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Objects and Subjects in Haida History

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Résumé de l'article

L'histoire sociale comme la valeur esthétique de l'art Haida sont des sujets souvent de conflits ou sont marqués par un manque de clarté. Cet article propose d'explorer les objets de Haida Gwaii pour un usage strictement local et par rapport à un ou deux cycles mythiques. Puis, à partir de la moitié du XIXe siècle, les collectionneurs, les marchands et les musées du monde occidental sont arrivés; ils se sont pris des milliers d'objets, et, en 1880, de nombreux artistes Haida pouvaient affirmer la continuité en fabriquant des maisons modèles, des totems et des bateaux pour les marchés de souvenirs.

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Ethnographic Things
Objects and Subjects in Haida History

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Early in the twentieth century McCoy Hall in the Museum of Victoria in Melbourne, Australia, held a variety of artifacts: a stuffed walrus, numerous skeletons from animals ranging from a blue whale to a kangaroo, and a surprising array of ethnographic and anthropological specimens. The general appearance of the gallery recalls the early modern *Wunderkammer* and cabinets of curiosities that have been assembled ever since (figure 1). The surreal juxtaposition of skeleton, artifact, and, say, the baby elephant displayed in the glass case in the center aisle, comes as no accident: the gallery in 1901 was named in honor of Frederick McCoy, an individual with many talents: Melbourne University professor, avid collector of many of the exhibits still on view in the museum today, and director of the museum from 1856 until his death in 1899[1]. Especially noticeable in this photograph, however, is the Haida frontal pole visible at the rear of the hall, somewhat obscured by strange, protruding skulls of other specimens. The museum acquired the pole in 1911 from Charles Newcombe, who first photographed the pole in its original location in a village called Hlghagilda (Skidegate) prior to

Figure 1. Display of frontal pole, Hlghagilda, Haida Gwaii, as installed in 1911 in McCoy Hall, Museum of Victoria, Melbourne MVM X 17074 (Photo: MVM).

1. For the history of the Museum of Victoria and on McCoy's role, see: http://www.museum.vic.gov.au/history/1854.html.

overseeing its removal[2].

If we somehow lift the pole from this early twentieth-century image and examine it more closely, we are struck by its strong color scheme (though some later renewal is likely), the piling up of animal forms or "crests," and the evident virtuosity of workmanship (figure 2). But how are we to interpret this artifact? What steps toward contextual grounding are necessary before our gaze can rest easy? An initial path may be charted when we learn that unlike the round cross-section of most surviving poles, that of the Melbourne example is unusual; its rear face is flattened and in fact slightly concave in profile, as if it was followed out to form that shape with exacting deliberation. What can account for this feature? Newcombe's 1911 photograph of the pole shows that it was flattened along its entire rear face, even as it rose over fifteen meters into the air. The use of concave frontal poles was documented in 1878 by George M. Dawson, who attributed the technique to an effort to reduce their weight and thereby ease installation without sacrificing rigidity. These poles "are generally 30 to 50 feet in height," Dawson observed, "with a width of three feet or more at the base, and tapering slightly upwards. They are *hollowed behind in the manner of a trough*, to make them light enough to be set and maintained in place without much difficulty." A panoramic photograph taken in the same village by Edward Dossetter in 1881, just three years later, shows that several additional frontal poles shared this flattened, hollowed-out, appearance (Dawson 1993: 141)[3].

Figure 2. Upper section of frontal pole, Hl-ghagilda, Haida Gwaii, before 1878; collected by Charles Newcombe 1911 for the Museum of Victoria, Melbourne. H. 1190 cm, diam. 120 cm. MVM X 17074 (Photo: MVM)

2. The photograph made by Newcombe in 1911 is illustrated in George F. MacDonald (1983a: 44).
3. For the Dosseter image, see MacDonald (1983a: 42-43).

Figure 3. Map, Haida Gwaii, BC.

The pole Newcombe sent to Melbourne in 1911 was his furthest shipment in the feeding-frenzy on poles and baskets, hats, masks, and button-blankets in the early twentieth century, part of what Douglas Cole termed a "scramble" for the material culture of the Northwest Coast that reached its greatest intensity between about 1885 and 1915[4]. A physician by training, Newcombe became an avid student and collector of Haida artifacts. Beginning in 1896, he spent fifteen years visiting villages, photographing what he saw, recording and mapping house positions and associated poles. Besides the Melbourne pole, he acquired others in Hlghagilda, a settlement in the middle of Haida Gwaii archipelago (Queen Charlotte Islands) (figure 3) but one that grew even as others lost population between 1850 and 1900. Its plan resembled that of other places: along a curved line of rocky beach a series of almost identical six-beam wooden houses (sometimes two deep), with each house surrounded by and fronted with, a monumental pole or set of poles. From one structure (house 1A on published maps) at the easternmost end of the community, came the Melbourne pole. According to some of Newcombe's and ethnologist John R. Swanton's detailed notes, this structure (built before 1878) was named House to Which the High Tide Comes, which was then owned by Like a Small Bird in Good Humor, whose wife was a member of the Sea Egg clan. Between this structure and its immediate neighbor (house 1B on maps) stood another pole, the only one now left at Hlghagilda[5]. On the strand not too far away was a dwelling named He Brings Loads of Food, and an additional eight structures have such descriptive names, but these can change, as can those of people, several times during their lives. But

4. See Cole (1985).
5. For a map of the village and houses 1A and 1B (both at far right of plan), and an illustration of the single pole still surviving, see MacDonald (1983a: 38-39, plate 28).

what of Sea Eggs, and clans?

