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TLINGIT AND KWAKIUTL TRIBAL ART

BY

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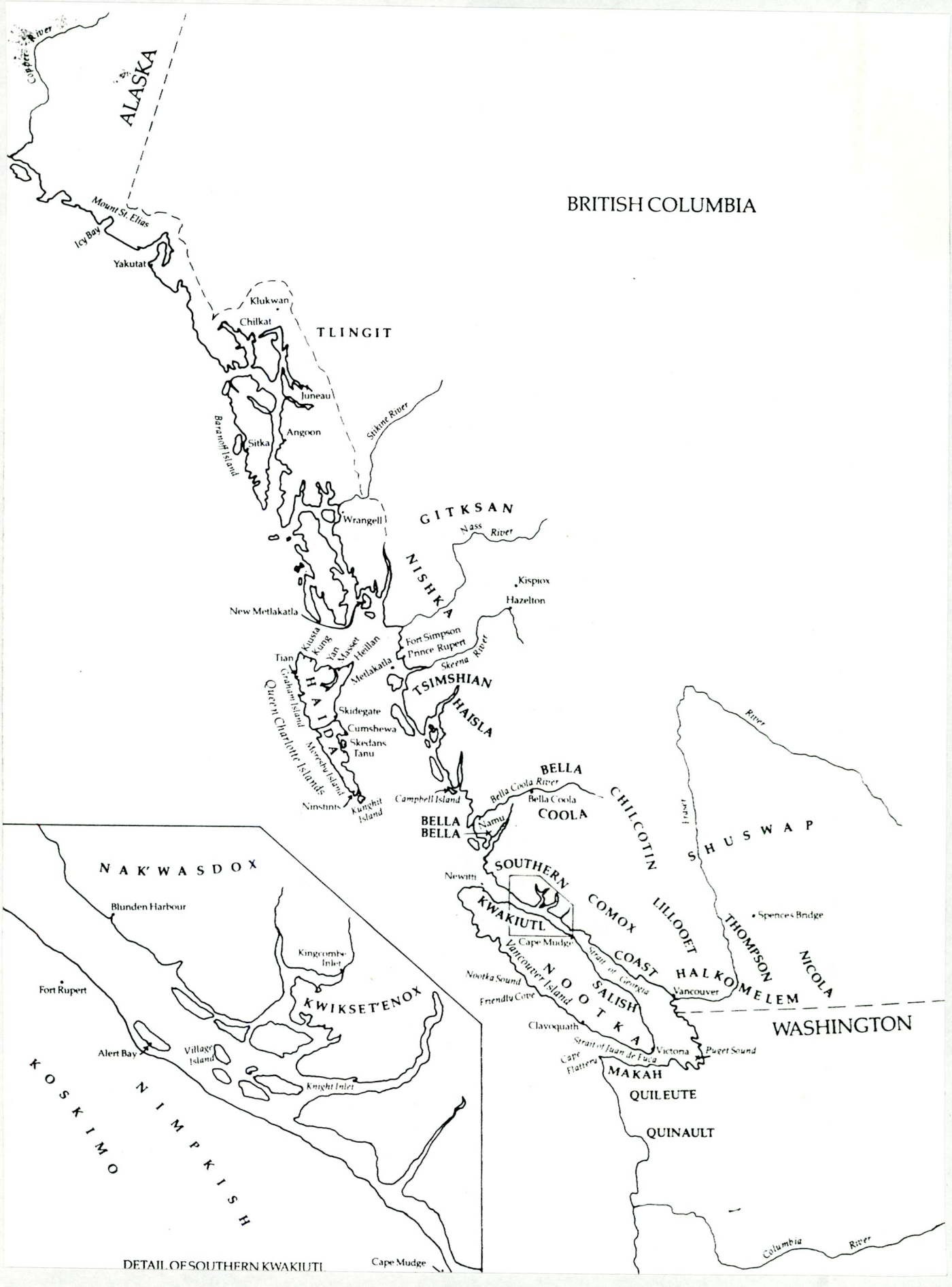


Plate 1: Map of Pacific Northwest Coast

INTRODUCTION

The last forty years has witnessed a shift in the way Western civilisation perceives indigenous 'primitive' art. Rather than viewing tribal art for western reasons, as Picasso did with African art (fascinated by its formal aesthetic qualities), we now can appreciate the cultural and religious roots from which they come. This has been mainly brought about by the field of cultural antropology. The work of antropologist Franz Boas with the American Indian tribes of the Pacific Northwest Coast (who are the subject matter of this thesis), is notable in this regard. It is also due to the gradual realisation that because a culture is not western, it is not necessarily primitive.

In North America, the most artistically prolific tribes have been on the Pacific Northwest Coast, from South Alaska down 1300 miles to the south of Washington State.

Initially with early traders, they prospered but the destruction of their culture came about with European settlers who followed soon after.

The Northwest Coast can be roughly divided into three main artistic groups: the Northern group consisting of the Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian tribes; the Central of Kwakiutl and Bella Coola tribes and the southern of Coast Salish,

Nootka and Lower Chinook. The Northern and Central groups, in particular the Tlingit and Kwakiutl will be the main topic of this thesis.

The thesis is broken up into five chapters. Chapter one details the Tlingit and Kwakiutl culture, particularly the importance attached to family lineage and the ceremony of the potlatch.

Chapter two explains the religious ritual of shamanism. The shaman acts as a gateway between the physical and spirit worlds. These spirit worlds are usually manifested in a trance. Through this meditation he is empowered to cure illnesses, guide souls and petition for favours.

Chapter three looks at the Tlingit and Kwakiutl human face masks. Masks are generally used for ceremony and ritual. A mask from each tribe is taken and they are compared and contrasted in detail, both in terms of aesthetics and general religious and cultural significance.

Chapter four looks at a Tlingit raven mask and a Kwakiutl Crooked Beak mask. These are analysed in a similar fashion to those of chapter three. Kwakiutl masks in particular tend to be zoomorphic rather than antropomorphic.

Chapter five traces the arrival of European traders rather

than settlers and the subsequent growth of both commerce and art (this period saw the most prolific phase of Northwest Coast art in history). After maritime fur trading changed to land-based trading with the decimation of the sea-otter, white settlers arrived and this marks the decline of both Tlingit and Kwakiutl culture and art (the potlatch was outlawed in 1884, for example).

It was during my stay in Alaska last summer that I became interested in Northwest Coast art. I was attracted to the beauty and simplicity of the craftsmanship in the work I saw. Their use of bright and sometimes garish colour, applied confidently in bold graphic patterns and their highly abstracted style of carving fascinated me. Above all, however, it lead me to ask the question - why? Why did the Northwest Coast Indians carve in the style they did? Why were certain colours prevalent in different tribes and what, if any, significance did they have? What did these carved figures represent and how were they used? These and many other questions I hope to answer in the following discussion.

This influence has also been developed in my studio work. It was not until I had answered my questions regarding these masks that I could actually understand their disciplined creativity in carving and in so doing find my own style. I have found that one has invariably helped the other. The

information I have gathered on these Indians has enabled me to achieve a positive direction in my metal work (which is based on zoomorphic images). Likewise, the design and construction of my head pieces has given me a further insight into the techniques which they employed to produce their style of art.

