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THE STRUCTURE OF THE POSSIBLE IN TSIMSHIAN MYTH: THE TRIBULATIONS OF ASDIWAL[1]

ABSTRACT: The Tsimshian of the northwest coast of Canada are described as matrilineal, but after arguing that matrilineality apparently represents a necessary ideological inversion of important socio-political categories the author concludes that matrilineality is not an active term in social discourse. It is related to the categorical contradictions inherent in a system of political self-definition that is basically residential and incorporative. The myth of Asdiwal is examined to illustrate the point that myth in tribal society acts as a charter for action that deals with contingencies which are not anticipated in ideology.

Everyone is aware of Lévi-Strauss' famous paper "The story of Asdiwal" (1976). Many were impressed by the brilliant analysis, notwithstanding general critiques published in books like *The Unconscious in Culture* (Rossi 1974), plus particular detailed analyses by ethnographers of the region like Alice Kasakoff (1974) and John Adams (1973). The well-known theoretical critiques do not have to be re-examined.[2] 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 are not sure what the myth is about. We know more about what it is not than what it is, a condition that follows from the nature of Lévi-Strauss' analysis in which he demonstrates that the story of Asdiwal is more about the untenable and impossible. Yet the inevitable question arises: if the possible consequences of hypothesized patrilateral cross-cousin marriage and matrilocal (or neolocal) residence are so disastrous for the Tsimshian, why would they choose to illustrate the negative consequences so indirectly through telling an entertaining tale rather than simply imposing harsh sanctions on transgressors? In fact, there are no such sanctions, and I will argue that far from discouraging imitators, Asdiwal legitimates a pos-

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1 This paper is an expanded and revised version of material drawn from Chapter 5 of my book (Lanoue 1990) and a jointly authored paper (Korovkin and Lanoue 1988).

2 Just 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).

sible life for the Tsimshian even as he breaks the 'rules'.

In this paper I would like to explore the relation between Tsimshian[3] social structure and myth. My starting point is the two-year period I taught at the University of British Columbia. My office was only 100 meters from the Museum of Anthropology, the same museum whose collections are so well-represented in Lévi-Strauss' book, *The Way of the Masks*. Despite the obvious thematic and stylistic similarities in the Northwest Coast material, I immediately noticed major differences between the human-like Tsimshian, the stark Tlingit and fantastic Kwakiutl carving styles. Since I was relatively ignorant of Northwest Coast social and cultural organization,[4] I started my search for an explanation with the obvious, known facts: the northern groups are matrilineal and have a phratric organization (four phratries in the Tsimshian case, two for the Tlingit and Haida), while the southern Kwakiutl do not appear to have any matrilineal structures. Perhaps matrilineality, a thorny issue in anthropology, was the point.

But were these people really matrilineal? What did matrilineality mean in a concrete context of well-documented patrifiliation, apparent avunculocal residence and inheritance of titles from one's mother's brother, but coupled with usufruct rights inherited from one's father?[5] These people were obviously not matrilineal in the same way that Nuer patrilineal models are said to define globally a particular political regime. And what about the evidence of village-level incorporation, the evidence that the village as a whole moved from winter to summer encampments, that the village fought together, that the village as a whole benefited from alliances negotiated by the chiefs of the local phratric segments? In other words, the Tsimshian say they are matrilineal and have four

matrilineally defined and exogamous phratries[6] — and we must accept the evidence as incontrovertible — yet their everyday political realities seem based on a residential-incorporative logic; for example, Houses[7] 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 separate dynamics. Since I was basically familiar with only band social and political organization, this led me to compare band and tribal social and political organization to see if I could understand the reason why the Tsimshian maintain a rigid and mathematically precise model (which is only *apparently* based on matrilineally-defined units) in an obviously flexible situation. In this paper I argue that rigid model of society is indeed an accurate description of Tsimshian values, and that the myth of Asdiwal accurately (though perhaps allegorically) reflects dichotomous tendencies in Tsimshian social organization.