The Haida have a living social structure, the complexity of which has always been rivaled and no doubt supported by the constitutive energy of its arts. Two major clans, (what cultural anthropologists commonly term "moieties") – Ravens and Eagles – frame social structure generally, and regulate exogamous marriage patterns. Each clan then breaks down into numerous subgroups or lineages. Twenty-two lineage lines exist within the Ravens, and twenty-three constitute the Eagles. Each lineage took its name from the village to which it originally belonged, even though it may have travelled widely in subsequent years; the Sgang Gwaay (Ninstints) Eagles, for example, always invoked their home village, no matter how far or how often they moved. Thus due to marriage alliances, a number of different lineages often exist in precisely the same locale. In each village, matrilineages might divide into several households, each living together in a large communal house, and governed by a house chief. And as George F. MacDonald has noted, "a lineage chief is simply the head of the leading household by virtue of his wealth or prestige." Yet each lineage chief also owned (or had the right to use) specific crests. When Swanton was in Haida Gwaii in 1900-1901, he was able to compile a detailed list of nearly all lineages. Of the crests particular to Qo'na (Skedans) he wrote: "Moon, mountain-goat, grisly bear, killer-whale, rain-bow, sea grisly bear (tcā gan xuadja-i), child Property-Woman (GitgA-'lgia). The moon was reserved for the chief." The chief, Swanton added, was Gidā'gudjañ, name literally meant "from his daughter" but had been "corrupted to 'Skedans' by the whites" (MacDonald 1983: 5).[6]

MacDonald's brief comment on lineage chiefs and prestige derives from thirty years of work and publication on Haida (and closely related Tlingit) culture in its social and spatial, ceremonial and ritual dimensions. He knew the material culture in a deep way, having first worked as keeper of ethnological collections and then as director of the Museum of Man in Ottawa (renamed and now the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Hull, Quebec). In that position, he labored incessantly to demonstrate the constitutive ties between social structure, linguistics, and material culture for all of Canada's First Peoples, even while his own research centered on the Haida[7]. In 1983 he released *Haida Monumental Art: Villages of the*

6. See Swanton (1905a: 268-295) on both clans and their lineages. The Oo'na quote is from page 269. Without identifying Swanton as the source, Smyly (1973: 18) does mention that Skedans is a white man's mispronunciation of Gid 'gudjañ.
7. In his museum work, McDonald came into frequent contact with scholars at other museums: the Royal British Columbia Museum in Victoria, the Glenbow Museum

Queen Charlotte Islands (HMA), a study that altered forever the way Haida material life, politics, potlatching, and sustained coupling of "traditional" myth and Anglican, Methodist, and Presbyterian mission churches – would be understood. It warrants historiographic consideration as the single most important publication on Haida culture and society since Swanton's key works appeared between 1905 and 1908[8].

What makes it such a singular work? It begins predictably enough with an overview of social structure, cosmology, mythology, and a short section on "contact with European culture," here referring to both exchange and extreme hostility between Haida and those European and Yankee vessels eager for the acquisition of otter pelts between 1980 and 1850. Yet HMA also teaches geography and demography. For example, it introduces one Xā'gi lineage that claimed presence at the birth of the Raven clan from the womb of Foam-Woman. In order to demonstrate the precise areal and social diffusion of their legitimate claim, MacDonald constructs a series of maps showing the specific migratory routes of the lineage, as it moved from south to north, and finally left for Alaska to become part of Kaigani Haida in the eighteenth-century (figure 4).

He then takes the reader on a compressed but accurate tour of Haida house types, and such decorations as interior and frontal crest poles. The bulk of HMA consists of village-by-village investigations within the confines of Haida Gwaii. From Sgang Gwaay at its extreme southern tip to Dodens in the far north, he takes the reader to a total of twenty-one communities. In each section MacDonald begins by presenting a map, usually accurate to about 1890-1900, showing the location and plan (this last when evidence allows) of every house, and every frontal, memorial, and mortuary pole known to have been in place. In this respect, MacDonald could only have shaped such precise plans after reading Charles Newcombe's papers at the BC provincial archives. Working initially alongside Swanton (and paid in part by Boas from Jesup Expedition funds), Newcombe made detailed maps of about fifteen communities, each annotated for location of poles, platform houses, the names of houses, and the like. HMA then augments

in Calgary, the Field Museum in Chicago, the American Museum of Natural History in New York, the Peabody Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology at Harvard. Principally because of acquisitions made by curator Stuart Culin in the first two decades of the twentieth century, we can add the Brooklyn Museum and Penn's own Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology to the list of institutions in which MacDonald did research. Standing in the lobby of the Penn museum's education wing are two poles that Newcombe obtained for Culin in Ghadaghaaxhiwaas (Masset).

8. See Swanton (1901, 1905a, 1905b, 1908).

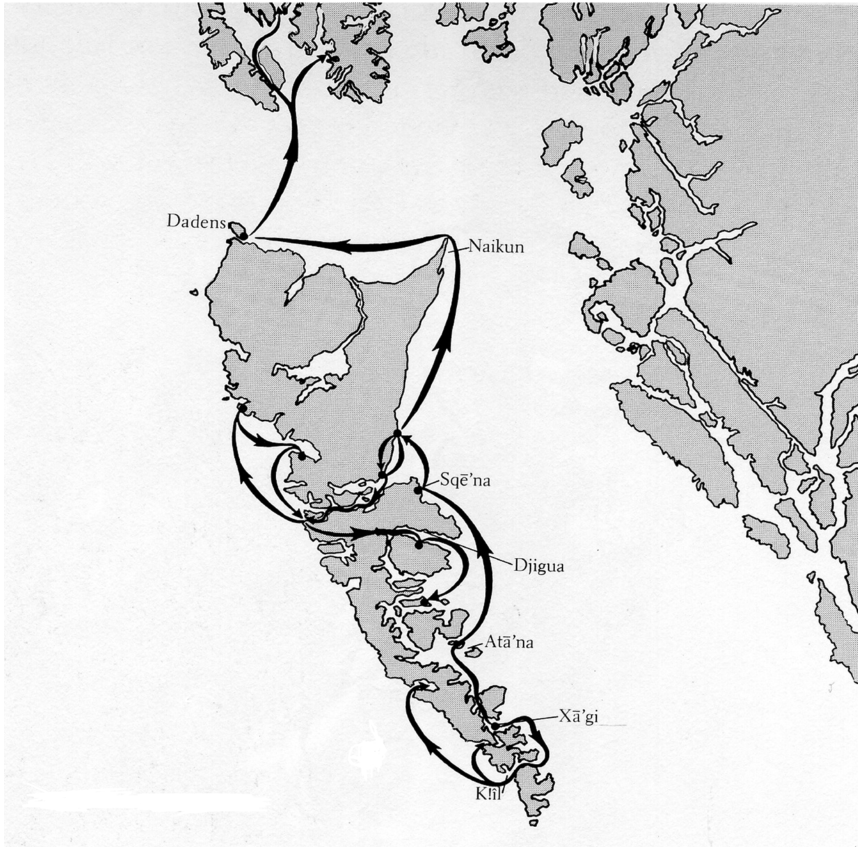

Figure 4. Migration of Xa'gi lineage north. From MacDonald (1983a: 11).