CHAPTER 1

The Tlingit and Kwakiutl tribes as with most Northern tribes had access to an abundant food source whilst also living in a fairly temperate climate (it is mostly similar to a Norwegian climate). Unlike other North American Indians who were mostly forced into a nomadic lifestyle, they were able to settle and in so doing, did not have the worry of producing only portable work.

Through elaborate fishing techniques in the summer, they caught large quantities of sea mammals and fish. Preserving the abundance of fish caught by drying and smoking, and extracting oil, especially from the eulachon fish, they had a stable diet coupled with the berries and roots they picked, that would last them through the winter months. With no necessity to hunt during these months, they were allowed the freedom to partake in ceremonial life and its material manifestations in carving, weaving and painting magnificent art works.

Through the assurance of a basic livelihood, a thriving hierarchical social order existed as opposed to the egalitarian system employed by their ancestors around and before 3500 B.C. It was because of this rigidly enforced system of social prestige that such an abundance of work was produced.

Plate 2: Potlatch Ceremony

Unlike their neighbours in the Plains, whose sense of being came from the present, the Northwest Coast Indians believed in the assertion of historic lineage through heraldic animals represented in their sculptures and crafts. They proudly held the belief that their primal ancestors were given special privileges by mythological beings from land, sea and air, and believed that these privileges and myths, which were highly valued, were handed down through descendants.

These special privileges were transferred into zoomorphic and antropomorphic images and crests. Animal crests were more important because of the power the Northwest Coast Indians believed the animal world held. According to their beliefs, there were three levels to the entire cosmos' animals of air, land and water. Their ancestors were occasionally able to enter the different realms of these supernatural beings and had gifts and privileges bestowed upon them, the songs and privileges therewith validating their claims.

The potlatch is a ceremony of feasting and gift giving to validate a claim for higher status and has been used in Tlingit culture since before 500 A.D. (13: p.18). In this ceremony, hundreds of items may be given by the host as payments to his guests who in return accept his claim to a higher status (PL. 2). The potlatch ensured that these

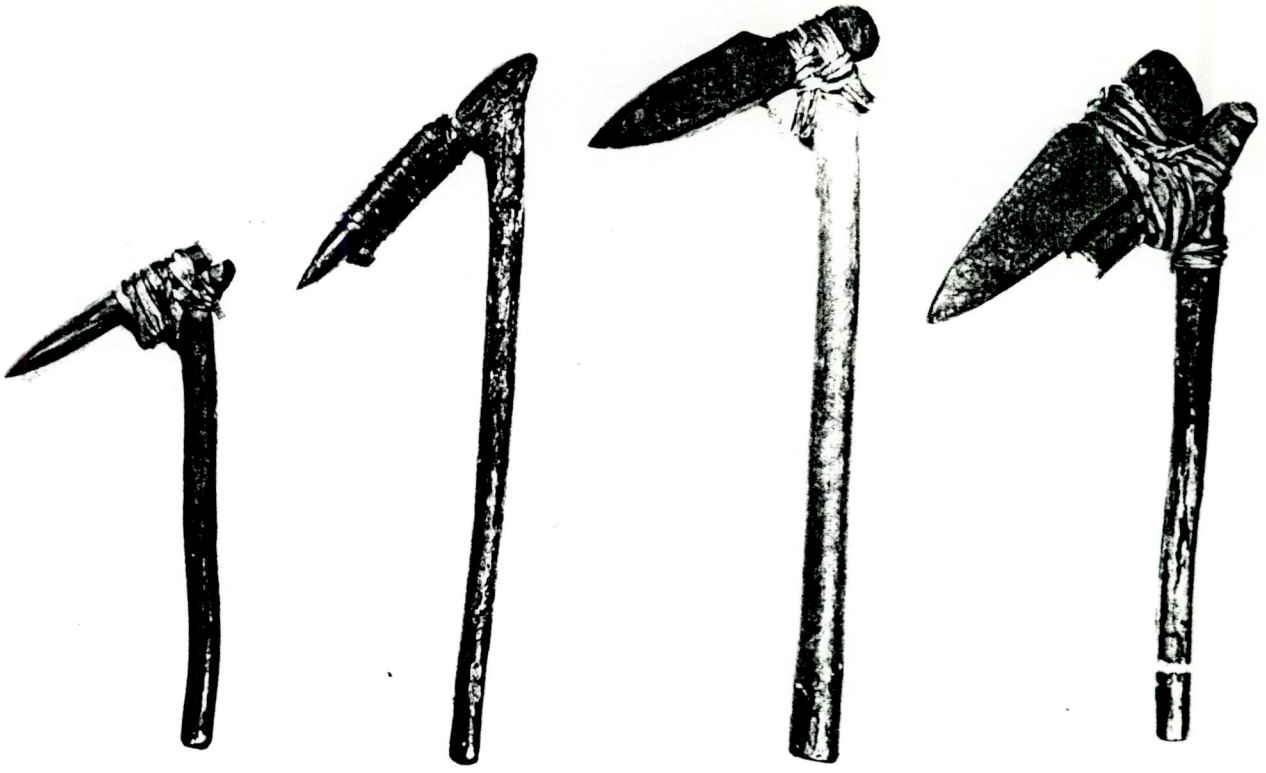
inherited privileges could be used for:

> '.. all the names, ranks, privileges and honours of the lineage were meaningless without this formal ritual of hospitality and the acceptance of gifts by the guests' (9:P.33)

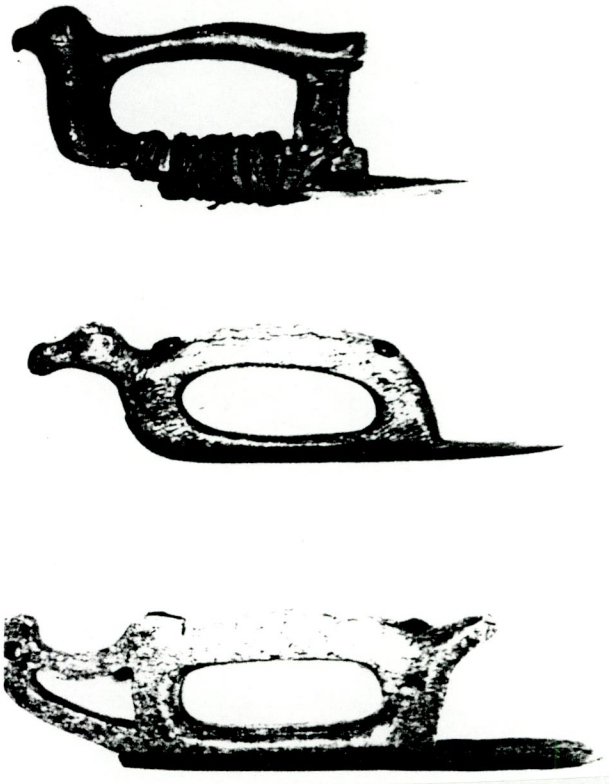
The erection of Totem Poles - an even louder proclamation of both wealth and privilege - also necessitated the holding of a potlatch, each time the host becoming more prestigious than before if all is successful. The blankets, masks and various crafts that the witnesses were paid with, coupled with the highly decorative feast dishes and bowls used by the host to show his wealth, ensured a thriving craft industry long before the Europeans ever arrived.

