

Asdiwal's Totemic Wives

Guy Lanoue

Every anthropologist is aware of Lévi-Strauss' famous paper "The story of Asdiwal" (1967). Many were impressed by the brilliant analysis, notwithstanding general critiques published in books like *The Unconscious in Culture* (Rossi 1974), plus particular detailed critiques by specialist ethnographers like Alice Kasakoff (1974) and John Adams (1973). The well-known theoretical critiques do not have to be re-examined.¹ The problem is that most criticism of Lévi-Strauss leaves us bewildered: we are still astounded by Lévi-Strauss' depth of analysis, despite that it has very little to do with the facts as many people would define them, yet we know more about what it is not than what it is -- not surprising, since Lévi-Strauss's analysis demonstrates that the story of Asdiwal is more about the untenable and impossible than the possible. Yet the inevitable question arises: if the possible consequences of hypothesized patrilineal cross-cousin marriage and matrilineal (or neolocal) residence are so disastrous for the Tsimshian, why would they choose to illustrate the negative consequences indirectly by telling an entertaining but rather incoherent tale rather than simply imposing sanctions on transgressors? In fact, there are no such penalties for Asdiwal-like behaviour. Far from discouraging imitators, Asdiwal legitimates a possible life for the Tsimshian even as he breaks the official 'rules'. Yet by making reference to the totemic basis of Tsimshian political discourse the Asdiwal story strengthens 'otherness' at the expense of village solidarity. Although it is a possible life, Asdiwal's is certainly not the life of a cultural hero in any sense of the term.

The so-called Tsimshian² totemic system, composed of the "ideological" discourse of descent (and, therefore, of the formal rules of marriage and residence) is in fact linked to Tsimshian notions of memory and history. I propose that the mythification of descent creates and

¹Just as the ethnographic critiques are generally unknown; one that may not deserve its relative obscurity is the delightful "Le Geste du chien d'Asdiwal: the story of Mac" (Codere 1974).

²There are four Tsimshian groups: Coast, Southern, Nishga, Gitksan. Despite differences in dialect, they are fairly similar to one another (Adams 1973:22), and the Coast and Southern Tsimshian are often treated as one in the anthropological literature (see Note 6 below).

defines the past and indicates how the idea of the past will be used in the present; in other words, how memory becomes politicised under certain conditions, and that historical memory takes the form of mythified descent — totemism.³ With its continual semiotic jumps from the possible and real to the unsanctioned and abstract referents, Asdiwal proposes a complex vision of concrete memory transformed into totemic history.

There are two aspects to the problem of totemism: a) some groups, especially tribes, identify particular categories within the group (typically, clans) with non-human natural species, ostensibly to draw attention to relations of symmetry between the groups and categories, and b) these groups either define recruitment to the category and therefore social reproduction in lineal terms (one generally inherits the totemic affiliation of one's mother or father) or, amounting to much the same, invoke a discourse a descent from a common mythical totemic being or beings in order to define the categories of the totemic model, to posit common identities, and to suggest the relationships that exist among these categories.⁴ In brief, as far as origins are concerned, people 'forget' their real genealogical origins in favour of a socially-conditioned idiom of mythical descent.⁵

Matrilinearity is the main element in this Tsimshian model of descent, a model I call 'political discourse' because it is continually invoked in strategic decisions though the formal rules that define the model -matrilinearity, avunculocal residence, and matrilateral cross-cousin marriage -- are not followed in everyday life.

What does matrilineality mean in a concrete context of well-documented patrification (including naming by fathers), apparent avunculocal or patrilocal residence and inheritance of titles from one's mother's brother, but coupled with usufruct rights inherited from one's father?⁶

³ There are other aspects of totemism, as T. Turner points out (1985:49): its cultic aspect, alimentary character, and reification as fetish. I will only be concerned with the idea of descent.

⁴ Even in cases of so-called conception clans in Australia (see Maddock 1973), in which it is possible that the child belongs to neither the father's nor mother's clan but to the clan of the spirit associated with the locality in which the mother first felt the first stirrings of conception, the system is perfectly lineal in the sense that clans are fixed categories whose members have the same 'spirit stuff' as the clan totem/ancestor; it is simply not biologically oriented.

