

## Harry Smith Recalls a Swinamish Spirit Dance in Puget Sound, circa 1940

So, there was near where I was visiting, what was called The Spirit Dance. This was held in a long building about as wide as this tent, but there was room down the middle for four fires. During the year, certain bird-like animals... now this is put together from conversations I had with people 50 years ago, and I was only beginning to try to remember them, when I realized it was time to start. So the ideas are going to be somewhat disjointed. But, being as two types of phenomena happen, the origin of the first humans was of a universal nature that I didn't realize until really earlier this year, which had to do with the creation of a series of humans, from things like stone, and clay, I believe the final one was made of wood, and it spoke. Later on these humans realized that certain things that perhaps resemble birds, but with wings maybe of obsidian or some thing, it's hard to tell, because there simply aren't terms in English for the concepts that exist.

The human himself, or herself, was really a series of concentric spheres that time went through on both directions from this central point. In other words, grandchildren had the same names as grandparents, because they were the same distance away. Maybe one was smaller but it was farther away, and the smaller one for that reason, or something like that.

These are things from casual conversations... Someone else, in describing the nature of--they were a famous doctor--of their curing, said that they were surrounded by four helpers: one red, one blue, one yellow and one green. I'm re-translating that "helper" from a man who said either souls or spirits. But it was 50 years ago, and I don't remember it too well. And he was in the center of this. He was also the sort of titular leader--this is--those people--Swinamish... all of these things will come from the Salish Tribes, groups, in the northern part of Puget Sound, and the adjoining parts of Vancouver Island or Victoria.

At any rate, people would then be... certain wooden objects... as I said, there were four fires down the middle of the building, and holes in the roof. There were certain wooden objects. Sticks, called tusden, chadso, which I believed was shaped like a bird; and skudalich which was a double-headed thing because it took four people to hold it down.

This seemed, uh, you know, I'd got a Ouija board for Christmas or a birthday or something a few years before so I was willing to believe it. It's essentially why I've been lucky in seeing the things that aren't often seen. It's because, people who've told me, who invited me to the... I don't know which one of these ceremonies to describe to you first. The one I began with, the so-called Spirit Dance, takes place on earth. the uuh, where the tusden, chadso, skudalich I can't, uuuh, Mrs Brown, who got the song that goes with the tusden, which are the long poles, the words mean "This little bird is going to sing." It was dramatic, but it took place on the earth, later, and was fairly well known--there were some professors there from the university and so forth.

The other, uh--after I'd gone to a number of meetings of that kind, I'd been invited to some thing that had been outlawed many, many years before, the so called knunknunkh, the dog-howler society. This was held in four houses arranged in a square. It involved a great number of things like masked people, who were literally

frightening, the ones that were, had become animals. This all took place in Heaven, but the audience looks restive. It involved a number of things--rattles shaped like skulls, a choir on the roof [to audience:]

If I wanna WHAT? Yeah, well, are there any questions?

[question inaudible] Well, that was, ah, I wonder if I should say [laughs] talk about that. Dr Radin had me type up the Winnebago text of the origin of the medicine society, which is supposed to be kept secret. And I made so many mistakes in the typing that it was never printed [laughter]. I saved it in a purified state, although I ditched my preliminary lecture which has to do with the circulation of the Antarctic current carrying stories of women keeping all the secrets and men having to turn them into Amazons to get the secrets back. And the general distribution of the twin leaves... I really hadn't planned to go into that--I don't have my notes with me, because I decided I'd really give elaborate descriptions of these two ceremonies and then compare them. But I decided it really wasn't a good idea. Because everybody was yawning and going into a trance and soon there'll be a scream, and you'll have to restrain the poor victim who was the... yeah.

It was literally terrifying. The people were disguised as wolves. They had wooden masks on... all the Northwest coast from South Eastern Alaska to Puget Sound has a certain style. This is because the artists traveled around. There weren't people everywhere that did that. They mostly lived on the rivers, and went to the Queen Charlotte Island or parts of Vancouver to make these trick things that gave the impression that [laughs] Hieronymus Bosch was alive and willing to the woods...

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One thing that is, I think, typical, is that tools are made to last a very long time, in non-industrialized places. It seems obvious, but you seldom think those are long times in terms of thousands of years. The jade axes and thing, DON'T get DULL [laughs]. It stays sharp once it's made--it may take 200 years to make it but it's good when it's made.

So, in various ones of these four houses, on the way down to this place, I'd been told I had to give a needle--that some woman would ask for a needle--and as I went down, this was a strange thing--I was at the end of the Vancouver B.C. Somethin' Or Other Streetcar line. There was the lady who asked for the needle and I gave her a bone needle that I'd dug out of a shell heap, and I said "There's a big dance down there?" and she said "Noooooo." However, I went down, and someone who was influential I knew was

down there. I doubt if any other living person, except children who were there, would be alive, who saw what proceeded, because it embodied a great number of sort of unique acts. I mentioned things like the choir on the roof; there were also pipes, made somewhat like organ pipes, and almost as large.

The music of that whole area is very beautiful, but "unfortunately" has not been uh "recorded"... There are intense prejudices against...Anybody that's been on reservations and has relatives that are stuffed in a museum along with giraffes and things, feels

embarrassment and remorse when the graveyards of their grandfathers and things are dug up, to count the number of crosses in relation to coins or something.

So anyhow I went down there and there was someone and they said, "No, he can't come." That I might be killed or something. I think I've outlined the main thing. The whole... everything... I suppose there were 400 people there. Someone went around the fire swinging a bull roarer. These ritual elements probably occur in sequence independent of the interpretation that's placed on them. And quite probably refer to a cosmographic scheme that er ... can be explained scientifically but runs counter to what might be considered scientific thought.

Let's say that was around 1940. There's a write-up in various magazines and things from that period. The earliest one I know of is 1943, as far as a published photograph. I lost interest until about three months ago, when Naropa called, and who was I to say "Nay"?