It was quite common in villages to find specialisation in different tasks. Some men might be skilled in building houses, others in making dug out canoes. For those fortunate and skilled enough to specialise in carving came a certain amount of prestige from the community. They were well paid to make various crests and masks for ceremonial occasions and in turn were able to pay others to fish, hunt and perform other routine tasks for them.

With an abundant variety of wood to choose from, the carver firstly had to know which varieties would best suit the



Pl. 3



Pl. 4

Plate 3: Stone Elbow Adze
Plate 4: D-Adze

piece being made. The most common wood used was Red Cedar, for its colour, height (if a Totem Pole was the commission) and ease in carving. Yellow Cedar was also quite common for masks, kerf boxes and frontlets.

The tools used were made by the carver also and ensured a personal touch to his work. Originally made from stone and shell, highly polished, they later included steel when it became available. The basic equipment consisted of a hammer, chisel, curved knife, elbow adze and D-adze (PL. 3 & PL. 4).

At an early age, a boy who showed artistic promise could be apprenticed to a master carver. After many years under this strict guidance, he might also become a master carver himself, if he was skilled enough. An intimate knowledge of all tools and materials used was a necessity. He also had to be familiar with the many different forms used on various objects such as feast bowls and masks and carve them in such a way that the meaning behind them could be easily recognised and accepted.

The tasks in this region were divided according to sex. As the men hunted, carved and made utensils and equipment, the women kept house, gathered foodstuffs and wove blankets, baskets and clothing.

Whilst the Northern Tlingit tribes passed down family heritage through the maternal line, the Central Kwakiutl tribes passed their privileges on through the paternal line except in the case of marriage settlements.

CHAPTER 2

As Mircea Eliade notes:

> 'The shaman specialises in a trance during which his soul is believed to leave his body and ascend to the sky or descend to the underworld' (4: P1)

The shaman is a traveller who has access to other realms of consciousness.

> 'Shamanism [which originated in Northern Siberia] has become one of the most ancient, most widespread and most persistent religious system known to man'. (16: P7)

Occasionally, the shaman inherits spirits (yek) from his ancestors. The shaman may possess yek of both human and animal forms. This is possible because they believe that the yek is the ghost of a dead person who can assume either a zoomorphic or an antrophomorphic shape, or occasionally both. This means that if people died in battle they may become birds; a normal death, land animals; and by drowning, sea animals. Usually the shaman meets with spirits during his own initiatory vision quest. The initiation ceremony requires eight days travelling alone in the forest, during which eight supernatural zoomorphic forms will approach him

Plate 5: Tlingit Shaman curing patient

and fall dead at his feet. He acquires spiritual potency, knowledge of the sacred world and profound curative powers by excising their tongues. Upon his return to the village he portrays his eight yek in both human and animal form. He creates numerous artworks in his initiation ceremony which characterise his spirits, or alternatively pays a master carver to do so.

The mythological concept of creatures that alternate between animal and human form is most clearly expressed through the shamanic system. As eight is the Tlingit number representing totality, completion and wholeness, every shaman has his own personal set of eight masks. Donning the face mask, the shaman is then transformed into its representational spirit-helper. The mask is suited to the seriousness of the task and denotes the payment the shaman expects for his services (PL.5). Even though the shaman is separated from the lay person by his ability to live in both the profane realm and the sacred world of the spirits, it is only when he wears his masks that he is far enough removed from the 'waking world' to obtain enough spiritual power to complete his tasks. Both worlds are not, however, necessarily geographically separate as the western concept of Heaven and Earth is, but it is dangerous for a human to enter the sacred realm. (14: P57)

The use of hallucinogenic and phantastic narcotics is a

frequent but not essential aspect of shamanism. It aids rather than induces the shaman's journey into various mystic realms. Forty species of narcotic plants were available in the Americas, as opposed to only six in western civilisation (4:p10).

The Tlingit shaman is part of the community, goes under the same kinship affiliation role and place of residence as any lay people might have. Two differences are that the shaman stores all his objects outside his lineage house until they are needed; and unlike the lay person whose cremated ashes are placed in a repository behind their lineage house, upon his death he is entombed in a grave house with all his masks, charms and other sacred items. The relatives of the shaman do this to protect the village from the potentially lethal powers of his sacred objects.

The Kwakiutl name for the winter dance series, the Ts'etsaeqa, means "shaman's series". (16: p137)

During the Ts'etsaeqa season, the most powerful club was the shaman's society and its most influential members were the Hamatsa (cannibal dancers).

Plate 6: Tlingit Shaman's wooden head-dress mask
Human Hair, Wolf Fur, Abalone and Leather

Plate 7: Tlingit Shaman's mask
Vertebra of Whale, Human Hair, Copper and Operculum

CHAPTER 3

Human Masks: Tlingit: - Plate 6

While there is some evidence of portraiture, Tlingit masks are not usually created for this purpose. The masks are predominantly designed for use in shamanistic ceremonies. Plate 6 is 151.6cm in height with hair; without hair it is approximately 23 cm in height. The mask is attached to the head by a pair of leather thongs which tie at the back. The refined carving style is characteristic of Tlingit carving.

This mask represents the spirit of a dead slave, the sunken cheeks and outlined features denote skeletal form. The facial expression of this spirit-helper seems ambivalent. The curvature of the eyebrows which are far apart suggest a feeling of either impartiality or benevolence, as opposed to Plate 7 in which the features convey a manic dynamism. The upturned, defined eyes which are heavily lidded and slightly off centre, suggest disinterest and lethargy. In contrast to this, the enlarged lips surrounding a lower set of obtrusively carved teeth, convey an expression of either pain or danger.

A sparse, clipped hair moustache and goatee, surrounds the mouth, leading the eye to a refined nose with flared red nostrils. From here, attention is drawn to the irises

Plate 8: Tlingit Shaman's wooden head-dress mask
Human Hair, Eagle Tail Feathers and Fur

Plate 9: Kwakiutl Tsonoqua Mask
Wood and Bearhide

inlaid with abalone, which are highlighted by dark copper-blue recesses on either side.

The ears are red and realistically detailed. However, the size in relation to the mask is almost double the average size. In Plate 8, small mice whisper secrets of spirits and witches to the shaman it adorns, perhaps in Plate 6 the enlarged ears represent the amplification of sounds from the spirit world.

The animal fur which is attached to this ear falls down and surrounds the neck, blending with the shaman's costume, thus giving him a more credible appearance. Much of the copper blue paintwork on the mask has been worn away but is still discernible. It is possible that it represents a common crest used by a slave or that it is a crest of the shaman.