each of these village maps with period photographs laid out according to a house-by-house survey of each structure shown on a given plan. Take his map of Ghadaghaaxhiwaas (Masset), for instance (figure 5). As the layout 55 indicates, it was actually formed from two much earlier sections, Uttewas and Idjao. The complete village consisted of a single line of houses facing the beach, with the exception of the two structures still on the hilly terrain of Idjao. Many of the village's houses are surrounded by or immediately behind a number of memorial poles (see key). One very large structure, designated as house 13, shows a wooden approach platform leading to it from the beach. The dotted lines inside the plan of the house shows it had interior platforms and was thus an impressive place. This builidng was built in the enter of the town by Chief Wi:ah. In contrast, all other dwellings in Ghadaghaaxhiwaas were smaller. Crammed with information both verbal

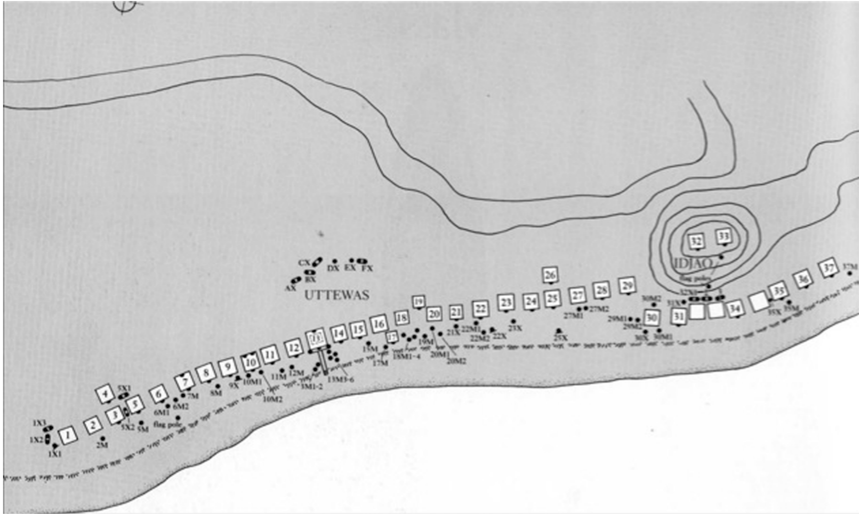

Figure 5. Local geography of Masset, Haida Gwaii, showing location of houses and poles. Key: M= memorial pole; X= mortuary pole; MH= mortuary house; S= shaman's mortuary; MA= crest design. From MacDonald (1983a: 135).

and visual that allows social comparison of housing, HMA is a detailed and finely nuanced study. It can be overpowering to read.

HMA relied on previous interpretations made, for example, by Marius Barbeau in his two-volume *Totem Poles* (1950), in which he argued with some subtlety that the carved designs found on many poles were a combination of both lineage crests (as argued by Swanton) and narrative mythic elements. The former required, as Swanton demonstrated, only a mastery of what crests were either specific to or shared among several lineages; this story grew increasingly difficult, however, as members of different higher or lower lineages intermarried (and shared crests). As a result, more than one lineage in a single clan argued the legitimate control over sea eggs, water grisly bears, or two-finned killer whales. Living up to Barbeau's second suggestion, that crest poles might have packed within their cedar edge material narratives – stories of the bear-mother, the kidnapped wife, the blind grizzly bear hunter, have argued that carved bent-wood chests also materialize myth, and perhaps Levi-Strauss's *Way of the Masks* was a one text that took Barbeau's hypothesis and pushed it to make a connection between masks and mythology (Levi-Strauss 1982).

Just two years before *Haida Monumental Art* appeared, Margaret Blackman's work on the ways that Northern and Kaigani Haidas and their

houses were altered by photographers was finally published. Blackman's disciplinary goal was to shape a visual ethnohistory; she employed the borrowed methods of photogrammetry in order to reconstruct the elevations and ground dimensions of several houses for which several images survived from multiple angles. As a final coda to his own project, MacDonald added an essay on "Photography and the Haida Villages of the Queen Charlotte Island" prepared by Richard J. Huyda. The essay summarizes the documentary images produced by George M. Dawson (working in 1878), Richard Maynard (1884), Edward Dosseter (1891), and Charles Newcombe (1896-1915), among others. Huyda's precise treatment makes possible an understanding of the longer and later works that followed in their wake, by such scholars as Victoria Wyatt (1989) and Dan Savard (2011)[9].

With poles, chests, and masks – both surviving and known only through photographs – shaping and refracting the generative power of local society and politics, lineages adopted crests (bears, frogs, killer whales) to substitute and stand for their qualities – ferocity in battle, underworld power, supernatural agency. Narrative ontology played a pivotal role. The Haida divided the cosmos into three zones: sky world, earth, and underworld; divisions in the animal world corresponded, and within each zone they followed a hierarchy. The Killer Whale ruled over the seals and otters, the bear ruled over earth animals, and the eagle was the chief of all sky creatures. All animals possessed souls like humans, so myths refer to killer-whale people, eagle people, and grizzly-bear people, among many others. Transformations across zones resulted in what MacDonald termed in 1983 "hybrid" animals – flying otters, bears with fins, possibly Sea Eggs. Through many story cycles, killer whales, in particular, own remarkable powers. When Swanton collected narratives, mostly from Haida men (though not exclusively so) in 1900, his storytellers could recall the names and attributes of more than fifty Killer Whales. The whales belonged to both Ravens (with black dorsal), and Eagles, although much more common among the former than the latter. Killer whales lived in houses set in neat rows like their human counterparts, and kept other lesser sea lions and seals in pens of the killer whale chief's house. Killer whales with the greatest power had multiple fins; one with five dorsals named Q'agawai´, is depicted on a memorial pole at Hlghagilda.