BANDS AND TRIBES

The main features of band[8] social and political organization are, first, its flexibility — in which important networks and categories emerge from residential incorporation — and, second, an emergent hierarchy, a tendency that is never entirely realized. Tribal social and political organization, by contrast, imposes a new set of categories which overlays the basic residential-incorporative feature that defines the boundaries of and recruitment to the group. This is the clan-phratry continuum, in which one aspect of a person's identity is defined in abstract terms and thus inverts the basically residential criteria that territorial bands use in defining important political cate-

gories. Along with clans and phratries, tribes have a system of institutionalized political leadership whose power is, at least in part, vested in the office rather than the man.[9] What remains a tendency within the band — namely, a hierarchy of leadership based on moral authority rather than political coercion — is fully developed in the tribe (Gluckmann 1971).

All North American tribes have one thing in common when compared to bands: a heightened awareness of the problems associated with aggregation and dispersal. The people of the Northwest Coast, for example, generally live in villages located along rivers or at river mouths, and depend on resources from the sea for much of their sustenance. In summer, however, they often move inland to the coastal mountains in order to gather berries, hunt and trade or fight with their neighbours.[10] These outlying areas are not only important for the resources they provide, but also for the isolation they offer for defence. Relations between neighbouring villages are usually volatile, even between villages of the same tribal segment. In brief, these people very much resemble the hunting bands of the interior, except that their pattern of resource use brings them together in larger numbers and for longer periods of time. This intensifies the problem of claiming exclusive ownership over areas that are in the peripheral buffer zone, and which are left unoccupied for as long as people remain in their coastal villages.

Not only is this pattern established for traditional times (the fur-trade epoch, approximately 1780 – 1880), it is correlated with a 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 now a matter of the historical record.[11] 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 practice of naming the ownership groups encourages the emergence of strong notions of sovereignty among these people. When threatened by invasion the coastal village people defend themselves — just as people in hunting bands would — but they base their defensive response in part on the notion of sovereignty. Chiefs unite people for purposes of defence along the lines suggested by the manner in which sovereignty is invested in the group; that is lineages and clans in the village are the ceremonial and political 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 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)[12] 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 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. This was particularly typical of political ties in the fur trade era.[13] In brief, these peoples have all the hallmarks of societies undergoing continuous

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3 There 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 Tsimshian are often treated as one in the anthropological literature (see Note 6 below).

4 My area of specialization remains the Athabaskan-speaking Sekani of northern B.C. (see Lanoue 1992).

5 An importance reflected in the terminology — father's people (*wilwsiwtxw/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).

6 The 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 Gispawuduweda/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).

7 Capitalized 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).

8 Tribal organization is found on the Northwest Coast, the Plains, parts of the southwest and in the northeast among Iroquoian-speaking peoples; there is too little information on southeastern peoples to generalize, although some groups, like the Creek and their confederates were undoubtedly tribal in the sense that I use the term here. Band organization is prevalent in northern Indian groups, the Algonkian-speaking northeast peoples, the Cordillera, and among the Inuit.

9 Writes Garfield (1950:33): "...the Tsimshian...are unique. They developed lineage political leadership into village chieftainship, probably in the beginning of the eighteenth century. Before the beginning of the nineteenth century this had developed further into tribal chieftainship. As far as we know, they had the only overall tribal organization headed by a chief that was found in northwestern North America."

10 For some inland Gitksan, Bella Coola, Bella Bella and Tlingit, the situation is the opposite, since they come to the coast in order to trade or participate in catching the oolachen (candlefish) and salmon on their annual runs.

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

12 Potlatches 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).

13 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).

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), polity versus enemies (everywhere, Rosman and Rubel 1971), 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 descriptive 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.[14]

Given such tendencies, tribal political and social organization is necessarily more complex, more structurally differentiated, than band social and political organization. What remains emergent or immanent in the band is often given full expression in the tribe. In terms of myth, therefore, it could be expected that bands 'play' more with various configurations than do tribes. By 'play' I mean that bands imagine alternatives to the political and social status quo, while social and political configurations used in tribal tales tend to be closer to the actual social and political organization. In a band, in other words, the possibilities that are explored in myth can only remain possibilities, given the small size of the band and the basic political system of ownership by occupation. A tribe, however, has several political and social configurations open to it and hence will very likely see its myth as a charter for either dominant or alternative social and political arrangements. In brief, motifs in tribal mytho-logic are truer to life than those in band societies.