A wild array of human hair approximately 20 cm long surrounds the top of the head. To the left of the mask above the ear a wolf's tail is visible, splaying out to one side; from it falls approximately 130 cms of unkempt plaits representative of the shaman's spiritual powers.

Kwakiutl: Plate 9

The Kwakiutl seems to have a bias towards masks which explore animal representation. This contrast with the

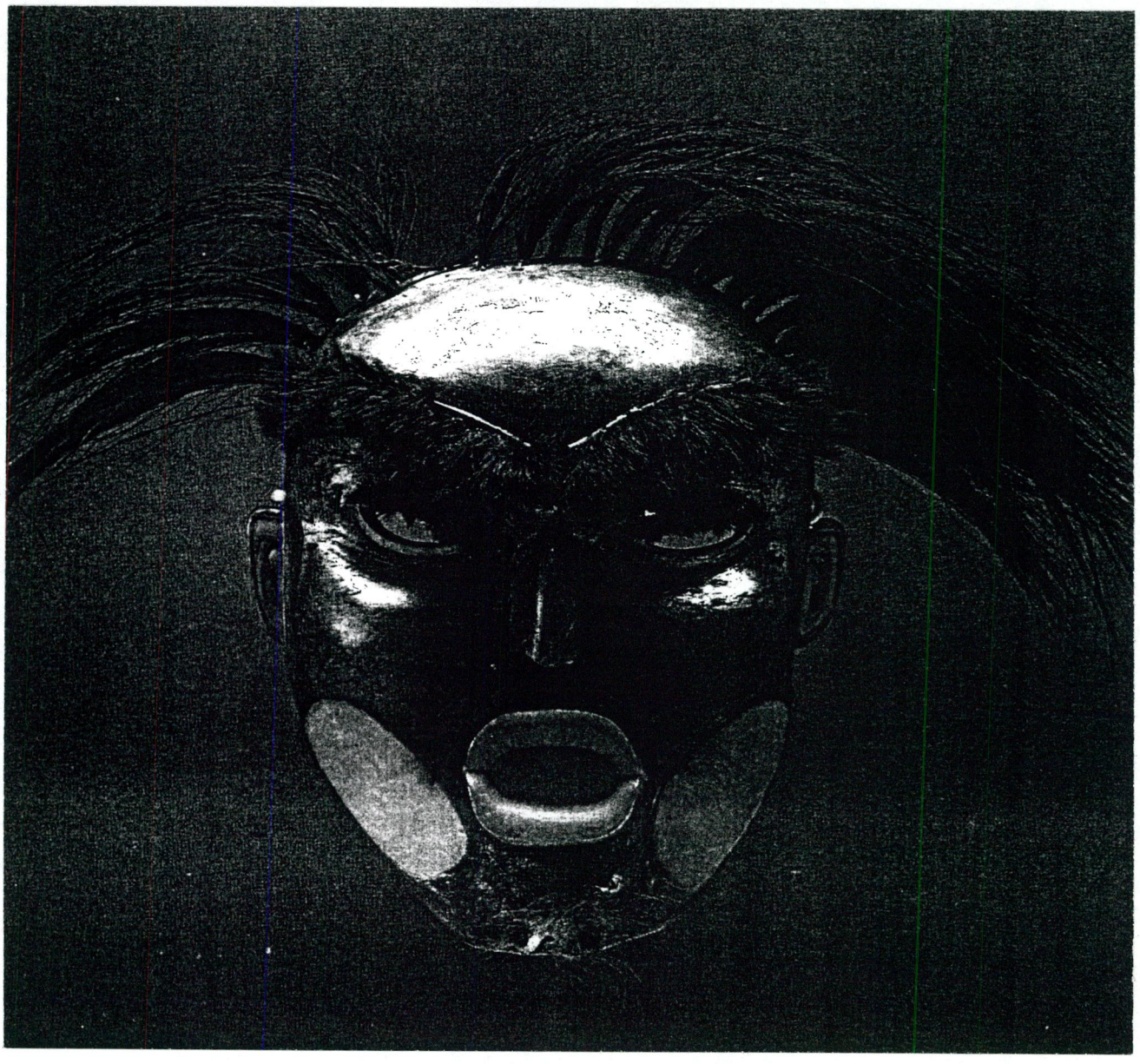


Plate 10: Kwakiutl Tsonoqua Mask (male version)
Wood, Human Hair and Bearhide

figurative characterisation is evident in the Tsonoqua masks. Plate 9 is 13 inches in height. The size is representative of the giant status of this female character. Attachment is not visible but it would tie to the back of the head using leather bands in holes directly above the ears.

Tsonoqua is a complex character in the Kwakiutl dancing societies. A large, fearsome figure who lives in faraway forests, she has an obsessive hunger for children who usually evade her clutches for she is too clumsy and lethargic. The children try to steal magic from her house which brings wealth and good fortune to their families. As a dancer during the Ts'etsaeqa season, she is an awkward, clumsy person who falls over people before being helped to her place where she proceeds to fall asleep. As the 'wealth giver' she is transformed into a man (p1.10) who gives coppers (shields) and other gifts for the chief to distribute.

The eyebrows and crown made from bearhide, denote a frenzied appearance which is characteristic of Tsonoqua's personality. The deeply-set eyes, drilled for the wearer to see, are representative of her furtiveness and lethargy, being small and half closed. The carving of the nose and cheekbones is highly stylized. Sharply defined and angular, these protruding features coupled with the deep recesses

around the eyes down past the nose, draw all attention to a prominent cupped mouth. The lips which are framed in the shape of the cry 'Hu, Hu' are suggestive of a sucking motion, used as she tries to catch children.

The figure has colour applied according to conventions. She has a shiny grey-black graphite face and a striking blood thirsty vermillion mouth, which, before store paint, would have been made from ground cinnibar and oils. The small ears, flared nostrils and recessed eyelids, also vermillion, reiterate her lust for blood.

Compare and Contrast

The Tsonoqua mask is composed of very strong visual elements. Its strength lies in its simplicity. Firstly the colour combination, black contrasting with vivid red, gives the mask a very graphic feel and enhances its striking appearance. The mask seems to be designed for initial visual impact rather than close scrutiny. This adheres to the mask's role within the ceremony. The Tsonoqua mask relies on the strength of its facial characterisation, angular facial plains and simplified structure rather than realistic detail.

The Tlingit mask is naturalistic, with facial detail rendered accurately. The quality of portraiture is conveyed

through the detail of the ears, eyes, mouth, nose and facial plains. Features seem emphasised rather than abstracted. This is typical of Tlingit masks. When colouring the mask, the Tlingit leave much more natural wood exposed in comparison to the Tsonoqua mask, the surface of which is totally painted. The red colour of the nasal, oral, eye and ear orifices is common to both masks.

The strong simplicity of the severe angular face gives a theatrical feel to the Tsonoqua mask. The mask calls up instant emotions rather than gradually wielding power over spectators. The eyes of the Tsonoqua mask are recessed, hidden deeply in the head. The mask is a caricature of a mythological being and chooses to emphasise the characteristic cry of the creature through strong abstraction of the mouth, rather than through developing a living quality through the eyes.