Houses have names, and the animals crossed in clusters on poles are similarly considered people. Many also considered the Cedar Tree People as giving life to the poles themselves. As one recent pole carver, Norman

9. Compare with McLennan and Duffek (2000).

Tait, observed in 1993: "You treat a totem pole with respect, just like a person, because in our culture that's what it is. A pole is just another person that is born into the family," Tait insists, "except he is the storyteller. So it should be treated with respect and honor." (Tait 1993: 9). The poles are thus narrative subjects. His words, like those of contemporary Haida carvers Bill Reid and Bill Holm, may be a key internal text that sheds new light on old processes; all three argue that poles are living things, objects made, remade, and never completely finished. While collectors like Newcombe and others may have pressed the poles to serve the aesthetic criteria of museum curators and accessions policies, in villages like Hlghagilda and Ghadaghaaxhiwaas, they were storytellers of lineage (on house frontal poles), loss and celebration (for mortuary poles) and remembrance (for memorial poles). "The figures on a pole," Tait continues, "are an outline of the story that goes with the pole. It's a serious traditional story that is family history and belongs to your uncle or grandfather, for instance, you have to check with them to get their permission" (Tait 1993: 9). Pole and story are inseparable; in this instance, tangibility and intangibility are terminally fused[10].

The narrative element of the crests (remember Barbeau) cannot be overlooked, even though Tait's argument that a pole is like a person may seem intended to impress outsiders eager to see personification – the humanness of things – as an essentialized process. Perhaps the poles are better considered as one part of a larger oral history, an aspect of material representation shared by hats, chilkat blankets, tattoos, and ceremonial masks. When a Northwest Coast chief recounts his own history, according to Janet Catherine Berlo and Ruth B. Phillips, "he is at the same time claiming a complex of interdependent possessions: crests, names, titles of chieftaincy, rights to dwell in a certain house, stories, songs, dances, and visual images, as well as rights to certain lands, fishing areas, and hunting grounds." From this perspective, many social positions are embedded in symbolic strategies. Poles are part of the summarizing work that art accomplishes to consolidate political authority. "On one level," Berlo and Phillips continue, "the crest explains how all these things were initially bestowed by non-human beings in the early time of the world, when humans

10. This adheres closely to Article 2 of the 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Practices and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Heritage; see Matsuura (2002: 4), which specifies "the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, *objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated therewith* – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage" (italics added).

and animals could more easily pass in and out of each other's domains" (Berlo and Philipps 1998: 195).

Consider the story, "The Origin of Carved House-Posts," recorded by Swanton in Masset dialect during the winter of 1900-1901. In this text, the easy interpenetration of human and animal motifs is apparent and gives crests their deep historical significance. The story was recited by Ghandl (called by Europeans Walter McGregor) who was born in Qaysun Llanagaay (Sealion town), a member of the Eagle clan. As Robert Bringhurst describes, he was "the blind poet of Sunshine and Sealion Town," who spoke his narrative repertoire to Swanton during November, 1900. Here is Ghandl's story, as transcribed in Masset dialect and translated into English by Swanton:

1 Many people lived in the town of Gî´tAn-q!a-lã´-na. The east wind
blew so strongly that some of the houses were blown
down. So they did not care to live there. They went away.
And they came to live at Delkatla.
5 Then there was no salt water there. It was all covered with grass.
Then they dig the town-chief's house-hole. They finished his first.
And all of the people lived in his house. But afterwards they built
houses on either side of him. All of these houses were completed. Then all
began to live in their own.
10 One autumn after that, they went to Rose Spit to get food in
two big canoes. Very many people were in the canoes.
They went for berries. Then one woman who was not
paddling looked into the water. It was very calm.
And it was bright sunshine. Then the
15 one who looked into the sea saw something carved at
the bottom. It was carved with figures of human beings.
And the lower part was carved into the representation of a killer-whale.
And the human being stood
upon the killer-whale.
20 They remained a longtime above it. They memorized it. And after they had
memorized it, they went away. And when they came over to L!ûsk?´ns, they
described it. Some of them said, "We will make the chief's house-posts like it."
And some of them were afraid. And after they were through picking berries,
they started off.
25 And they arrived at the town. Then they told those who had staid
at home about it. They were going to imitate it for the chief, when
they again built a house for him. And some of them were afraid,
and did not want to do it. Still they made the representations.
And they completed them. There were two.
30 Then they began to paint them. Then they raised them on
something. At this time the land moved. The Ocean-People were angry on

account of it. Then a flood came. And after they had fastened
their canoes together, they put the
posts on them.
35 They liked them too much to leave them behind. When the water
got far up the side of a small mountain, they put one of them up
on that. And then they put one into the sea. Then they wept
bitterly. Then they put weasel-skins into
their ears as (ear-rings).
40 They also put them into the ears of their wives and
children. Then they sang. They sang crying-songs. They sang
for themselves, because they thought this would not again
dry up. At that time they sang the following crying-song.
"The supernatural beings were the ones who made the flood come.
45 The supernatural beings were the ones who made the
flood come, made the flood come." At this time the sea began
to move. The canoes began to sink. And after the canoes had sunk,
they (the people) floated upon the ocean.
Now they became birds. For that purpose the
50 canoes sank under the sea. The Ocean-People were the ones
who caused it. But after that, the tide began to fall. And now
they are birds. Part of these birds are called Ear-Ring-Wearers.
The Ear-Ring Wearers were once people. And
the say that the house-
55 post is now upon Gao. People used to see it there
when they went up to eat medicine. Moss grows upon
it. Those who were going to be chiefs kicked off the moss from it.
When one saw it, he became rich. Near it stands a very big devil's-club.
And the chief's house-hole still forms a hole in the sea.
60 When the tide is low, it is still seen. And they also used to
pray to the house-post to become wealthy. Those who
prayed did become wealthy.

This story outlines the discovery of the first house-post underwater, an object that derived its authority from a combination of the human and killer-whale forms (ll. 16-18). It was first found by a woman, who noticed it because she stood momentarily, at least, outside the normative labor system of the north island (l. 13: she was "not paddling"). At even though she could see below the surface because the water was calm, the setting for the entire narrative is one of social unrest. A strong east wind has leveled some houses in their village, so they are in a state of flight even as they settle at Delkatla. They build their chief's house first, then turn to their own dwellings. When all houses are completed, they travel to a place to go berrying (l. 12). The moral difficulty addressed by Ghandl's words arises first when the people who had been on the berrying voyage memorized (ll. 19-21) the underwater icon so thoroughly that they decide to copy it –

twice, in fact – in order to fashion house posts for a brand new residence they fashioned for their chief. But some felt the new posts were dangerous: "*Some of them said, 'We will make the chief's house-posts like it.' And some of them were afraid*" (ll. 21-23). But those in favor of fashioning new house-posts pressed on with their work; even as fear for some continued, "*Still they made the representations. And they completed them. There were two. Then they began to paint them. Then they raised them on something*" (ll. 29-31).