TSIMSHIAN SOCIAL-STRUCTURAL AMBIGUITIES

Perhaps Lévi-Strauss' most famous analysis of an individual myth is based on a Northwest Coast Tsimshian story, the myth of Asdiwal (Lévi-Strauss 1967; taken from Boas 1912:71 – 145). Lévi-Strauss sees this story as the working out, by demonstrating the unacceptable results that follow from alternate and imagined social configurations (patrilineality, matrilocal residence after marriage, etc.), the problem of endogamy and exogamy in Tsimshian society. As he states (1967:30), "mythical speculation about types of residence which are exclusively patrilocal or matrilocal ... 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,[15] 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 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-martial residence by having property rights 'return' to the groom's matriline after his marriage. The actual pattern of residence in Tsimshian society (particularly among their 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 patrilocality (probably only sons of the chiefly class); avunculocal residence is said to predominate.[16] Although not clear, it appears that the Tsimshian

model of their society incorporates some statements of patrilocal residence, yet their practice – depending on an individual's class – is avunculocal.[17]

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 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 matrilateral 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 the 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 becoming one. It is as if the Tsimshian solutions to mortiality 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 Tsimshian ideology. Ambiguous attitudes towards marriage and all the subsequent tension that accompanies marriages between 'insiders' and 'outsiders' (quarrelling, 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 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 Asdiwal story, which allegedly tackles the tension between different villages or Houses and not the matrilines, refers to the ideologically-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, patrilocal residence and matrilineal descent). In brief, the myth distinguishes between values and ideology, just as the ambiguities in everyday values are 'resolved' in the Tsimshian model of their society.

There are major differences between the summary presented below and the version published by Lévi-Strauss, who stressed the 'bricolage' aspect of the residential arrangements that are mentioned in the myth in order to support his view that a rule of post-marital patrilocal residence reconciles matrilineal inheritance of titles and rights to property and MoBrDa marriage. As I pointed out above, this residential 'rule' is an idealized representation of Tsimshian society that 'fixes' the ambiguity towards 'far' and 'near' marriages by inverting the major terms of references 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

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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.

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

15 '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.

16 In fact, the post-martial residence rule is not 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 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).

17 Rosman and Rubel (1971) see 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.

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 practice but to Tsimshian ideology,[18] 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, matrilocal post marital residence and patrilateral 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, then they could undoubtedly have limited the number of matrilineal segments to which each segment is connected.

Hence, there is no 'real' problem of reconciling matrilineal descent and patrilateral 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). 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 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 depending on ties with the outside. 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.[19] All of these ambiguities are seen in the myth of Asdiwal, which runs to about 35 pages in the original, and so only a summarized version (based on the 1912 Boas text) can be presented here.

THE STORY OF ASDIWAL

In the beginning there are two women: one, a Chief, while the other is her daughter, an outsider who lives in her husband's town up river; the Chief, however, is in her own town at a place called Canyon.[20] The husbands of both these women die in a winter famine. Both women leave their towns of residence and meet mid-way, where there is nothing to eat. The daughter finds food (half a rotten berry) and builds a house. During the night a stranger arrives and lies with the daughter,[21] although the mother does not notice anything.

In the morning the man departs, the young woman also leaves to collect bark for the fire, hears Hats!enàs[22] and finds food.[23] This episode repeats several times and each time she finds bigger game. Each time she finds bigger game she increases the size of her house in order to dry the ever-increasing supply of meat. One day, following her routine of getting bark and finding meat she meets Hats!enàs, who admits to having supplied her and her mother with animal food over the last few days and having slept with the young woman at the outset of her adventures. The young woman is glad and realizes she is pregnant by Hats!enàs. Hats!enàs wants to marry her if the woman's mother agrees.[24] Hats!enàs appears while the two women are talking and showers them with all sorts of game.

18 Furthermore, as perfect and unambiguous as the terms of the Tsimshian model seem to be (matrilineally inherited phratric identity, matrilineal cross-cousin marriage and patrilocal 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.

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

20 The town is at the border between the Skeena valley hinterland, recently abandoned at the time of the formulation of the myth, and the Coast. Hence, the myth calls into question the 'over there' at its outset. The Coast Tsimshian claim the region that is 'up river', but do not actually have villages there. Asdiwal seems to be part-Gitksan.

21 Not an uncommon theme in Tsimshian stories; for example, see Cove (1987: 93ff) on the previously unpublished myth "The Origin of Devil's Club".