⁵ I feel it necessary to stress once again that I am only referring to one aspect of 'kinship', the discourse that deals with social origins. I am not directly exploring the question of how such a discourse is used and manipulated in terms of social organisation.

⁶ An importance reflected in the terminology -- father's people (*wilxsiwtxw/kswaatk*) means 'from whence I come' (Cove 1987:78), a not unimportant gloss, as will be seen. Magic power is also associated with father's group; see Lévi-Strauss (1967) and Seguin (1984b).

These people are obviously not matrilineal in the same way that Nuer patrilineal models are said to define globally a particular political regime and at the same time act as a polysemic metaphors for economic, social and even cosmological aspects of Nuer thought. Furthermore, there is evidence of village-level incorporation and social solidarity, such that until recently the village as a whole moved from winter to summer encampments, that the village fought together, that the village benefited from alliances negotiated by the chiefs of the local phratric segments. In brief, the Tsimshian say they are matrilineal and have four matrilineally defined and exogamous categories⁷ -- and we must accept the evidence as incontrovertible -- yet their everyday political realities seem based on a residential-incorporative logic; for example, Houses⁸ own territories and resources, and alliances seem to be made among villages, not phratries. In brief, practical affairs are not merely exceptions to the matrilineal model but follow their own dynamics using the village-house as terms of reference. The problem then becomes, why do the Tsimshian maintain a rigid and mathematically precise model of their society (political discourse) *apparently* based on matrilineally-defined units in an obviously flexible situation? To answer the question we need to contextualise the Asdiwal myth.

SOCIAL ORGANISATION AND TERRITORIALITY

Not only is a pattern of tension and sensibility to issues of land ownership established for traditional times (the fur-trade epoch, approximately 1780-1880), it is correlated with an

⁷The four are, in common anthropological usage:

Coast Tsimshian:	Killer Whale	Raven	Wolf	Eagle
Nishga:	Fireweed	Raven	Wolf	Eagle
Gitksan:	Fireweed	Frog	Wolf	Eagle

The Southern Tsimshian resemble the Coast Tsimshian in organization and dialect; see Boas (1916:482 [also 1902:480] and Garfield (1939:173).

Strictly speaking, 'Killer Whale' (also known as 'Blackfish') is not an exact rendering of the Tsimshian name *Gispawudweda/Gispudwada*.

Each phratry, according to Halpin (1973:186; 1984:26), has a secondary crest associated with it. Fireweed is "... represented by two or more equally important animal motifs" (Emmons 1912:365), unfortunately unspecified.

Fireweed is "seen as the same as [Blackfish] for marriage purposes (Cove 1987:79fn).

⁸Capitalized when referring to the socio-political unit; Houses were corporate, matrilineally 'organized' (Adams 1973:7), and the Tsimshian word for House can be glossed as 'being together with one another' (Sapir 1915:4).

historically established fact: between 1800 and 1830 the Tsimshian of the Skeena river valley migrated en masse from their homeland in the interior to the Coast region, and in the interior the Gitksan were pushing northwards (MacDonald 1984a:80). This left Asdiwal's homeland on the upper Skeena relatively depopulated and created a heightened awareness of the coast-interior dichotomy; strife and tension between the groups is a now matter of the historical record.⁹ This also accords with the evidence that multi-ethnic contacts, positive and negative, were a feature of daily life throughout the nineteenth century.

The reality of living together and the practice of naming the ownership groups encourages the emergence of a strong sense of territoriality. When threatened by invasion the coastal village people defend themselves by using already existing political constructs: lineages and clans in the village are the ceremonial networks which form the basis for political and military alliances; among the Tsimshian, "Chiefs were responsible for relationships with other villages and also with foreign groups... " (Seguin 1984a:xiv). This use of a political idiom of unity is what sets these people apart from hunting bands such as the Cree and the Ojibwa and provides the justification for calling the people of the Northwest Coast tribes despite their hunting and gathering mode of life. Of all North American Indian groups, especially among those who were essentially based on a gathering economy, the people of the Northwest Coast developed one of the most extreme notions of political hierarchy among North American groups. They are usually described as class societies, with marked competition (albeit somewhat ritualized in the potlatch)¹⁰ for positions with high political and religious status.