The large living eyes of the Tlingit mask contrasts strongly with the Tsonoqua mask. The abalone insets in the eyes catch the light and gleam, saturating the creation with a sense of life. Tlingit masks usually represent the souls of humans, so the large light-filled eyes, detailed face, open gaping mouth imbue the mask with spirit. The Tlingit mask radiates a sense of power, as is natural, considering its shamanic purpose in ceremony and healing. The mask conveys an 'other-worldly' sense (the eyes) while the humanoid

detail earths the mask in a reality, with which the spectator would have no problem identifying.

The realism of the effect is extended by the facial surround which merges shaman and mask visually. The Tlingit mask uses real hair thus propagating reality and power, whereas the Kwakiutl Tsonoqua mask uses bear hide for the hair and eyebrows.

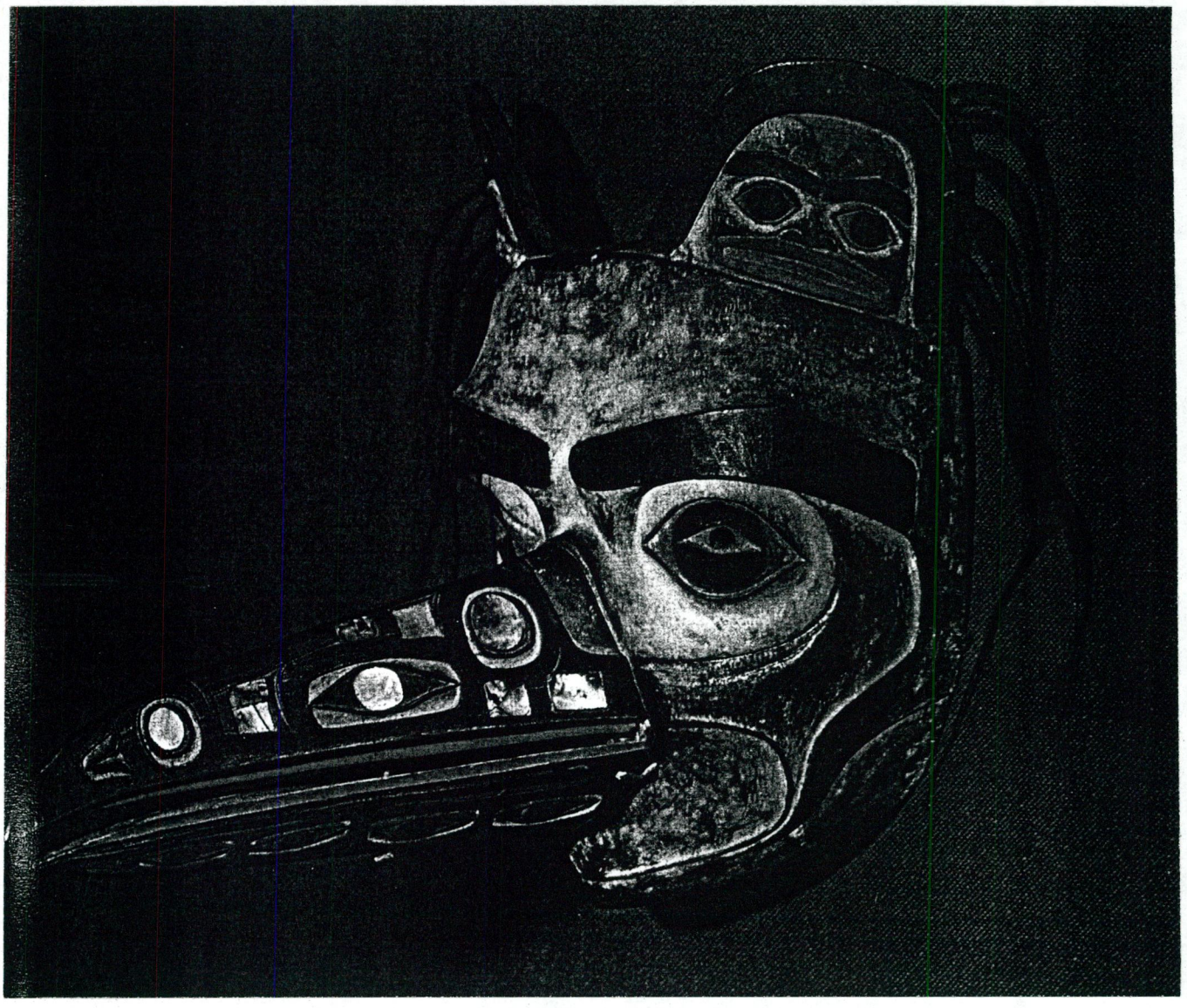


Plate 11: Tlingit Raven Mask
Wood, Human Hair and Abalone

CHAPTER 4

Animal Masks - Tlingit: Plate 11

Zoomorphic images are very important in Tlingit society. They represent a time when man was closer to the animals in the different plains of consciousness.

This Tlingit mask (PL.11) is a highly stylized, zoomorphic representation of a raven which also possesses bear qualities. It is likely that this piece which shows exquisite craftsmanship is a crest mask which characterises the mythological Raven. The Tlingit people had much respect for 'Raven' because he was:

> 'a potent spirit that could turn those who looked at him into stone' (13: p18)