22 'Good Luck' (Boas 1912: 73, 261), a small bird like a robin that "... conferred luck to those who saw it" (Halpin and Seguin 1990: 271). Luck was especially important in a predominantly fishing-based culture that depended heavily on hunting to supplement the fish runs.
In Boas' notation (used here), '!' as in Hats!enàs, represents stress, 'ᵒ' as in 'Huᵒt' represents a glottal stop. The final 'à' in Hats!enàs is a long 'à'. See Boas (1912: 67, 68).

23 A common Tsimshian theme; see Garfield (1950: 51).

24 Obviously, a young man would normally 'ask' (although the higher the rank, the lesser the choice) for the hand of his betrothed from her father, his mother's brother. As Garfield states (1950: 24), "Young people had little to say since romantic love was not regarded as a basis for marriage."

Hats!enàs and the young woman marry and build two large houses to dry the meat. The child is born and is "pulled up"[25] by the forehead by his father Hats!enàs so that he grows up quickly. Hats!enàs gives his son (Asdiwal) a bow and four arrows, a lance, a hat, a cane, a basket and a bark raincoat, plus magical instructions that guarantee Asdiwal success in his endeavours. Asdiwal is to be a mighty hunter. Hats!enàs disappears, never to be seen again.

The people from up the Skeena[26] came and bought meat from the two women; then villages from "all around" (the vicinity) also bought meat and the women became rich. The older woman dies and her daughter gives a great potlatch with all the people of surrounding villages as guests. She calls the name of her son (he assumes his proper social identity). The mother and Asdiwal return to Canyon.

Asdiwal faces the first of his tests: a dangerous white bear[27] comes down river from the northeast during the winter, and all have failed to stop it. The bear reaches Asdiwal's town (at Canyon). Asdiwal puts on his father's magical gifts and chases the bear, who goes up river eventually up a mountain. The bear manages to temporarily escape by creating a gorge in the mountain that Asdiwal at first cannot cross until he uses his magical instruments. The chase continues and the episode is repeated. The bear and Asdiwal reach a "plain" (a plateau or mesa) on the top of the mountain, where they find a ladder that leads towards the sky. The bear climbs up, followed by Asdiwal. They come upon a beautiful springtime prairie. There is a path which leads to a house in the middle of the prairie. The bear enters the house and is revealed to be a beautiful woman who was wearing a bear blanket (skin). The Chief of the house questions the woman as to whether or not she has obtained what she wanted: it is clear that she has enticed Asdiwal into following her, and Asdiwal enters the room. The Chief is in reality the Sun. The Sun unites Asdiwal and the young woman, his daughter, in marriage.

The woman loves Asdiwal and warns him that her father will try to kill him as he has killed her other suitors by magically causing them to fall off a mountain while they were hunting mountain goat. It is now clear that the woman is trying to escape her father's control, and since he is the Sun, he is a great Chief.[28]

Asdiwal laughs off the danger and agrees to go up the mountain to hunt for his father-in-law. He again puts on his magic outfit and again runs as fast as a bird flies.

Asdiwal fools his enemy by placing his cane in the ground and stretching his raincoat over it. Even the stars are fooled, except for the Kite.[29] Asdiwal has in fact gone over the other side of the mountain, where he encounters another large house

standing middle of a plain or mesa. Asdiwal sees a shaman-mountain goat predicting the future in a crowd of mountain goats, which he kills except for the shaman and a young female; they escape by jumping over his head. Asdiwal magically carries all the meat back to his wife's house, where he presents it to his father-in-law.

The Sun orders Asdiwal to draw water from a spring inside a mountain fissure, which he intends to close as soon as Asdiwal is inside. Again, Asdiwal is warned by his wife but laughs off the warning, secure that his supernatural powers are greater than the Sun's. He enters the mountain with a slave of the Sun and causes the slave's death and draws the water; this time, Asdiwal was successful by ruse rather than by magical powers. The Sun brings the bones of his slave home, and his daughter steps over them,[30] causing the slave to come back to life.

The Chief orders Asdiwal to get firewood for him. The wife once again warns her husband, who again shrugs off the warning, trusting in his supernatural powers. Asdiwal is again accompanied by the Sun's slave. Asdiwal strikes the tree designated by the Sun and it falls on the slave, killing him once again. This time the daughter must step on the bones of the slave four times to revive him, and the Sun causes the tree to be put together in one piece.