This general and brief description does not do justice to the complexity of the cultures nor of the many excellent ethnographies which have emerged from work in this area, but it does point to what many have noted (see, for example, Benedict 1934) as the salient feature of many Northwest Coast peoples; namely, the general tendency towards a public expressiveness that

⁹As MacDonald states (1984:80), "The acquisition of new territory was not a traditional cause for war." After the arrival of European trade goods, war became even more of a struggle for control over territories and their trade routes.

¹⁰Potlatches are the key to the formation of alliances. When people are rich with foodstuffs and trade goods, a demonstration of their enormous wealth in a potlatch cowers their neighbours into a seeking a peaceful alliance, usually formalized by marriages between the chiefly classes of the respective groups. Lacking great wealth, a group is soon judged weak by its neighbours and is therefore in a bad position to defend its claimed territory. For descriptions of this aspect of Northwest Coast potlatching, see Adams (1973); Barnett (1938); Boas (1966); Codere (1966); Drucker and Heizer (1967); Ferguson (1983); Fleisher, (1981); Piddocke (1965); Rosman and Rubel (1971, 1983); Seguin (1984b); Spradley (1969); Walens (1981).

approaches social schizophrenia: a constant re-shuffling of alliances, egocentric bragging and a sense of *noblesse oblige* among members of the chiefly class, constant aggression towards neighbours and trading partners, yet combined with a strong tendency towards the formation of intertribal associations mediated by elaborate exchange rituals.¹¹ In brief, these peoples have all the hallmarks of societies undergoing continuous flux.

Given these circumstances, it is not surprising to find that contradictory tensions dominate many features of Northwest Coast life: heaven versus earth (Kwakiutl; Goldman 1975), rulers versus ruled (everywhere; Ruyle 1983), 'real people' (with names and crests) versus commoners with no names (Tsimshian; Cove 1987), the polity versus enemies (everywhere, Rosman and Rubel 1971), the spirit world versus the tangible (Kwakiutl; Walens 1982), symbolic fathers (the Haida with respect to the Tsimshian) versus symbolic mothers (the Tsimshian; Dunn 1984:102ff), food versus its containers (Tsimshian; Allaire 1984:86-87), and so on. For many Northwest Coast groups each element is more or less opposed to the other in structural and semantic terms. As Lévi-Strauss enigmatically states (1982:103) with special reference to the Salish and Southern Kwakiutl, much of Northwest Coast art and myth is an attempt at arbitration between marriages that are too near and marriages that are too distant, just as Vastokas (1978:257-258), for example, locates similar fundamental ambiguities in varied visual and architectural organizational schemes.¹² In brief, given such ambiguities, it is not surprising to locate another apparent contradiction between practice and model.

TSIMSHIAN SOCIAL-STRUCTURAL AMBIGUITIES

Lévi-Strauss sees the Asdiwal story (taken from Boas 1912:71-145) as the working out, by demonstrating the unacceptable results that follow from alternate and imagined social configurations (patrilineality, matrilocality residence after marriage, etc.), of the problem of endogamy and exogamy in Tsimshian society. As he states (1967:30),

¹¹This was particularly typical of political ties in the fur trade era. Indeed, there is much debate whether some, if not all, of these characteristics are the result of major changes associated with the arrival of Europeans and their diseases (which killed off many chiefs and created vacancies for upwardly-mobile people). The literature can hardly be reviewed here, although my position is that any characteristics noted for the fur trade period were either in place before the arrival of the Europeans or reflect well-established social-structural and political tendencies.

¹²The argument can be traced in more detail in Korovkin and Lanoue (1988).

Mythical speculation about types of residence which are exclusively patrilocal or matrilineal do not ... have anything to do with the reality of the structure of Tsimshian society, but rather with its inherent possibilities and latent potentialities. Such speculations ... do not seek to depict what is real, but ... to show that they are untenable.

