

SYMMETRY IN SOCIAL ORDER

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Symmetry is most commonly thought of in material or physical terms. A symmetrical arrangement is immediately apparent to the senses, most especially the sense of sight. Social symmetry also exists, but it is harder to discern because of its pattern is usually manifest over time rather than instantaneously. Nevertheless, the people constrained by such a system regard it as an atemporal structure, and discuss its temporal expression such terms. A prime example of a socially symmetrical structure is the moiety system of the Tlingit Indians of British Columbia and Alaska, which affects society at all levels of inclusiveness from the tribe to the household. Tlingit geography, cosmography, and art express symmetry as well: material equivalents of the non-material social organization. These seemingly disparate symmetries all reiterate the fundamental Tlingit notion that a functioning whole consist of mutually dependent halves.