites the observations of a Russian ethnographer, Veniaminoff (in 1840) on this matter: "Raven...

creator of the world... never died. His home is called 'Nassschakijelch' and is at the source of the Nass River and is inaccessible to humans as well as ghosts. When Raven had accomplished his deeds on earth he is supposed to have returned there." (Krause, p. 183). This quote deals with Tlingit, not Tsimshian beliefs, but the two are really hardly separable. Their mythologies and cosmologies are virtually identical. The Nass River passes through both Tlingit and Tsimshian territory and the lower Nass was Tlingit territory until the Tsimshian drove them out (Drucker, p. 115). The early date of Veniaminoff's observation strongly suggests that the idea of Raven living to the east in the mountains — as he does in Myth 38 — predates white contact. Finally, it is worth noting Lévi-Strauss' observation that any version of a myth is valid.

Further credence can be given to the idea of more than one version of a myth existing when we consider an article by Hammel (1972). Hammel looks at a popular European folk-tale, finds many versions of it, and asks why. The basic reason, he suggests, is that various versions arise at different points in time. Hammel argues that a folk-tale will, over time, become structurally more perfect. Thus, in a series of variants in a tale, a historical progression should be visible. His observations on the changes in tales over time is valuable, but his idea that myths become perfected over time must be questioned. All things considered, Myth 38 may be thought of as a valid part of the Tsimshian Raven cycle. This position is strengthened when we look at it in structural terms, comparing it with other myths in the cycle.

In terms of use of code, the gustatory element is the strongest in Myth 38. The difference between this myth and previous myths where the gustatory code is also important is that here Raven is the giver of food instead of the taker. The one who lacks food is the son of Raven. This myth, with its description of the presentation of a large quantity of food, parallels Myth 1 where Raven's father gave Raven a very large quantity of food. But Raven's father could not afford the gift, whereas in Myth 38, Raven has an abundance of food. Hence the gustatory code of Myth 38 contrasts the abundance of food with the total emptiness of the man, from the start.

In Myth 38 the two really supernatural or magical incidents that occur to the man are both accompanied by loud frightening noises.

These incidents are the roaring of the “hau hau” and the ‘terrible noises’ which follow the man on his trip home. These sounds accompany a movement between worlds. The food provided by heaven is thrown down from the mountain, and a man carries the food given to him down to the world of mortals. In the first instance noise is related to the (positive) existence of the mountains which the “hau hau” climb. In the second instance the noise relates to the (negative) removal of the mountains in the man’s path. In terms of opposition, the loud sounds relate to the apparent quietness of the spirit world.

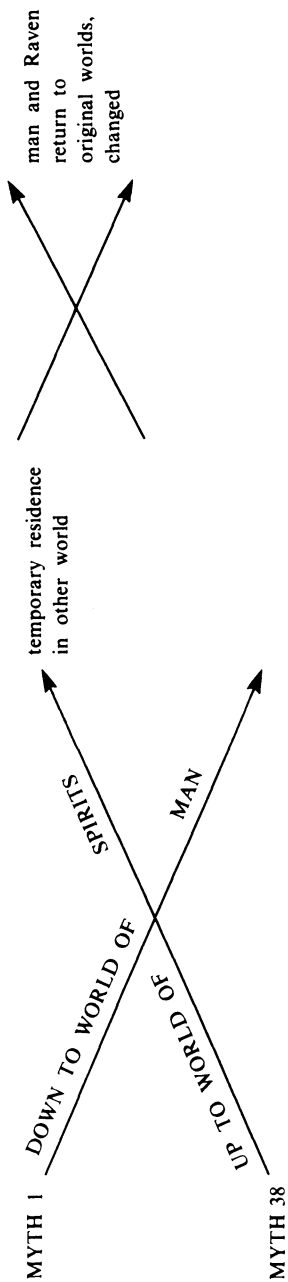
These silence-noise and mountain-no mountain oppositions in Myth 38 counterpoint its central, gustatory code. And both are mediated by food. The “hau hau” throw down raw food; Raven prepares the food for cooking and gives it to the man; the man takes the food down to his world to cook and eat. A culture/nature bridge, supported on pillars of sensory based codes, carries the basic message of correct attention to kin. The message is carried from the world of spirits to the world of man. (Raven appears as kin to the man as he is a father figure and aids the man in distress.)

In detail, Myth 38 is notably similar to Myth 1. This last myth tells of a man, driven by need, who crosses into the world of Raven. In the first myth Raven, driven by his hunger, crosses into the world of man.