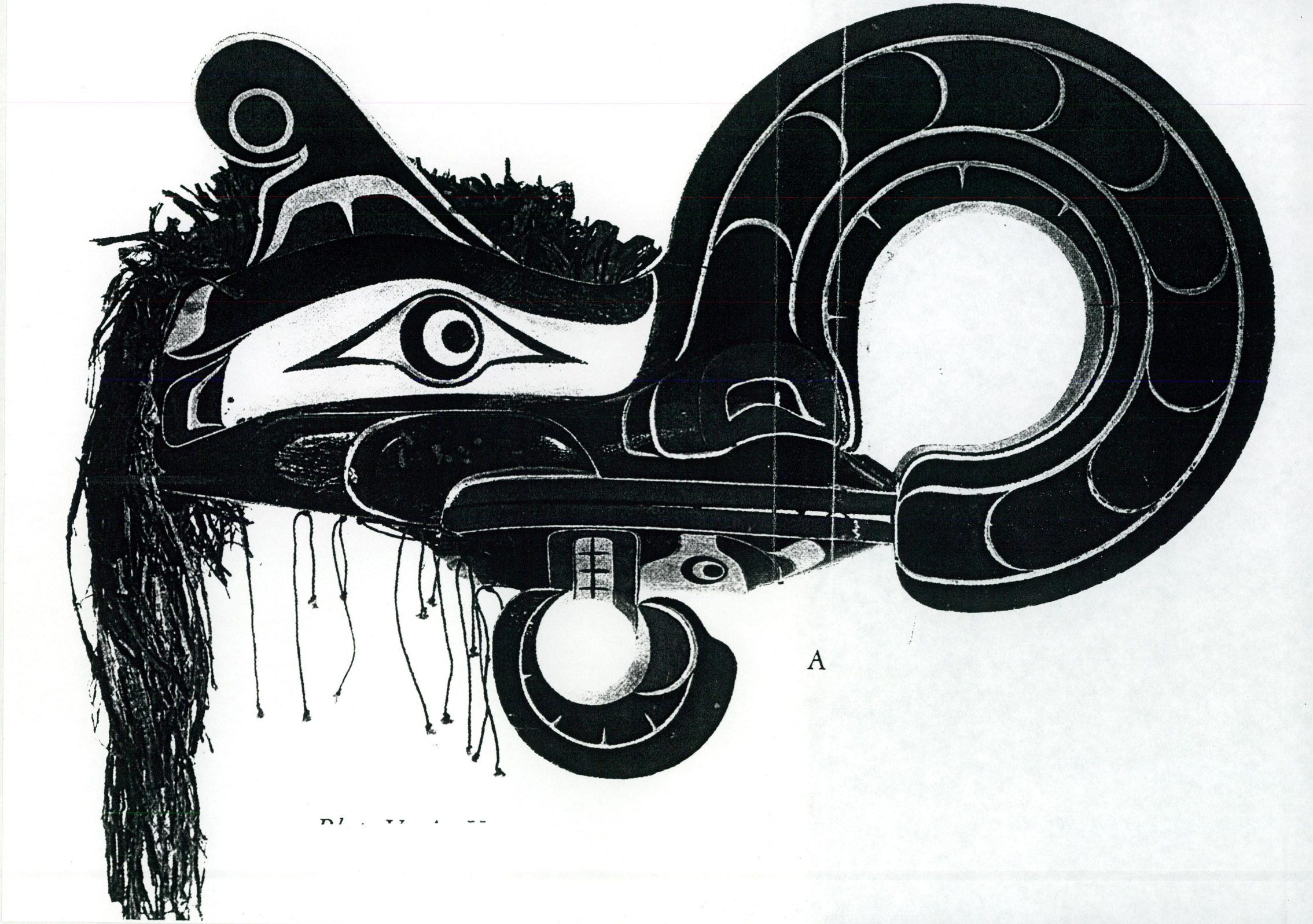
Through usage, the copper-blue paintwork has worn away from the highlighted facial features of the mask. A beautiful brown patina has developed on the exposed surface, giving a richness of quality that adds greatly to the powerful presence of the piece.

In Tlingit tradition, the backgrounds are often left unpainted in the natural wood colour; but in this, an unusual example of a double zoomorphic figure, most of the

facial area was once covered in copper oxide paint.

The acclivity of the forehead leads the eye to the prominent black eyebrows (often exaggerated in Northwest Coast carving), which are expanded and sweeping. The eyesockets conform to the prevailing North Coast ovoid form, which is accentuated by the sharp contrast between the pale blue paint of this recess and the crisp line of the patinated cheek. The eyes are a combination of exposed wood with large black pupils and an unusual feature in Northwest Coast carving, red slit irises. The irises which are not a feature of Northern work might be indicative of the sly, mischievous character of the raven. This demonstrates the carver's skill in both creativity and technique. They have small drilled holes for the wearer, probably a chief, to see out through.

The cheeks which are highly stylized retain the symmetry of the piece and flow smoothly from the eyebrows to the top of the mandible. The winding pieces below the cheeks are suggestive of ear coverts. They follow the curve of the cheek merging with the refined chin. The ears which surmount the mask contain bear-like symbolism. It is probable that the low relief carving of the bears, contained within these ears are purely decorative. Human hair, a common feature in Tlingit animal crest-masks, is pegged in locks along the edges.



A

Plate 12: Kwakiutl Hamatsa Crooked Beak Mask
Wood and Cedar Bark

The most intricate piece of this raven mask is the beak. It is inlaid with abalone and contains highly worked patterns. The overall colour is black which is a good contrast to the abalone and pale blue paint.

The nostril which is the most discernible and prominent feature of the upper mandible, is represented as an eye. The lower is covered with eye symbolism. The beak has a recessed line of vermillion running along the edges, outlining both and highlighting the complex pattern. Both mandibles move as a unit and can also be operated separately through a well concealed network of leather strips.

Kwakiutl: Plate 12

The most important winter dance among the Kwakiutl is that of the Hamatsa society. It is based upon legends of bird-monsters who inhabit the sky-world and eat human flesh. This dramatic and complex ritual which contains many characters, usually takes four days to complete.

The mask in Plate 12 (107 cms long) represents Galokwudgwis, the 'Crooked Beak' bird monster. During the ritual this mask is worn with a long shredded cedar bark cloak which blends with the cedar bark fringe hanging from the top and back of the mask. A rope harness is attached to the top back of the mask, brought around both armpits and tied