The wife warns Asdiwal of the last test her father has prepared for him, which is to bake her husband in the fire.[31] This time Asdiwal is scared. A fire is built and the Sun commands his daughter to order Asdiwal to lie down on the hot stones; she refuses. Asdiwal goes outside and encounters his father Hats!enàs, just when his magical powers appear to have deserted him. His father gives him some magical ice. The Sun derides and taunts Asdiwal as he lies in the fire, but no harm comes to him. The Sun Chief admits that Asdiwal's powers are greater than his own, and comes to like and accept him. Everyone lives in harmony.

One day Asdiwal gets homesick. His father-in-law sends him back to his earthy village and he is shown the way by his wife. He and his wife arrive amidst famine. Asdiwal is given a Chief's name in a potlatch and assumes his titles as head of the House.[32]

Asdiwal continues to live with his wife in his mother's village. His wife discovers that Asdiwal has betrayed her and leaves to return to the land of the Sun. Asdiwal tries to follow her and is killed. This time it is the Sun who gathers the bones and without his daughter's help restores Asdiwal to life. Everything is well, but Asdiwal is homesick once again. Asdiwal returns to earth with his wife, and she leaves him after showing him the way home. Asdiwal's mother has died in the meantime and he goes down the Skeena. He meets a woman, daughter of a Chief and who has four brothers, and asks her hand in marriage. They live in her village.

25 The usual Tsimshian idiom is that a person is "pushed up".

26 I.e., from the area where the young women had lived before the famine.

27 Bear tales are common in Tsimshian mythology. Both men and women may marry bears, who appear in human form; see Garfield (1950: 49).

28 This is not clear in Tsimshian statements. Normally, daughters of great chiefs would marry far away, viri- or patrilocally, although a stated preference for avunculocal (MB) residence (for men) suggests that women of the chiefly class would not change residence after marriage.

29 A kind of hawk.

30 It is worth mentioning that salmon, the Tsimshian staple, was prepared by cutting it longitudinally by a woman sitting on the ground with her legs spread apart. Most Indian menstrual taboos, Tsimshian and others, specifically forbid a woman to step over a male's hunting equipment for fear of contaminating it and rendering it ineffective (Garfield 1950: 40). Furthermore, Tsimshian mythology contains many references to vagina dentata; see Cove (1987: 53 – 64).
The inversion between everyday values and myth (a woman stepping over something produces a positive effect and revives instead of harms the slain Asdiwal, a hunter par excellence) seems to call attention to Asdiwal's 'normality' by a double contradiction: Asdiwal is an outsider and as such is not subject to 'normal' rules and prescriptions (hence the inversion), and yet he is very much a kind of role-model. Shamans (another facet of Asdiwal's identity) are especially susceptible to malign influences from menstruating women; see Cove (1987: 207 – 208).

31 Fire and consumption may be necessary for reincarnation, just as reincarnation is necessary to conserve within the House the powers and status inherent in a name held by the deceased. In a myth that Cove considers important to understanding Tsimshian world view, the carcasses of salmon (and the bodies of chiefs) were to be completely consumed by fire for reincarnation (and hence survival of the Tsimshian) to occur; see Cove (1987: 53 – 64, 72 – 73), Seguin (1984b: 119).

32 A completely normal procedure. Status is inherited among the Tsimshian, but must be validated 'by public recognition' in a potlatch ceremony.

Everyone is happy again. Asdiwal hunts mountain goats with his brothers-in-law and kills many animals at the top of a mountain; he gives everything away to his brothers-in-law and his father-in-law. The family as a group moves to another town and some rivalry emerges between Asdiwal and his brothers-in-law. Asdiwal wins a hunting contest and in a fit of pique the brothers-in-law leave and take their sister with them.

Other people arrive at Asdiwal's now-deserted camp. They too are four brothers and a sister. The brothers take pity on Asdiwal and offer him their sister in marriage, and he offers them the bears he had killed in his contest with his previous set of brothers-in-law. Asdiwal kills more bears but does not distribute them equally among his new brothers-in-law. They all move towards the coast and Asdiwal becomes even richer and more powerful. His wife has a boy,[33] but more rivalry develops, again a contest between land and sea hunting. Asdiwal is confident his magical snowshoes will enable him to clamber over the rocks and hunt sea lions successfully. He is successful, but his brothers-in-law abandon him on the rocks, although the youngest returns and offers to bring him back to their camp. He declines because of his rivalry with the oldest and stays on the rocks. *Hatslenàs* helps him survive a great storm.