As Myth 1 starts with the Shining Youth arriving at the house of a chief, so Myth 38 starts with Raven coming to inspect the new house. But the reception given is quite different in the two versions: in the first the Shining Youth is welcomed and loved; in the last Raven is feared and shot. In Myth 1 Raven, because of his voraciousness, is sent away to the East. In Myth 38 it is a man, who has lost everything through his greed in gambling, that travels East. Both pass from one cosmic world to another. Diagram 5 helps to pinpoint these contrast.

Raven knows of the man’s history and assists him. Raven appears as a father figure. The gift of food in Myth 38 parallels the gift of the Raven blanket in Myth 1. Raven travelled across the ocean in the air, the man climbed into the mountains, also rising above the earth. When the man reached the vicinity of Raven’s above, he had to climb down into a deep valley. Raven descended from the sky to settle down in (what was to become) the world of man.

DIAGRAM 5
Comparison of Myth 1 with Myth 38



The major transformation in Myth 38 is completed through the mediation of a pair of twins, as in Myth 1. But where the slaves in Myth 1 had caused one who was not hungry to become ravenous, the pair of "hau hau" cubs in Myth 38 bring food to satiate one who suffers from a lack of food. Also the more basic "emptiness" that the man is suffering from, which led to his gambling and inability to contribute to the upkeep of his kin, is also "filled". On his return home he shares his new found bounty with his kinsmen. The formula used earlier may be used here to point out the major transformation in Myth 38:

generosity of Raven :: generosity of a cultured man
starvation of Man poverty of a starving person

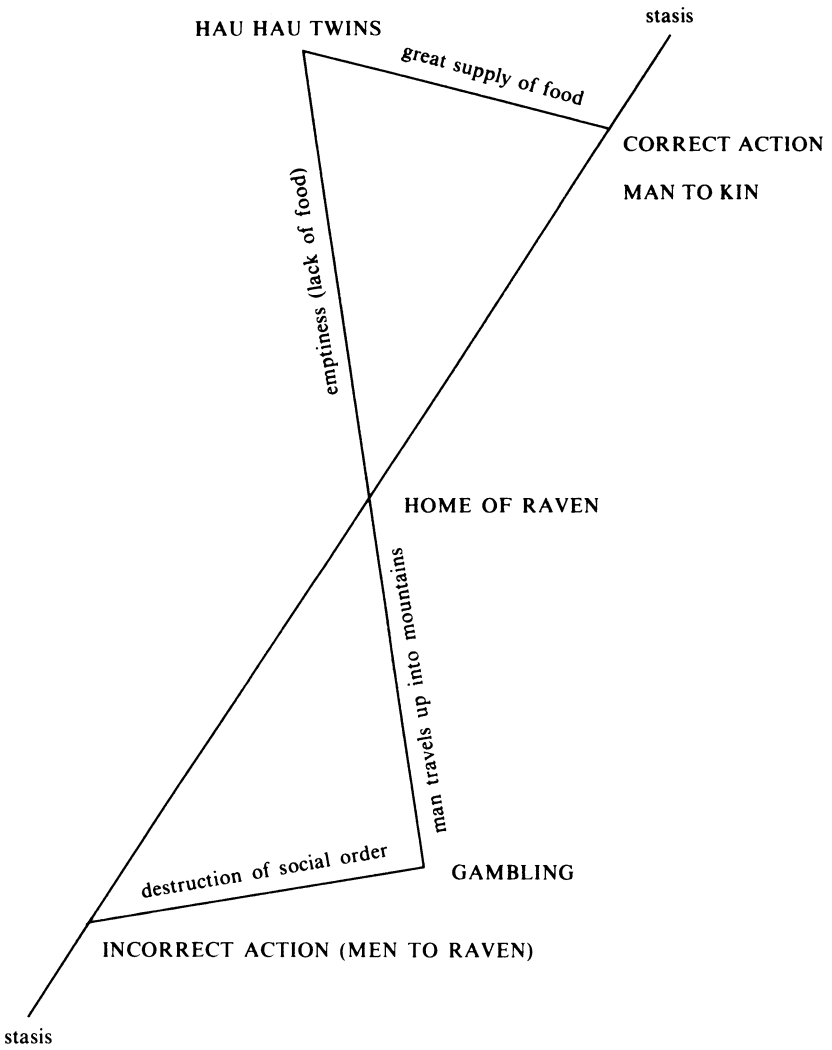
Raven is again a mediator. In this case he restores social order through his gift of food. This can be seen as an opposite statement to that which we saw in Myth 1, but with the same message: culture can only exist if correct action is maintained. The man alters his earlier behaviour. Instead of gambling his new wealth, he distributes it amongst his kin. This is the socially correct thing to do. The essential symbol of culture in this context, as throughout the myth cycle, is food. The key now is food that is cooked or (as in Myth 38) is prepared and ready for cooking. Diagram 6 shows the progression of events in Myth 38.