Lévi-Strauss' analysis of the Tsimshian Story of Asdiwal,¹³ however, depends very much on accepting the Tsimshian model of society (MoBrDa marriage, patrilocal or avunculocal residence and matrilineal descent) as a description of real conditions rather than as an idealized and 'corrected' representation of people's actual marriage choices. Others (Adams 1974; Kasakoff 1974; Thomas *et. al.* 1976; Douglas 1974) have also noted that there appears to be little correspondence between Tsimshian reality and Lévi-Strauss' proposal that MoBrDa (mother's brother's daughter) marriage is central (though problematic) to Tsimshian social organization.

Briefly, Lévi-Strauss argues that MoBrDa marriage examines the structural tension between matrilineal inheritance of titles and rights to property and patrilocal post-marital residence by having property rights 'return' to the groom's matriline after his marriage. The actual pattern of residence in Tsimshian society (particularly among the people who have the Asdiwal story) is, statistically speaking, avunculocal residence (residence with the groom's mother's brother; Garfield 1950). There is some initial patrilocal residence (probably only sons of the chiefly class); avunculocal residence is said to predominate.¹⁴ Although not clear, it appears that the Tsimshian

¹³'Accidentally' in Duff 1959:43; 'to be in danger' in Boas 1912:257; *asdi-* connotes 'something improper' in Boas 1911:303; all cited in Adams 1974:173. Adams argues (1974:174) that the name "Asdiwal" can be glossed as 'something or someone doing something improper', and that according to Tsimshian values a negative name indicates a character or social defect that someone has overcome; "Asdiwal" is an upstart, a commoner, in other words, but one who has made it to the top ranks of respectability due to his magical and hunting powers.

¹⁴In fact, the post-marital residence rule is not at all clear from the literature. For example, Garfield writes (1950:23) that "... a married woman lived with her husband, hence in a home that belonged to his lineage", which suggests an avunculocal arrangement since the man's lineage's property belongs to the man's mother's brother. Further on, she states (1950:24) that "... the wedding was usually celebrated at the home of the groom, who lived with his father [in which case, it is a patrilocal arrangement] or one of his uncles", which suggests, in the latter case, an avunculocal arrangement. She also states (1950:24), "The young wife was under the supervision of her husband's uncle's wife," which, in the case of MoBrDa marriage, is the woman's own mother. Cove (1987:138) also appears to be of two minds when he notes that the Gitksan had difficulty distinguishing between father's and spouse's people as "... distinct categories of guests" at the wedding feast. Halpin and Seguin state (1990:277) that "The *ideal* post-marital pattern, *at least for the high ranking men who inherited noble names*, was one of avunculocal residence [my emphasis]." Rosman and Rubel state (1971:16) that "Chiefs took wives from other tribes," suggesting that there was patrilocal residence; it hardly seems possible that a young Chief, in consolidating a strategic alliance, would live in another village. Even in cases of clear MoBrDa marriage, and when a young man has moved to his MoBr's home, "This shift places him physically in the same

model of their society incorporates some statements of patrilocal residence, yet their practice -- depending on an individual's class -- is avunculocal.¹⁵

Elsewhere (Korovkin and Lanoue 1988), using data collected and analyzed by Kasakoff (1974), I have shown that Tsimshian marriage choices operate over a two-generational cycle that effectively turns 'outsiders' into 'insiders', and that the point of reference of the marriage choices is the village/House, not the lineage/clan/phratry. That is, Tsimshian apparently prefer to marry someone whose mother was born in another village if one's own mother was born in the present village of residence, and vice-versa. 'Outsiders' whose mothers were born in a village other than the village of present residence prefer marriage to someone whose mother was born in the present village of residence (an 'insider'). There is also avoidance between people whose mothers were both born outside the same village, just as marriages between children whose mothers were both born in the same village are avoided. There are *de facto* proscriptions on marrying bilateral kin, and the stated preference to marry into MoMo's or MoFa's House is not statistically validated by Kasakoff's analysis. Cove notes much the same tendency when he resolves the question of whether the Tsimshian favour matrilineal or patrilineal cross-cousin marriage when he writes (1987:139),