In short order, their world begins to twist. The Ocean-People seek vengeance for the mimetic theft of the killer-whale man; the land moves, and then a flood. The people put their two new posts across some canoes strapped together. As the waters rise, they put one atop a small mountain. The other they deliver to the waves, hoping perhaps to mollify divine anger. But their hubris in copying the memorized designs has now been cracked; "*Then they wept bitterly*" (ll. 37-38). And now enters the "ear-ring" motif in Ghandl's myth. Perhaps as atonement, the men fashion weasel-skins into earrings, which they, their wives, and children don before chanting "crying-songs." The songs have impute a clear sense of responsibility for their troubles: "*The supernatural beings were the ones who made the flood come. The supernatural beings were the ones who made the flood come, made the flood come*" (ll. 43-46).

Hearing this lament, the Ocean-People offer still more afflictions to the people. Now the sea itself moved. Canoes sank, and people rose to the surface, to be reborn as birds, their *punishment through transformation* complete (ll. 49-62). Some of these birds – the ones that had been men – are called "ear-ring-wearers." These birds knew that the remaining house-posts was still on the mountain called Gao. Now covered with moss, it was frequented by people searching for medicine. Aspiring chiefs would kick away the moss and "grow rich". The house-hole of their chief's house that had been flooded, was at times now visible at low tide. Anyone who prayed at that house-hole "became wealthy" (ll. 50-62).

Ghandl's "The Origins of Carved House-Posts" thus describes the wages people paid for attempting to draw down divine power for themselves, and the dangers that result from any mortality dependent on memory and mimesis for its own political power. Even so, the piling up of crests as narrativized elements gave poles their remarkable power as things that could assume both objective and subjective roles. A pole at Hlghagilda's Thunder and Lightning House, for example, built by Daniel Eldjiwus (Edenshaw) of the Seaward Eagles in the 1860s, had a total of five crests sequenced for mnemonic purposes. As MacDonald explains it, the third in the sequence,

dogfish, "signifying a woman with a labret, in memory of a woman who was carried off by a dogfish and became one of them." The point at which the dorsal fin of the dogfish emerges from the pole is marked by a human face, and the tail of the dogfish is held in the beak of the raven (crest two). The dogfish crest, caught between the raven and a bear "whose tongue is joined with an upside-down human face," has a direct tale connected with it. The woman shown in crest three was the wife of a man called Do You Hear What I Say? In 1892, James Deans collected this story, implicated by the crest's being:

> One day a pure white sea otter swam close to their house. "Do you hear what I say?" was about to shoot it with his bow and arrow when his wife advised him to shoot it at the end of its tail so that the blood would not spoil its beautiful skin. She took the skin to the shore to wash it and was carried off by a killer whale who wanted to marry her.
>
> With the aid of a marten and a swallow, "Do you hear what I say?" searched for a year for his wife, finding her at last in the house of the killer whale from which he successfully rescued her.[11]

The materiality of narrative subjects such as poles that both speak and recount myth (recall The Lazy Son in Law and The Bear Mother) remains a vital part of Haida culture, as it establishes tissues of connection that bind the gathering, the processing, the production, and social distribution of affective things. The text-actions at Hlghagilda came in part from that village's gaining of population during the 1850s through the early 1880s, from more remote settlements in the southern islands. Three events stand out. In 1850 gold was discovered, and the first influx of whites followed quickly; in all likelihood, the Hudson's Bay Company learned of the strike and sent vessels in 1851, two of which foundered. The people of Hlghagilda captured the white crews, intending at first, perhaps, to enslave them, but soon chose ransoming as a wiser course. The Hudson Bay Company indeed paid for the men's release. The local Haida made out well, and marked their quick prosperity with a flurry of poles and potlatches; thereafter, however, Hlghagilda often suffered from being excluded from trade. The increasing size of the community, more than 400 souls in 1880, attracted attention from missionaries. A Methodist mission church set up in 1883. As they had elsewhere, the missionaries worked to eliminate face painting, the wearing of masks, and the ritual fighting with property that potlatch

11. Quoted in MacDonald (1983a: 48). On Ninstints and its conservation, see MacDonald (1983b: 52-58). For an overview of select heritage sites, see also MacDonald (1989).

in part defined[12]. The same was the case in Ghadaghaaxhiwaas in 1881, when Charles Harrison arrived to establish an Anglican mission church. He allowed his congregants to have a final photograph taken (by Edward Dossetter) in full regalia and bodily adornment[13].

As Hlghagilda rose to claim, modestly between 1850 and 1870, the attention of both profits and prophets, smaller villages lost population. The local history of Sghan Gwaay on Anthony Island stands for many such places; a busy village during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, by 1860 it was functionally deserted. Yet Sghan Gwaay stands out for its remarkable collection of poles, some still in place, many others moved to museums. In November 1981, after twenty-five years of conservation efforts and site interpretation, it was designated as a "World Heritage Site, of importance to the History of Mankind," by UNESCO, then meeting in, ironies of ironies due to the pole at Melbourne, in Australia.

In local dialect, *Kunghit Haida*, Sgang Gwaay is also rendered *Sga´ngwa.i Inaga´-I*, or Red Cod Island Town. It was only given its more common name when early European traders in the 1780s named it after the then chief of the village *Nan stins* (He Who is Two). By the time John Work completed his census of the Haida between 1836 and 1841, he referred to the village is *Quee-ah*, after an earlier chief *Koyah*, making the point that, like people and houses, villages also could change names over time. The seventeen recorded houses line a gravel coastal strip in a small cove well protected from the cold winds and harsh currents of the Pacific. Amid the conservation efforts that have spanned the years from 1957 to a more recent joint Haida/Parks Canada project to combine archaeology and conservation, some remarkable discoveries have been made. One thing that stands out in Sgang Gwaay is its mixture of different pole types; thus it is possible to see memorial poles mixed among house frontal poles and mortuary pole that feature a small box on top for the reception of the coffin of a chief or shaman. In many instances, historic photographs make this same mixture a common feature of then stable villages. Only at Sgaan Gwaay, however, do they survive *in situ*. An extraordinary survival, too, is the carved front panel of a mortuary box, collected by Newcombe in 1903. Originally decorated with twenty-nine pieces of abalone shell, the panel has been in the Royal British Columbia Museum since it purchased the