The end result of all these oppositions and contrasts from one myth in the Raven cycle to the next is the same. The message which comes through from these various inversions is identical. This is true of all the myths we have looked at. In Myth 1 over-attention by the father leads to instability; in Myth 18 under-attention by the son leads to instability; in Myth 26 the attempted theft by a guest from his host continues by instability. Finally in Myths 37 and 38, proper attention by (Raven) the father serves to change instability into stability.

We have used Lévi-Strauss' formula to examine the transformations in Myths 1, 18, 26, and 38. Now looking at the whole cycle we can again apply this rule, seeing the changes which have occurred throughout the entire cycle:

overattention of a father to son :: generosity of cultured being (Raven)
loss of a son (Raven) poverty of a starving person

DIAGRAM 6

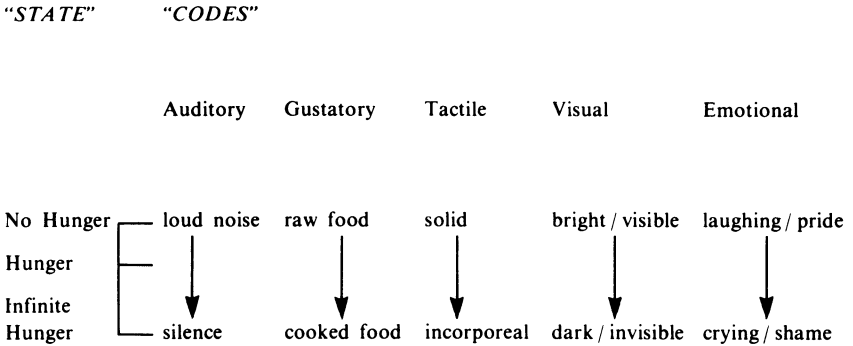


The prodigal son in Myth 38 is taken care of by his kinsman (the father figure, Raven) and the discordant vibration sent out in Myth 1 is quieted. Quieted for a while, for the man is informed that Raven will travel once again, at a further day.

The oppositions we have seen are built up through the use of various codes. The codes, and the interactions of these with the armature, are what actually communicate the message. They are the form in which the culturally relevant information is packaged. Within the Raven myth cycle the gustatory code is clearly the essential way in which the message, about correct social action, is communicated. Other codes, relating directly or indirectly to the various human senses, however, serve to augment this central one.

DIAGRAM 7

Adapting an idea from Lévi-Strauss (1969 p. 153) we can construct a table relating the various uses of code to a basic concept we will call "state". By state we refer to the basic device for communicating the message. The major code (gustatory) relates directly to the state. Lévi-Strauss limits his discussion to sensory coding systems but it appears that, at least in Tsimshian mythology, an emotional coding system must also be considered.



Through the codes, the myths search for a median point, bouncing from one aspect or extreme to another. Culture is the mid point.

The chart (diagram 7) shows the various codes in relation to each other and expresses the opposed poles of each code. "Culture" is the mid-point. Culture mediates between the world outside and the world of man. What we find as the message of the Raven myth cycle, the necessity of maintaining correct social action, relates directly to cul-

ture. It is a key factor that separates man from the non-human world. When Raven the transformer brings the world of materiality into existence, he brings a species into being that patterns its existence after the spirits. We saw in Myth 1 that the spirits had a social organization and ate cooked food. Throughout the myth cycle it is always cooked food that Raven seeks. Social situations, be they of kinship or of hospitality, always relate to the structure presented in Myth 1. It is noteworthy that the only time we find Raven eating uncooked food is in Myth 18. There he takes food from the belly of his slave; the raw food has been "cooked" in the slave's digestive tract.

Thus beyond the opposition of over-attention versus under-attention we see a basic opposition of culture/ nature. These myths thus go beyond "exploring the unsatisfactory conditions of social life" (Hammond-Tooke, p. 85). They deal with the larger human consciousness of self as well. They aid in the realization that man is somehow separated from the universe wherein he exists. The transformation which culture wrought carried man into a realm of socially and economically patterned existence. Man became distinct from both spirit and inanimate worlds. Myth arose to explain the genesis of this distinction, or of man's emergence from nature.

For the Tsimshian, Raven, thief and trickster, represents a connection between these two worlds. A diurnal creature who arose in darkness, he embodied a multiplicity of oppositions. And as a mediating figure, he became an agent of transformation. He triggered off changes in the state of the universe. His essential motivating force is a drive to seek culturally treated food, true of man also who is child of the Raven. The myths communicate at first an explanation of how things in the world came to be. On a deeper level they show the dangers which arise when a person acts counter to social custom. And on a still more basic level they are an attempt to explain man to himself, indeed to make the very universe intelligible.

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