After the storm abates a little mouse[34] invites him to his grandfather's underground house, which is in fact the house of the sea lion Chief. The people (sea lions) are in fact suffering because of wounds from Asdiwal's arrows (inflicted in a previous hunt), and he offers to cure them. He pulls the arrows out and is immediately accepted and loved by the people for his aid. Yet Asdiwal is homesick for his wife and child; his wife misses him as well. He returns home in a sea lion stomach[35] (pushed along by magical winds which the Chief tells him about). He is reunited with his wife and child. He goes inland and enlists his wife's aid in obtaining his tools, which are in his brothers'-in-law house. Asdiwal discovers that his eldest brother-in-law has mistreated his wife. He and his wife make a new camp and he carves two killer whales.[36] The killer whales are made to come to life but die in the water. He and his wife repeat the experiment with various types of trees; finally, the killer whales carved of yellow cedar[37] succeed, but only after his wife has made sacrifices to the spirits. He instructs the killer whales to upset the canoe of his brothers-in-law when they go hunting sea lions on the following day. The whales are to start with the eldest and upset all the brothers'-in-law canoes, except the youngest brother's, whose boat is to be tipped over when he is close to shore. This comes to pass, and Asdiwal gets his revenge but spends some time with his youngest brother-in-law.

He gets homesick once again and desires to return to his old group up the Skeena River. He leaves his wife and child. He

arrives at a town, holds a potlatch and receives a new Chief's name. His boy by his first wife comes to him and Asdiwal gives him his magical bow and arrows. They part company and Asdiwal goes hunting mountain goats but forgets his magical snowshoes. He only had a little dog that his son had given him in exchange for the bow and arrows. Asdiwal is rescued by his father Huot[38] who takes Asdiwal with him, but Asdiwal's body, lance and little dog all turn to stone.[39]

ASDIWAL AS A HERO

Given the ambiguities between 'far' and 'near' in Tsimshian values, it is not surprising that the myth of Asdiwal uses actual place names (not mentioned in this summary) in establishing its narrative line (Asdiwal travels from village to village, which in fact were real Tsimshian villages in the nineteenth century), nor that the social arrangements reflect the reality of the constant reformulation of allegiances by the chiefly class.[40] And, as I have argued above, the fact that the Tsimshian recognize a category of 'outsider' within their dynamics of group recruitment suggests that Asdiwal's movements from a patrilocally-defined locale to his mother's native village (a 'real' choice which is statistically confirmed by Kasakoff), followed by a series of neolocal and bilocal experiments in neutral territory (neither his own nor his mother's or father's villages) and ending with Asdiwal's son in his mother's village and then in his father's village, is in fact much closer to Tsimshian reality than the idealized 'rules' of post-marital patrilocal residence and matrilateral cross-cousin marriage would suggest. The residential arrangements, in other words, accurately portray Tsimshian ambivalence about 'far' and 'near' ties, and, incidentally, matrilineality and 'kinship' as an organizing principle become an epiphenomenon of the Tsimshian way of describing their political arrangements.[41]

In fact, at several crucial points the myth takes pains to destroy or undermine the significance of 'perfect' residence and marriage rules and yet emphasize 'real' patterns. At the outset of the story, for example, when mother and daughter establish neolocal residence and eat half of rotten berry (Houses were divided into 'halves', which were probably two lineages), *Hatslenàs* manages to have intercourse with the daughter while the mother blissfully sleeps unaware in the same room. This suggests at the outset that matrilineality is neither an infallible nor perhaps even an important aspect for defining group (House) identity. When *Hatslenàs* proposes marriage he does so to the girl's mother rather than her uncle (MoBr), thereby undermining another pillar of the idealized matrilineal Tsimshian society. Even before, mother and daughter are stranded without their men, creating a single-lineage House that is so untenable that *Hatslenàs* intervenes; soon after, the daughter builds two houses — though still imperfect, since each house is dominated by a single lineage, it is at least a dualistic representation of a village[42] that metaphorically stands for a House.