12. On potlatch, see Murdock (1936) and Stearns (1981: 174-74, 227, 230-31). For comparative discussion of the Kwakiutl, see Cole (1991).
13. The Dossetter photograph, now in the collections of the American Museum of Natural History (no. 42264) is reproduced in MacDonald (1983a: 41). See also Harrison (1925).

item from Newcombe. Still, something is unsettling when one reads about Sgang Gwaay, in part because the emphasis always falls on the sanctity of the place as a "pure" pre-white contact experience, on the "balance" the Haida struck between nature and artifice, between forest and water, and between raiding neighboring seaward enclaves (the Bella Coola stand out in Haida stories) and deflecting their own conflicts over rank and prestige into potlatch competitions; indeed, frontal poles frequently have elongated upper sections surrounded by incised circles or "rings"; each ring represents one potlatch that the house family hosted. Competition over wealth, then, is a direct cause of competitive designs and the remarkable fluorescence of aesthetic achievement in Haida art. Potlatch provides the organizing axis of performative energy in masks, blankets, baskets, wooden settees, and frontal poles.

These arguments, while influential, at times curiously conflate the historical work crests accomplished within an aestheticized ethics of preservation and collecting. For a counter-argument to prevailing, essentialist notions of Haida "identity", we can turn to a third village, Ghadaghaaxhiwaas; it was the counterpart of Hlghagilda, as it pulled population (and tribute) from other communities on the North Island. Anglican missionaries came here earlier than elsewhere, by 1876. But Ghadaghaaxhiwaas lost no ground in trading with outsiders. Due to the centralizing authority of Chief Wi:ah, a local leader, politics ran smoothly, as his communal house effectively served his lineage. In 1840 Wi:ah decided to build Nie:wens, or the "Monster House," close to the center of the settlement (remember House 13 in figure 5?) both to maintain his hold on the chieftainship and to consolidate his holdings with those of his father, Si:gei, who had been chief of all of Ghadaghaaxhiwaas. The father had shocked many in the village when he overturned normal inheritance practices – that is, of anticipating that the title of chief would go to his sister's eldest son. Instead, as Willie Matthews told Blackman in late 1970, Si:gei gave a feast to honor his son, and announced before those assembled, "I got a son and he became wealthy by his own right; I don't want him to be a common member of this village, so I *give him this village*."[14] The house was the largest dwelling ever built by the Haida, with a floor plan over fifty-five feet square. At first glance to Newcombe and other turn-of-the-century photographers, the Monster House was difficult to see amid the cluster of poles before it, many of which had noticeable potlatch rings. When the camera's eye trained along the planked entranceway to the structure,

14. As quoted in Blackman (1972: 212).

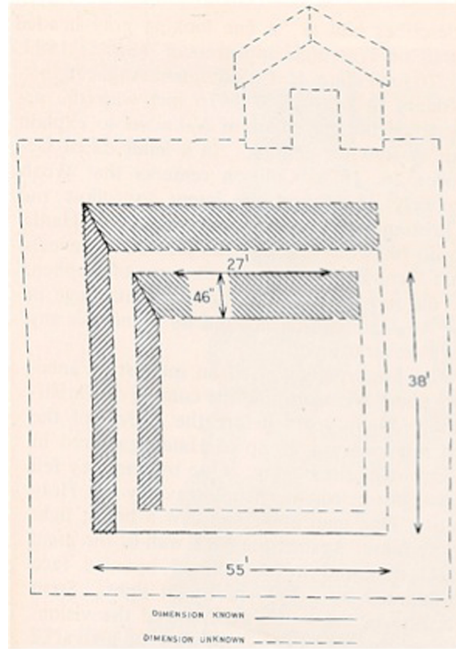

Figure 6. Plan of Nei:wens, Masset, ca. 1840. From: Blackman (1972: 213).

however, the monstrous size of the building came into view, as did the fashionable bowler hats, jackets and trousers on the men, and polite parlor dresses on the women captured in the image.

Inside, Nie:wens reveals still more novelty. The house was a large, six-beam plank structure with its interior levels moving in series from the smaller square space around the fire to the higher platform reserved for Wi:ah's family, to the enclosed room, at the rear of the uppermost platform, reserved for Chief Wi:ah himself (figure 6). But instead of heavy, carved and crested chief seats – uncomfortable despite their proud detail – Wi:ah and his associates parked themselves in factory chairs of a type then made in Gardner in Massachusetts, Grand Rapids in Michigan, and Toronto in Ontario. These were commodities from the outside, to be sure, that Wi:ah no doubt employed to build prestige and prerogative – much, perhaps, as scholars have argued the same kinds of *en suite* chairs helped empower middle-class identity in the years immediately after the American Civil War. The factory-made tables make the same point. Even as the house integrated more industrial commodities into its daily routine, what is striking is that Wi:ah embraced outside goods in each of his four domestic spaces: fireplace area, sides of the housepit, and both the first and second platforms[15].

In these and related instances, the rise of consumption seems to have been tied intricately to the timing of missionary suppression of potlatch, the pre-eminent local match-up of property, political interest, and popular desire. Of course, potlatch itself had by 1880 already become a tournament of value firmly tied to the market economy. Prefacing his own detailed observations of two large potlatch ceremonies in winter 1900-1901,

15. See Blackman (1972), the listing of all artifacts in Nie:wens is on page 224.

Swanton observed the circularity of the things-in-motion at the center of potlatch. "As a chief borrowed from the opposite clan through his wife, and paid back to the heads of his own clan who were husbands or wives of those he borrowed of, the potlatch seems to have been an endless chain of property," he observed, and "a large portion of the wealth in the place being massed into a man's hands for the occasion. At the same time he paid back much more than he had received, especially to those who were working for him" (Swanton 1905a: 155-156). The spatial arrangement of houses in villages had always given a central place to the chief's household; in similar fashion, gradations of rank were clearly marked by levels of both interior house poles and exterior frontal and memorial poles. Therefore, the social structure of relatively static ranks gained reinforcement through these various displays of preference and deference. Swanton described in detail situations that demanded potlatching: the building of a new house in Hlghagilda, the carving and erection of its new frontal pole, the return of a loved one who has gone away and returned, and the special dances of secret societies "inspired" by spirits moving through them. He then turned to the actual things given away, including in this instance Hudson Bay trade blankets of the sort that circulated across the North American continent and that were given away in numbers intended to calibrate precisely the social power of each participant in the construction of the structure. Goods were given according to the parts of a house each had contributed. Swanton translates from the Haida:

> Then they began to distribute property. He who got the house-pole received ten blankets; and the two who carved it, ten each. To the four who got the heavy gable-planks they gave six apiece. To each of those who got the wall-planks on either side of the house-front they gave six apiece. To those who got the wall-planks for the sides of the house they gave six apiece, and the same to those who got the planks for the rear of the house. To those who got the six stringers on the roof, they paid four apiece (each of these was obtained by one chief). To those who got the four corner posts they paid four blankets apiece. To those who got the posts on either side of the house-pole and the corresponding rear posts they paid four blankets apiece. To those, too, who got the two ridge-poles on either side of the smoke-hole they paid two apiece. To those who dug the post-holes they gave one blanket apiece. When that was done, they also paid eight blankets to those who got the roof-planks on either side. (Swanton 1905a: 169-170)

Thus far, the builders of the house receive a small number of blankets depending on the skills required for the task they contributed. The reward for the selection and carving of the house-pole were each valued at ten

blankets, while digging the holes for the structure's corner posts – a much less skilled job – warranted only one. Hudson Bay blankets were thus transformed into a kind of currency which weighed labor value in minute increments. Consider now what a chief might warrant:

> They gave blankets to the town chief first, striking the ground with a baton, and calling out his name. They gave him one hundred blankets. Afterwards they distributed to the town people, one after another, sometimes forty, sometimes thirty, sometimes twenty. To the man's sister who gave him food much more was returned than she gave. Sometimes she received sixty blankets. To the visitors also was given a large amount. But when a man did not receive as many as he had expected, he asked for more, and they quarreled a good deal with each other in the potlatching-house. Now the potlatch was over (literally,"upset"). (Swanton 1905a: 170)

What Swanton observed and was then told about potlatching makes clear the incremental system of property when given away. Not only did small numbers of blankets adequately reward work done on the house and house-pole. Even more at stake for hosts of such events was rooted in how well they could offer tribute to their town chief, members of their lineage, and the opposite lineage that derived power from exogamous marriage; the more they could give away to their social superiors, the greater their own chances of marrying into powerful lineages or replacing a house-chief upon his death.

The logic of potlatch property was for some pivotal to status maintenance. But what about commoners, those unskilled diggers of post-holes with no chances of social advancement? Families of low status had smaller houses toward the outer ends of village life, they had no chance to alter their standing by giving away property (what property?), and their houses craved a level of decoration denied them. "The middle class or common people worked for their house or lineage heads and owned little property of economic importance," Viola E. Garfield and Linn A. Forrest argued in 1948. "Since control of all natural resources was in the hands of the hereditary upper-class leaders," they maintained, "there was little opportunities for commoners to acquire the wealth necessary for expensive and elaborate undertakings" (Garfield and Forest 1948: 6).

For these individuals, perhaps the display of petty commodities at potlatch gatherings through the Northwest Coast brought new possibilities. Consider a Kwakwaka'wakh potlatch at Fort Rupert in 1898. The things to be "given away" included steamer trunks, footlockers, and scores of enamel

dishpans. These were imported ready-made house wares, cheaper but able to break the hegemonic monotony of trade blankets. Or a similar one at Alert Bay in 1914, given even amid heavy pressure to suppress potlatch (figure 7). Here are mass-produced factory chairs not unlike the ones already in Chief Wi:ah's Nie:wens, but also chest of drawers with looking glasses, small valises, and what looks to be a small sewing-machine table. Perhaps, too, a quilt is flapping in the breeze. People are eyeing these goods with care, staring intently at the piles of commodities. The imagined modalities of individual freedom these objects offered no doubt suggested one way out of the caste system that had always informed hierarchic Haida society, through the endless chain of property circulation at the center of potlatch; for common families, that chain might never let go. Commodities offered one modality of overcoming constraints. "The excitement of commodities is the excitement of possibilities," Lewis Hyde meditates, "of floating away from the particular to taste the range of available life. There are times when we want to be aliens and strangers, to feel how the shape of our lives is not the only shape, to drift before a catalog of possible lives" (Hyde 1983: 67-68). Trade goods and outside commodities thus cut in two different directions. On one hand, potlatch ceremonies retained – and when threatened by missionary suppression – sustained sufficient power to anchor such goods to larger ritual strategies. On the other hand, commodities might seem to undercut "collective," essentialist understandings of the Haida while

Figure 7. Kwakwaka'wakh potlatch, identified as Bob Harris's, Alert Bay, Vancouver Island BC, before 1914 (RBCM 1887).

actually nourishing people without claims on fungible property.

Just at this point, when the market of outside things is sinking connective tissues deep in local logic, Daxhiigang (Charles Edenshaw), a skilled carver of wood and argillite, nephew of master carver and chief Gwaayang Gwanhlin (Albert Edward Edenshaw), finds a new market for his world of miniature productions. Without doubt, Daxhiigang, a Ghadaghaaxhiwaas Eagle of the Stastas lineage, realized that visiting anthropologists, collectors, tourists – continuing traders all – would find his brand of commodity production desirable. In fact, one of his first efforts at miniature model-building came in 1900, when John Swanton requested that he complete a model of Wiah's Monster House that the ethnologist could take home. The exercise depended on Daxhiigang's precise memory of the building, which had finally fallen down in 1891. Now in the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Ottawa, his model bears striking similarity to the original, including correct and detailed treatment of the twin round openings for doors and the articulation of the frontal pole. Daxhiigang was an individual of many talents and possessed a thorough knowledge of Haida mythology, crests, houses, and kinship. He was a keen advocate of sharing his exacting knowledge with early ethnologists and photographers. He was also a careful student of the many carvings made by his uncle, some of which were purchased by Newcombe and have ended up in major museum collections. Daxhiigang, in particular, was a highly skilled argillite and black slate carver, and his miniature totem poles, small animal statues, and carved boxes have been collected widely[16]. The same processes affected many other artifacts, now already being defined as a precious kind of tourist art – a miniature souvenir – segregated from the middle-class factory furniture and enamel dishpans, the bowler hats and britches that shifted Haida material life between 1880 and 1915. The commodity chains and ties of materiality lash both societies – "authentic" and "touristic" – differentially, together. And every link in the chains of materiality is forged by the situational tensions between commodity desire and gifted coercion, between projected life stories and the wonderful, almost intimate sense of closure that things can provide.

