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THE HUMAN IN TSIMSHIAN ART

Tsimshian totem poles seem to show more human figures than do Haida and Kwakiutl. Tsimshian frontlets often use an idealized human face. Tsimshian round rattles sometimes use human faces. The Tsimshian use manifold human face masks. Why?

The faces are generic; not strongly male or female, young or old; not individualised portraits; uniformly serene or expressionless. Proportions, if anything, are infantile: heads large in relation to bodies, eyes large in relation to faces. Postures can sometimes be read as infantile too: seated, (seldom standing), pseudo-fetal.

The hypothesis is that we have here a blended individuum: mother-father-child in one. Male-female, child-adult, begging the question as to which it is because it is the trinity, shown as a triune.

Variations which retain the human metaphor are such as Split-Person and Sharp-Nose. Half-Person, Person with head in body, Mother and Child, are variations which show that the concept was being thought about that way.

Is there a postural similarity with the human female figure on the back of the Raven rattle? Do flat-knees signify that? If so, we have a link with Raven's self-generation as procreation.

Diagrams of Raven would say the same thing. Beak-Nose of Weeget, Frog-Woman, etc. Raven's "Nest"?

It is a safe formula, but not very exciting, because it leaves out sex and death. No hint left of eating, retribution, killing, incest. It is either transcendent (Stars, Rainbows, etc.) or bland. Where has the fierceness and fear gone? Where is vag. dent. and Grizzly Bear?

Who, me, worry?

The human figure on the Raven rattle is sexless too, in a sense.