At several critical points Asdiwal receives help from his father and indeed it is his father's magical instruments (bow and arrows, snowshoes, etc.) which allow Asdiwal to overcome the disability of his 'orphan' birth. Father and son in fact have a strong tie in matrilineal Tsimshian society, and a father, especially of the chiefly class, normally provides his son with access to resources he controls within his own matrilineage on the understanding that the boy will not use those resources to potlatch in order to usurp his father's titles and position. This is neatly emphasized in the disappearance of *Hatslenàs* after he bestows his magical gifts on Asdiwal, thereby leaving the field clear for Asdiwal's social climbing. There is in fact no contradiction here between matrilineal inheritance and patrilateral affiliation, since among the Tsimshian House chiefs (and Asdiwal's father and mother are both of the chiefly class)[43] owned private resource sites which were not considered lineage property (Richardson 1982). Finally, the initial episode represents the growth of a house/House (it is continually enlarged) by constant incorporation of meat; that is, the wealth and power of a House very much depends on real control over resources, and the House 'grows' by incorporating Asdiwal's mother's catch (the various meat animals that are caught all portray human qualities in other Tsimshian stories).

Asdiwal consistently bests his brothers-in-law whenever there is some rivalry or competition over who actually contributes more to the group; in this case, whether sea hunters or land hunters are superior. This too is a normal rivalry in terms of Tsimshian society, even though Lévi-Strauss argues that these episodes call attention to the impossibility of the residential arrangements which underlie the relationships. In Tsimshian society, wife-takers are considered to have higher status than wife-givers,[44] and so Asdiwal is acting out the values of Tsimshian culture when he beats his brothers-in-law at their own game. There is another aspect to this competition: in the first episode of four brothers-in-law, all is well until the family (including the four brothers-in-law) move to another town near the coast. The Coast Tsimshian had a more flexible system of stratification that the Gitksan of the interior; among the Gitksan, stratification was strictly according to clan, regardless of village, while among the Coast Tsimshian each village had a different hierarchy of clans according to local conditions (Cove 1987:121). Hence, in moving to the coast Asdiwal has changed systems of stratification, and so rivalry not only can but must emerge as people re-work their relationship. The clan rivalry which Lévi-Strauss attributes to a failed matrilocal experiment (which the arrangement is not: there is no evidence in the tale that Asdiwal and his family are living with wife's mother's people, but with wife's brothers and father's group) simply mirrors a 'real' Coast Tsimshian situation, where clan status depends on what particular village a person is in rather on the particular clans that are represented in the village.

In the wider social sphere Asdiwal or his mother always stress the importance of ties with outsiders, almost to the point of denying his ties with his own people. Initially, his mother sells meat (caught by Asdiwal) to outsiders and only afterwards to locals. In fact, it is only after Asdiwal's mother has alleviated the famine by distributing and selling meat to outsiders that she returns to her own land, relatively secure that the ties and goodwill she has built up will enable her to live securely at home. Asdiwal himself also embodies an ambiguous vision of himself as a successful individual as long as he keeps moving to new groups to be recognized and hailed as a hero. Asdiwal is consistently lonely and homesick for 'over there', to the point where he constantly breaks up the happy household that he has fought so strenuously to establish (especially in his marriage to White Bear Woman, daughter of the Sun). If anything, this heigh-

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33 Waux, himself the hero of various Tsimshian myths.

34 Mouse-Woman is probably meant here; she is an important intermediary between Tsimshian and the world of animals. See McNeary (1984: 7).

35 Cove (1987: 52 – 63) describes a parallel situation in a key Tsimshian myth he analyzes; a young prince is returned to his people from the Land of the Salmon in a giant salmon's stomach. See Boas (1916: 192ff) for similar tales of life in the Land of the Salmon.

36 One of four phratic symbols among the Coast Tsimshian, even though Asdiwal's suspicious origins (possibly Gitksan Tsimshian) suggest that he is using the wrong symbols; the Gitksan equivalent of the Coast Tsimshian Killer Whale crest is Fireweed.

37 The main material used in construction and carving by the Tsimshian was red cedar; see Halpin and Seguin (1990: 271, 273).

38 'To escape', Boas (1912: 262).

39 Stone, according to Cove (1987: 49 – 156ff, 173), is a metaphor for chiefly qualities; the ideal Chief is silent, immobile and intransigent.

40 Such that one of the prime considerations against waging war was the presence of one's own people in neighbouring groups (Ferguson 1983).