From the vantage point of any individual, the father's brother and the mother's brother are distinct. Within a House, to succeed to the mother's brother's name [as young men of Chiefly class do when they live in their MoBr's household before marriage] is to hold it for him, given the skip-generation idea [that reincarnation operates over two generations], until he is reincarnated. In relation to the mother's mother's brother, the successor is that person reborn. At the same time, the father's father is reincarnated by him. The fusion approximates, as closely as the system allows, the two lines of descent

location as the male members of his lineage" (Rosman and Rubel 1971:19), and "... [the] wife does not shift residence in this system" (Rosman and Rubel 1971:20).

¹⁵Rosman and Rubel see (1971) Tsimshian marriage practices as the arbitration of the tension between differently ranked wife-givers and wife-takers. Wife-takers have higher status and rank than wife-givers, and they are ego's father's lineage. Hence, whatever the actual difference between 'rule' and 'practice' among the Tsimshian, the model I have proposed holds: the Tsimshian model of their society incorporates three rather than two lines (including ego's own); therefore, the Tsimshian have indeed created a model in which discrete and 'inviolable' groups have as many connections to each other as are possible given the possible permutations of the three variables that define group recruitment and group formation.

becoming one. It is as if the Tsimshian solutions to mortality and the retention of powers create their own paradoxes, which are then resolved in an indirect way.

In brief, marriages are formulated in practice using criteria which are significant in terms of the village/House incorporative continuum but are described in terms relevant to the lineage/clan continuum. As Adams states (1973:39), marriages tend not to occur between people who share access to the same resources. Hence, there may be ambiguity, as Lévi-Strauss states (1982), about marriages that are 'too far' and marriages that are 'too close', but the Asdiwal myth does not refer *directly* to the Tsimshian model. Ambiguous attitudes towards marriage and all the subsequent tension that accompanies marriages between 'insiders' and 'outsiders'¹⁶ (quarreling, for instance; see Garfield 1939) are the result of conscious political strategies that allow the village and the Houses to be simultaneously 'independent' (see Sapir 1915) and 'well-connected', in the sense that such strategies permit them to strive for political and economic autonomy and develop a strategy of outside political ties that help guarantee such autonomy. These terms are placed in single quotation marks to emphasize that these political strategies are in fact at odds with each other and are somewhat mutually-exclusive aims -- a discrepancy the Tsimshian are aware of.

The residential 'rule' in the model -- MoBrDa marriage -- is an idealized representation of Tsimshian society that 'fixes' the ambiguity towards 'far' and 'near' marriages by inverting the major terms of reference which define the problem within the particular Tsimshian values that legitimate marriage choices. In practice, the incorporating group (the House) is represented as the exclusive but non-localized phratry in the Tsimshian model of their ambiguous attitude towards outside marriages. From the point of group recruitment, unilateral prescriptive exogamy (MoBrDa marriage) using the abstractly defined matrilineal phratry as the point of reference becomes, in practice, incorporation into the House, an incorporation that stresses bilateral proscriptions above and beyond simple phratric exogamy; these proscriptions, as I have suggested above, seem to revolve around the 'real' political considerations of strengthening the relative social position of the House by means of strategic alliances. Since the 'rules' (matrilineal residence, MoBrDa marriage and patrilocal/avunculocal residence) do not refer to Tsimshian

¹⁶These terms are defined with more precision below.

practice but to the Tsimshian model,¹⁷ there is no reason why, for example, the Tsimshian could not have developed an alternative model with an explicit rule that would suggest that a young man live in his mother's group after his marriage, thus effectively 'reconciling' (in Lévi-Straussian terms) the alleged problem between residence and inheritance. In this hypothetical case, each matrilineally defined segment would be connected, following the three hypothetical rules of matrilineal descent, matrilineal post-marital residence and patrilineal cross-cousin marriage, with one other segment -- resulting in a dual model: Mo's/ego's group and Fa's group -- rather than two, resulting in a triadic model -- Mo's/ego's group, Fa's group and MoBrWi's group. In brief, if the Tsimshian were really trying to minimize connectivity by clarifying and strengthening the boundary around the group by representing the group as an idealised phratry, then they could undoubtedly have limited the number of matrilineal segments to which each segment is connected. But the opposite is true: while apparently fixing real ambiguities by mythifying the group as the phratry, creating inviolate boundaries, the particular rules that define the model legitimate the largest number of connections in the mythic universe, three.