In this radically impure world, strangely, the Haida played with "objects" in order to preserve a way of life that protected their relative autonomy in seeking objectification; this kind of material mixture, in other words, surrounded both Swanton and his Haida mythtellers even as they spoke the

16. On the life of Daxhiigang and his relatives, I have relied on the masterful and detailed discussion in Wright (2001: 163-312).

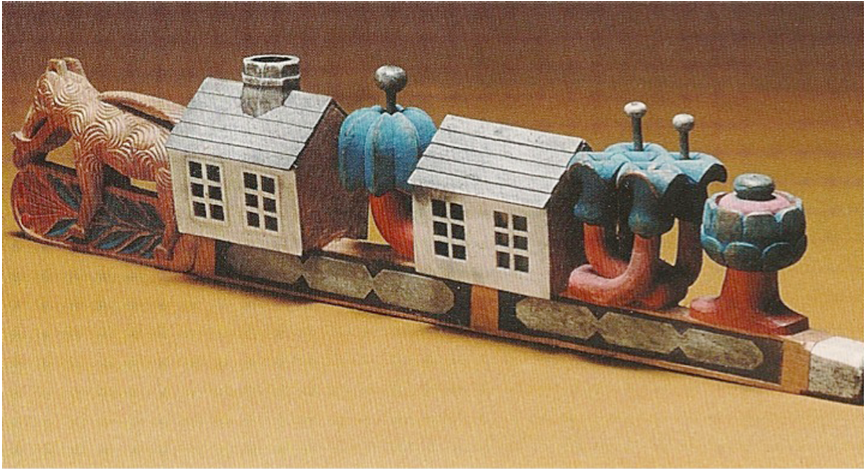

Figure 8. Pipe, wood, Haida Gwaii, before 1849. Blue, red, and white oil-based paint. Overall length: 18' 14" (Peabody Museum of Salem E3492).

purity of oral tradition. And they harkened to mythical purity even as local families actually embraced Protestant missions. A few examples will suffice in making the more general point. Early Haida pipes are often made of a black slate called argillite, Daxhiigang's favorite medium, and often portray animals sitting astride the pipe stem. But pipe-making underwent a major experimental phase beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, as Europeans with both a pipe-collecting and smoking bent arrived with currency in hand. One pipe carved in argillite integrated motifs from ship's rigging, while another played with the popularity of small shingled houses and so-called "Boston houses" with paned windows and central chimneys among the Haida (figure 8); arrayed along its stem are tight orbits of geometric bushes or trees that seem detached from nature, representing no doubt a perfection of organic growth in symmetry. This particular pipe, while of Haida manufacture, was collected in 1842 by one Isaac Chapman, master of a brig from Salem, Massachusetts, at the mouth of the Columbia River. It must have first arrived there as a trade good. Chapman then transferred it to ship captain William Cushing of Newburyport, who gave it to the Newburyport Marine Society (est. 1772) when he returned to port. A third pipe is stranger still, placing the stem under the outstretched limbs of a "flying" human figure, perhaps a dark satire of the evangelical critique of tobacco and associated ceremonials. The sale of miniature souvenirs to travelers like Russian sea captains and traveling Europeans merchants starting in the 1840s likewise depended upon black slate and argillite, and

the widespread acceptance of the craft in the Haida economy[17].

What seems clear is that both Europeans and Haida villagers were creating commodities that crossed one another in a sustained, two-way traffic. After all, as Erna Gunther argued in 1972 in a chapter heading in her study of interactions between Indians and traders on the northwest coast in the late eighteenth century, "The Haida, the Shrewdest of Traders, Who Set the Style for Demand in Trade Goods." (Gunther 1972: 119, and discussion following in 119-138)[18], it is time that we continue to theorize cross-cultural commoditization by productively blending the differential analytics of commodity chains and materiality studies, with works on commodity flow and contingency in interpretation.[19] When we think about "ethnographic things," we might consider the various admixtures of exchange, aesthetics of the object qua object, and the alternate subjectivities that competing markets invariably define: the imperfect distribution of mass production, the nostalgia that may accompany assertions of revitalized rank and potlatch politics, and the clever disjunctures of tourist art.

Figure 9. Anetlas k'aayhit'á na.as (Star House) pole, Ghadaghaaxhiwaas, Haida Gwaii, before 1882 as installed at Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford UK, 1901.

We end up at a point conceptually close to where we began, this time at a location at the center rather than the southern periphery of the British Commonwealth. In 1911, as you may recall, the Hlghagilda pole was delivered to the Museum of Victoria and placed in that mélange of curious specimens in McCoy Hall. A decade earlier, in 1901, the

17. For information on the "Boston-houses" pipe, see Malloy (2000: 87-88, 142-43). On argillite carving, see Macnair and Hoover (1984).
18. My argument concerning the impure aspect of intercultural commodity life is indebted to Wyatt (1984: 40-65).
19. See Hopkins and Wallerstein (1986); this essay has been reprinted under the title, "Commodity Chains: Construct and Research," with many essays that followed in its wake, in Gereffi and Korzeniewicz (1994); see also Gibbon (2001), Appadurai (1986), Hoskins (1998), Thomas (1991), Keane (1997). On commoditization and its various definitions, see Hart (1974).

Pitt Rivers Museum at Oxford also received delivery of a pole. An impressive 11.36 meters in height, it was a frontal pole that stood before the Ghadaghaaxhiwaas dwelling of Chief Anetlas (b. ca. 1816-d. 1893), called Star House, built in 1882. The pole was donated by Oxford's own E.B. Tylor, who authored an essay on it in *Man*, a journal he then edited (Tylor 1902). Charles Newcombe, Rev. James Kean, and the Hudson's Bay Company each assisted in obtaining it for the museum. The purchase price was secured at $36 CD, and sent by rail and steamship, the preparations for which included cutting the pole into two sections and removing the raven's protruding beak. When finally reassembled and installed, the pole dominates the balconied gallery that houses it (figure 9).

When I see it now, its towering and self-assured aesthetics vibrating through the stolid air of English high academia, I am sure that it also carries a more complicated history packed within its cedar skin — a history of lineage, of houses named and named again, of grizzly bear people speaking to killer whale people, and of the boundaries between potlatches and commodities, between subjects and objects, being transgressed, almost magically.

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