41 In the sense that matrilineality is no longer a choice based on some poorly-understood quality of descent through women, but merely a structural 'leftover' after the more important (to the Tsimshian, and perhaps to many peoples) rules of marriage and residence have been defined. If the Tsimshian want to stress connectivity to other groups in the idealized representation of how their society works, then they would choose a matrilineal principle (after specifying MoBrDa marriage and patrilocal/avunculocal post-marital residence) to describe the exogamous groups; the result is a triadic model. If on the other hand they wish to minimize the idea (since we are dealing with an idealized model) of connectivity then they can maintain rules of MoBrDa marriage, patrilocal/avunculocal post-marital residence in combination with matrilineally-defined exogamous groups, resulting in a dual model. The alleged benefits or functions of matri- or patrilineal descent are irrelevant

to the final choice; the relation of the native model to strategic values that define group recruitment and social reproduction is the final arbiter.

42 Some ethnographic accounts (for example, Miller 1982: 159 – 160) mention that villages were divided into moieties, 'owners' and 'others'. Halpin and Seguin (1990: 274) also suggest that "... *at the village level* ... [their emphasis]" Tsimshian society was dualistic.

43 Meaning, they are 'real people' with the right to display crests and use names.

44 This is perfectly understandable when it is remembered that the main aim of alliances is to produce autonomy and increase the independence of the House/village.

tened longing for 'over there' is an exaggeration of Tsimshian movements but not of Tsimshian sensibilities which, as I noted above, incorporate a notion of 'outsider' into their dynamics of group formation and recruitment. The point that 'far' is, in one sense, 'near', is emphasized by the recurrent bird imagery in the tale. Asdiwal flees as quickly as a bird flies whenever there is danger or a critical point is reached (*Hats!enàs* is "like a robin" in the original; Boas 1912: 73); the only sympathetic star is the Kite (a hawk) when Asdiwal confronts the magic mountain, and so on. That is, there is a tacit manipulation of imagery to suggest that alliances that cross regional boundaries (Kite is, after all, a very far-away star) are important to long term survival.

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 uxorilocal, 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 roasting[45] 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. 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.[46]

Ambivalent feelings evinced towards 'far' and 'near', towards a tendency of 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 villagemates of an impending attack and betray their 'true' relatives.

The story of Asdiwal, as Adams has noted (1974), is a 'real' story, and the contradiction is between, on the one hand, contingent events and the disastrous consequence that can sometimes follow from them and, on the other, a desire for stability or continuity in the face of these contingent events. In fact, Asdiwal represents the 'self-made man', the hero who rises to the top of his society on his own merit; he is not an anomalous or marginal hero found in band societies but an embodiment of how success is defined in Tsimshian terms. If anything, the story is a morality tale, since Asdiwal eventually fails when his magic 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 the 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 power of movement. The tale also makes clear that Asdiwal fails as a carver of one of the important crest animal (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 Gitskan 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 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 climatic 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. Power and wealth are not enough without wide-ranging ties.

In brief, Asdiwal demonstrates that within societies with complex tribal organization, a myth acts more as a charter for certain arrangements than as a vehicle for unrealized yet potentially valid configurations. The political and social reality, in other words, is sufficiently complex to contain tendencies that can come to be expressed in very tangible social and political arrangements if conditions change. It is not so surprising that transformation and connectivity are often mentioned as the key to Tsimshian art and thought (see Halpin 1981, 1984; MacDonald 1984b). Hence, myth in such societies will play down rather than explore alternatives to the status quo.

And Asdiwal effectively deals with the status quo by simply providing 'real life' examples. Yet Lévi-Strauss was not wrong to point out that every armature in the myth on which action is hung in fact refers to the Tsimshian model of society. After all, Asdiwal *is* experimenting with alternative forms of residence, and it could even be argued that the myth is about alternative forms of filiation, since Asdiwal gets help from a father who is largely absent and therefore unable to provide him with the true 'magic' that every Tsimshian chief desires, connections to other Houses. Asdiwal must do with 'real' magical substitutes, and therefore ultimately fails as a chief. And, obviously, Asdiwal is the son of a female with an absent husband — his matrilineal origins are clearly stated at the outset. In other words, the myth of Asdiwal combines a 'true' description of Tsimshian social organization with oblique references to the elements (matrilineal descent, patrilocal residence, and MoBrDa marriage) that define the Tsimshian model of their society. Asdiwal as a myth, therefore, is neither true nor untrue, neither directly nor indirectly legitimates the status quo. The myth of Asdiwal is about contingencies that are as 'real' as everyday life.

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45 Obviously 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.

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

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