In brief, the Asdiwal story, which allegedly locates the tension between different villages or Houses and not the matrilineal lines, refers to the politically-sanctioned *values* of Tsimshian society; the inconsistencies and ambiguities in the relevant terms that define group formation and group recruitment on the level of everyday values have in fact been 'fixed' by being made more precise in the Tsimshian *model* of society (MoBrDa marriage, patrilineal residence and matrilineal descent). In brief, the myth distinguishes between values and political discourse, and the ambiguities in everyday values are 'resolved' in the Tsimshian model of their society.

Hence, there is no 'real' problem of reconciling matrilineal descent and patrilineal post-marital residence, since the very rules that define the Tsimshian model (residence, descent and marriage) are the outcome of a desire to make each segment bounded and exclusive (they are lineal) and at the same time as connected as possible to other segments (they are interconnected such that the model is triadic and not dual). In a word, the myth of Asdiwal is not 'playing' with alternative arrangements that are presented as failures in order to reinforce the existing system of

¹⁷Furthermore, as perfect and unambiguous as the terms of the Tsimshian model seem to be (matrilineally inherited phratric identity, matrilineal cross-cousin marriage and patrilineal residence after marriage), the Tsimshian implicitly acknowledge the need for 'far' marriages by connecting each matrilineal segment (whether this be lineage, clan or phratry) with as many other matrilineal segments as possible using these three rules of group formation and group recruitment allow.

residential, marital and descent rules, since the very rules that are said by Lévi-Strauss to constitute a structural contradiction in fact represent a 'solution' to the problem of maintaining the political independence of Houses by dependence on ties with the outside world. As Adams states (1974:177), Asdiwal's life is actually a possible life for the Tsimshian, who strive, through their myth, to minimize contingent events.¹⁸

Asdiwal's Wives

The Asdiwal story, states Boas (1916:792), consists of three parts: the meeting of mother and daughter on the ice, marriage with the daughter of the sun, and the episode of the sea-lion hunters. Here I will consider the middle episode.

Perhaps Asdiwal's most important marriage, to White Bear Woman, is to someone from the northeast, the alleged point of origin of the Tsimshian in their cosmology. The marriage is uxori-local, but 'normal' in the sense that she is the daughter of the sun (an 'insider') and he is an 'outsider'. The marriage is also complementary: the situation is such that potential conflict should be minimal. She is a daughter with no mother, and Asdiwal is a son with no father. The conflict between Asdiwal and his father-in-law is not so surprising, since every father-in-law must provide for his son-in-law (SiSo) as well as his own sons. If anything, the conflict (which eventually ends in friendship, since MoBr and SiSo are natural allies in Tsimshian society) is given a ridiculous slant in the story since the Sun has no sons that could motivate his jealousy, only a daughter. Even the time of his marriage is significant in terms of 'real' Tsimshian discourse: winter is a time of residence in the village and of heightened sensibility to political and military threats from the outside. Winter is also a time of real danger, of famine, as stored food may run out before the arrival of the spring runs. It is no accident that Asdiwal's father gives him a piece of magic ice to overcome the roasting¹⁹ that the Sun has planned for him, which may serve to emphasize the opposite: that winter is the time of co-residence and hence of greatest social solidarity; it is in fact the time of mid-winter renewal ceremonies in which the group confronts cannibal spirits (incorporators) from the outside and overcomes ('tames') them.

¹⁸Such tales were popular among the Tsimshian; see Garfield (1950:27). Cove also notes (1987:139) that one informant stated "Anyone can become a chief."

¹⁹Obviously a reference to the idealized possibility of auto-cannibalism that could occur if food ran out; cannibalism was an important component of the mid-winter ceremonies among the Kwakiutl, for example.