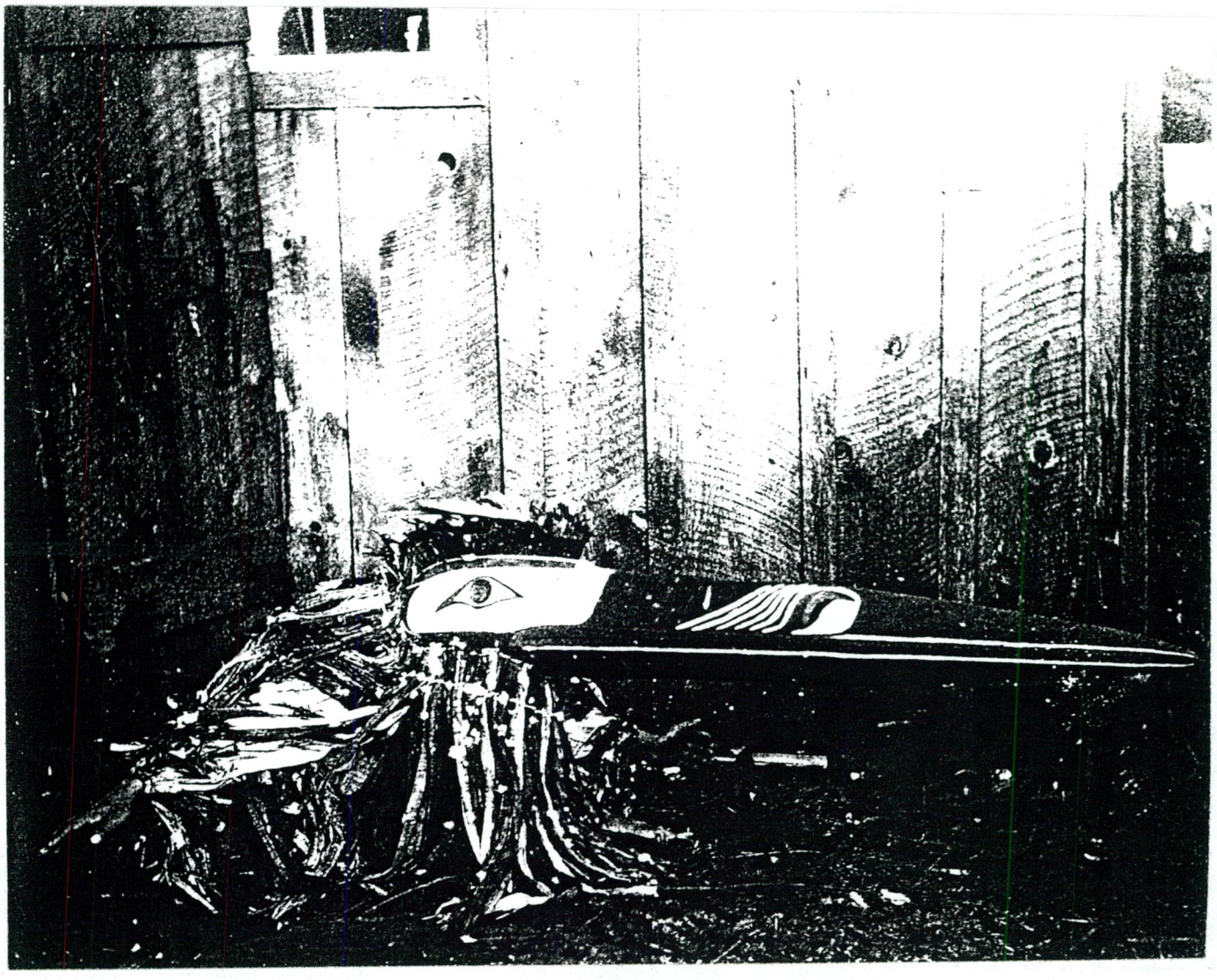


Plate 13: Kwakiutl Hamatsa Dancer

around the chest or waist. With the mask held securely, the hands of the dancer are free to manipulate the beak and make various gestures as he dances in a difficult squatting position. (PL.13)

The most prominent feature of this mask is the characteristic curved arch protruding from the beak. Whilst the carving has been kept within strict formlines, it has a personal style indicative of 'Crooked Beak' masks, which provides the largest scope for individual variation and creativity in Kwakiutl masks (9:p.106). It is painted in black and brown with carved white lines used for highlighting and is almost 50 cms in width. Noted for his strength in both creativity and structure (10:p253), Willie Seaweed (the carver) has emphasised this rounded arch by use of white curved lines and brackets which encase the alternating complementary colours. It is framed with an outer line of black which dramatises the prevalent power of this beast. The inner tapering line of brown, with small touches of white, is suggestive of foreshortening and coupled with the curvature implied by the concentric lines, gives this dramatic piece of the mask an extra dimension.

Directly below this curved arch is a wide, flaring nostril which is hollow on the inside. Bright vermillion colouring also highlighted with white, give this exaggerated protuberance an aggressive quality which reflects the bird's

cannibalistic tendencies. The large recessed white eyesockets lighten this otherwise heavy piece and stress the intensity of the round alert pupil outlined by a crisp vermillion eyeform. Above the ridge of the ear socket is an earform representative of the mythological thunderbird's horn, brightly defined in black, red and white. Shredded cedar bark, a feature common to Kwakiutl work, is pegged along the top and at the back of this piece. The brown protruding cheeks, unusual to Hamatsa masks, lead to the short, squat, black beak, outlined in red. The lower mandible depicts a refined representation of Baxbakualan Xsi'wae, the cannibal spirit who initiated the Hamatsa novices. It is a simplified rendering of the 'Crooked Beak' mask, with a prominent set of teeth which denote the savage qualities of this ominous character. This lower beak is jointed so that when strings are pulled, it shuts with a loud clap. Keeping to the rhythm of the dance, the 'bird monster' increases the clapping of the beak as the tempo of the dance intensifies, building up the excitement of the audience.

Compare and Contrast

The antropomorphic image of the Tlingit mask mergers bird and bear characteristics with human facial form. The beak represents the raven, the ears the bear, while characteristics of both creatures influence the human face.

B

Plate 14: Kwakiutl Killer Whale painting by Roy Hanuse

The Tlingit use the human aspect as a common link between the two zoomorphic representations. This creates an ambiguous feeling about the mask. The symbolism may suggest man acquiring qualities of raven and bear, or the merging of both animals through the common ground of the human spirit. The power of the mask is channelled through its mysterious presence rather than through instant visual impact.

In contrast, any human qualities present in Kwakiutl masks are subtle and undefined (PL.14). In Plate 12, form and pattern create an interdependant partnership both working together for theatrical effect. The immediate impact of Kwakiutl masks suit their role in active and energetic dances, where they reflect and rely upon the energy of the dancer.

As discussed earlier, the Tlingit are comfortable with portraiture and refined detail. Despite the zoomorphic subject matter, the Tlingit carvers still adhere to the portrait quality of the spirit masks. The main facial structure of this mask is human in form, with the beak and ears acting as appendages. However, the Tlingit carver has achieved totality of visual impact by allowing the influences of the animals to work upon the structure of the face. It appears that the top half of the face reflects the bear's influence and the bottom of the face the bird's influence. The refined cheeks and small pointed chin

Plate 15: Kwakiutl Sea Bear with mask of octopus by Roy Hanuse

Plate 16: Kwakiutl Chilkat Cloak
Commercial Wool

capture the delicacy of a bird in human form; while the heavy eyebrows and large detailed eyes are derived from the bear symbolism, which is repeated as a detail in the ears, reiterating influence and meaning.

The Tlingit rely on subtle colours, leaving more natural wood showing. The strength of the piece is born of the refined and detailed carving. The mask is not dependent on colour for impact, unlike the Kwakiutl mask, which relies heavily on graphic patterns and vivid theatrical colours to augment the form.

There is strong emphasis on painted lines and block colours in Kwakiutl masks which is not present in their Tlingit counterparts. Note the spiralling patterns on the 'crooked beak', used to emphasise the dynamism of the form. Bereft of pattern, the beak would not achieve the same powerful energy, as the form itself is quite blocky and unrefined, unlike the pattern which is clear and detailed. In contrast, the bird beak of the Tlingit, although the surface is adorned, still maintains the subtle detailed form of a raven's beak and depends upon it for its strength..

Kwakiutl detailing through the application of graphic pattern is evident throughout their work. Even when the Kwakuitl draw figures or make textiles (Plate 15, Plate 16), they fill the simple shapes with a myriad of detailed

Plate 17: Kwakiutl Hamatsa Multiple Mask
Wood and Cedar Bark

pattern which breeds life into the objects. The activity of the colourful patterns merging with the abstract carving style, give Kwakiutl art its theatrical dynamism. One expects the work to spring to life as the masks are reminiscent of puppets (Plate 17). The work is suited to the enthusiastic activity of ceremonies and dances.

Unlike Tlingit masks, which wield a quite and intense influence through the subtly of their execution, the Kwakuitl masks depend upon the energy and enthusiasm of the applied colours and shapes. The form of the mask provides the substance, while the patterns breed into it a living element.

Despite the savage nature of the subject matter, the Kwatuitl mask still conveys a humorous aspect. The vibrancy and abstraction of the masks distances them from reality and encases them with their ceremonial roles. The Tlingit masks, because of their realistic detail and subtle colouring, wield power through their proximity to the actual world. Tlingit masks combine the actual world with the spirit world in a way which seeps into the consciousness of the spectator.

