

La Voie des Masques. *Claude Lévi-Strauss*.
Les Sentiers de la Création. Geneva: Skira,
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This collection of papers, in spite of the
Review of La voie des masques, by Claude Lévi-Strauss

In these two beautifully produced, abundantly illustrated, and eloquently written volumes, Lévi-Strauss performs another tour-

de-force. Among the vast artistic patrimony of the Pacific Northwest Coast Indians, he perceptively singles out for analysis a particular, widespread kind of mask (the *swaixwe* found among 12 tribes of the Coastal Salish). These masks are different in type but identical in overall form (I, p. 32). Since myths are linked with each type of mask, the author extends to the artworks the methods used in his study of myths in order to provide the "justification plastique" of these works. Much of the study is therefore taken up by the careful summary and analysis of the pertinent myths, examined in their system of transformation from tribe to tribe. The first part of the study convincingly establishes the fact that among the Salish the masks exhibit invariant traits at the plastic, mythological, sociological, and semantic levels (I, p. 74-75). In the second stage of his research, Lévi-Strauss synthesizes the data relevant to the Nootka and Kwakiutl versions of the *swaixwe* masks (borrowed from the Salish). In this process of transfer, the plastic elements of the mask remain fairly unchanged, but the messages carried by them are inversed. Expanding the paradigm by contrasting these masks and myths with the *dzonokwa* sculptures and myths from the Kwakiutl, he reaches the interesting conclusion that the *dzonokwa* masks are the complementary opposites of the *swaixwe* from the plastic, socioritual, and semantic points of view. Extending the analysis to the Dene, he observes that copper among them has functions inverse to those given it by the Kwakiutl and to those attributed to the *swaixwe* masks by the Salish.

Initially, the author proceeds with the constitution of "le dossier global" (I, p. 35) of what is known about the esthetic characteristics, the techniques of manufacture, the usage, the expected results, and the myths accounting for the origin, appearance, and conditions of usage of the masks. It is immediately apparent that there are numerous lacunae in this dossier. Whereas there is much information about the myths themselves, there is little knowledge about the other accompanying texts (e.g., chants sung during the performances); furthermore, the evidence is uneven or nonexistent about aspects of manufacture, usage, function, ownership, transmission, level of meaning, and affective impact of the masks. Most of the masks and myths were collected independently from one another and outside their context. The questions, therefore, remain as to how well the two sets fitted together in practice and how these relation-

of the masks. The sculptures are obviously something more than mere transcriptions, or condensations, of myths. Artworks, once they are created, have a certain existence of their own and may stimulate "secondary" interpretation and reflection and follow a separate course. The interpretation of the justifying myths can offer only one level of understanding of the masks, albeit a very intricate and valuable one. The work is really more about myths than about masks and leaves unexplained much of the latter's significance, including some of their formal features. Through Lévi-Strauss's method we certainly know much more about the ideas that underly the origin and appearance of the masks, but we do not better perceive exactly what they do and mean in the context of various ceremonies and social activities, nor their specific qualities in the diverse cultures in which they occur. The conceptions of the creative artists, the demands of the patrons, the responses of the viewers, the performance behavior of the actors, the specific usages in actual contexts, and many other factors, which all add to the range of meanings conveyed by the artworks, are not clarified by this type of analysis.

The two volumes are fascinating reading; the arguments are lucidly and vigorously developed. New insights into the relationships between art forms and myths and into the elucidation of the symbolic content of formal elements are definitely provided. This is a thought-provoking work, the results of which should be tested elsewhere.