In brief, Asdiwal's winter marriage is a perfect expression of the ambivalences of Tsimshian society that reach their peak expression in winter, the time of greatest isolation.²⁰

Ambivalent feelings evinced towards 'far' and 'near', towards a tendency complete isolation and autonomy on the one hand and towards connectivity and potential dispersal on the other, have already been made clear in the tale. For example, the ice episode follows on the heels of evidence of Asdiwal's wife's divided loyalties (she aids her father in resuscitating the slave, Asdiwal's enemy), which is, once again, something which rings true for Tsimshian society, where war with villages that contained kin was considered problematic (Ferguson 1983) and riskier, since even blood relatives could warn their village-mates of an impending attack and betray their 'true' relatives.

If anything, the story is a morality tale, since Asdiwal eventually fails when his magical powers desert him towards the end of his various residential and marital arrangements: he causes the Sun's slave's death by ruse rather than by the magic that is legitimately his by inheritance; he overcomes the slave while performing women's tasks (fetching firewood and water) rather than hunting; he fails to bring the killer whales to life until his wife performs sacrifices to the spirits; he enters sea-lion society by using common sense rather than magic (pulling the arrows out), even though the sea-lions are convinced that they are affected by a plague and that Asdiwal is a great shaman; he is returned to his camp in a sea lion stomach pushed by winds called up by the Chief of the sea lions rather than use his magical powers of movement. The tale also makes clear that Asdiwal fails as a carver of one of the important crest animals (Killer Whale or Blackfish) of the Coast Tsimshian (Seguin and Halpin 1984); in the end, Asdiwal's most powerful enemies (the second set of four brothers-in-law) are defeated by wooden killer whales brought to life by his wife. His failure here would not be unexpected to a Tsimshian listener; Asdiwal himself is not a coastal but a Gitksan Tsimshian, and they do not have Killer Whale as a phratric crest. The failure to kill his enemies by invoking a crest that is not his (but perhaps ought to be, since they

²⁰On re-reading the above, it seems very probable that the Sun is treating Asdiwal as salmon, i.e., potential food. Since the Sun has no sons with which to formulate ties to 'over there' (the Coast), and because Asdiwal does not take the Sun's daughter to *his* (Asdiwal's) village in order to establish the legitimacy of the Sun's claims to coastal territory, the Sun must make do with what he has and 'consume' his son-in-law. This potential incorporation (we are never told if the Sun planned to eat Asdiwal) is simultaneously normal (residency-incorporation), self-destructive (the Sun loses all chances of

are on the coast and Asdiwal is incorporated into whatever society he happens to visit) seems to indicate that Asdiwal cannot assume a permanent identity (the Killer Whale phratry) based on his skills alone. It also suggests that at some point his skills and the power and fame of the House with which he is affiliated must participate in a wider net that crosses village boundaries if he and they are to survive. This failure is simply the climactic point of the long series of similar 'failures' that are represented by Asdiwal's constant shifts of locale. These are simultaneously a failure in personal terms for Asdiwal and a structural problem that must be overcome if the Houses are to survive in the long run. The power and wealth of the House and village are not enough without wide-ranging ties.

Since incorporative criteria are inverted, descent (the 'vertical' dimension) is necessarily mythified so that clan-based political identity is divorced from the material contingencies that continually threaten the collapse of the incorporative networks, and 'horizontal' genealogical memories become 'vertical' totemic memories. The result is structured forgetfulness — mythical descent is invoked to define the newly-formulated clan networks, but it must be aphasic in Jakobson's sense: if 'real', concrete genealogical memories constituted history, the result would favour the syntagmatic links between clan categories at the expense of the paradigmatic links that tie clan members to one another and to their mythical ancestor.

Thus the story of Asdiwal functions as a 'real' tale of movement and not as a tale that deals with the ideological rules of movement.

Perhaps Boas was right when he declared (1916:412) that the Asdiwal story was not so much a story about the origin of the clan as it was about the origin of clan crests.

establishing ties with the coast) and positive (he destroys Asdiwal to start over with a fresh marriage for his daughter). The Sun accepts Asdiwal only when he proves that he can sustain a self-sufficient 'village'.