CHAPTER 5

The first Europeans began to explore the shores of the Pacific Northwest Coast around 1774. By 1778, Captain James Cook had established trade links with the Nootka peoples, and traded brass and iron objects for their sea otter skins which were highly valued in China. Many others heard of the huge profits to be made and soon the maritime fur trade became a thriving business.

In the beginning, the Europeans and the Americans were able to obtain these furs for relatively little. It is estimated that the American ships, which were the most successful in this endeavour took approximately 350,000 pelts which would sell for between 40 to 120 dollars each; the Indians receiving only an estimated 7 million dollars in return (13:p20).

Experienced in trading for at least 2000 years, the Northwest Coast natives soon learned the value of the sea otter skins to these traders and profited greatly in return with copper, iron, blankets, beads and paints, and other trade goods (19: p78).

Soon, however, with the decimation of the sea otter, trading moved inland with the hunting of bear, otter, marten and mink. Tribes such as the Kwakiutl, Tlingit and Tsimshian

benefited greatly from the changeover to land-based trade and with the opening of the Hudson Bay Company in 1821 16:p22), many tribes, especially Tsimshian, even moved their villages closer to these trading posts so that they would have easier access to the white trade goods.

With this newly opened-up opportunity for acquiring wealth, families of middle-class status were able to acquire sufficient possessions to compete in the potlatches with important chiefs. As the potlatches increased, so did the enormous amounts of capital, in the form of crafts, trade blankets and food. As each family vied with the other over the positions of rank in these newly formed villages:

> 'The potlatch changed from being a simple validation of the host's position to a demonstration of his superiority over other families' (13:p42)

This new wealth accelerated the entire economy, for the wealthier the Indians became and the more lavish their potlatches, the greater the necessity to commission art that could display their enhanced status; therefore vast quantities of carvings, totem poles and other works of art were made from the end of the eighteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century (5: p.279). Although there is evidence to show that copper has been used in their society as early as the fifteenth century (2:p4) and that

they had had trade links with China for iron (19: pp 79-80). The new ease with which metal tools could be acquired acted as a further stimulus to Northwest Coast art. Metal axes, adzes and chisels were technically far superior to their traditional stone and shell tools. Carvers were able to produce taller totem poles, larger canoes and finer and more complex relief structure much more quickly.

> 'Northwest Coast art, which had developed into a distinctive style prior to white contact, became far more splendid as artists obtained better tools and as patrons acquired greater wealth'. (13: p30)

Before the influx of white settlers in the 1850's the natives held a mutually beneficial relationship with the fur traders. Whilst the traders scorned their food and found their customs savage and bizarre, they mostly left the Indians to themselves and they had a high admiration for their art.

The arrival of the new immigrants to British Colombia and Alaska brought the gradual down fall of Indian customs and traditions. As more Indians moved into the growing cities, they were forced to live in slums which bred disease and promoted violence. Alcohol, which had been banned to Indians by the Hudson Bay Company, was now freely on sale and it was commonplace to see Indian women in brothels.

A smallpox epidemic which hit Victoria in 1862 (13:p49) virtually annihilated many surrounding tribes. As the evicted Indians tried to return to their home lands they infected the people of their village also. With the Northwest Coast Indian population down by one-third, many villages had to re-group and with high ranking positions now available, competition started between families which led to even greater potlatches and impressive artwork.

This manifestation of power and prestige was not to enjoy a lengthy success, however, as with the white settlers came the missionaries, who strove hard to westernise and convert th Indians. Disdainful of their practices, especially the potlatch, and of their artwork, the missionaries were rewarded in 1884 with the outlawing of the potlatch by the Canadian Government. As the old religions were abandoned by many in favour of Christian forms, the art which functioned within these systems - teaching people about traditions, morals, ideals and the natural world - died with them. Cultural persecution of the Indians went on until the 1940's as even school children were not allowed to drawn in their traditional styles (13:p241).

CONCLUSION

> 'There are men still living who, as we believe, stand very near to primitive [i.e. prehistoric] man, far nearer than we do and whom we therefore regard as his direct representatives ... The savage's mental life must have a particular interest for us if we are right in seeing in it a well-preserved picture of an early age of our own development'. (13:p238)

During the 1920's and 1930's the distinction between 'civilised' and 'primitive' culture was strongly emphasised when appraising works of art. It is evident when reading the words of Freud, that tribal culture was considered as a step in the progression of man.

'Tribal man' was a specimen in an evolutionary experiment. His work summoned echoes and ghosts of a past time before man developed a refined and civilised nature. Applying this theory to art, civilised man regarded tribal art with a sceptical eye.

The apparent simplistic naivete of tribal art was a breath of fresh air in a society based upon repression and reason. Freud's works on sexuality had already exposed the thin veneer of control which separated mans' refined and moral

nature form the beast within him. 'Civilized' man was appalled and fascinated by the savage crudeness he identified in some of these primitive creations.

It was believed that tribal art lacked complexity, which made it easy to consider it as a 'craft' rather than 'High Art'. 'Art' was created by reasoning individuals and it was believed that 'Primitive' society was sadly lacking in the ability to reason, having more in common with children than developed adults.

Freud and the Surrealists approached the 'primitive mentality' and its creations from a position of intellectual loftiness. It was believed that the 'pre-rational' mind was flawed by an inability to distinguish between subject and object. The fact that 'tribal' man did not have a highly developed ego made it easier for him to merge with his surroundings, thus giving rise to a feeling of unity between man and cosmos. However, the Surrealists admired the spirituality of 'Tribal Art'. They sought in the work of Pacific Islanders and native North Americans, an expression of man's souls through colour and symbols.

Antropologists and artists failed to recognise that tribal art reduced complex ideas on man's existence to its essential components, through a network of symbolism tightly woven into their cultural understanding. The complication

Plate 18: Kwakiutl Fool Dancers

Plate 19: Kwakiutl: Mungo Martin putting finishing touches to totem pole with D-adze

of 'civilized life' was misread as the complexity of a developed society, while the expression of man's essence in 'Tribal Art' was dismissed as superficial and simple.

Throughout the period in time of the cultural repression, by the Canadian and American Government's of the Northwest Coast Indians (from 1890's - 1930's); the Kwakiutl society still retained close links to their traditions and beliefs. Dance Ceremonies, Potlatches and consequently artwork, whilst not being as prolific as the nineteenth century, was still an important part of the community. Carvers such as Mungo Martin (PL 18 & PL 19) and Willie Seaweed, who had been taught in the traditional manner (that is, from an apprenticeship to a master carver), maintained this unbroken tradition. Both highly skilled, their exquisite craftsmanship was virtually unnoticed by 'whites' until the revival in the late 1940's. Through such carvers, the resurgence of pride in natives and appreciation of art and traditions by 'westerners' became a reality.

Bill Holm, an important figure during and since this revival period, has done much to explain and clarify the formal rules which apply to this art. Not being a native Indian, he took it upon himself to learn the Kwakiutl traditions and through an apprenticeship with Willie Seaweek, has himself become an accomplished craftsman.

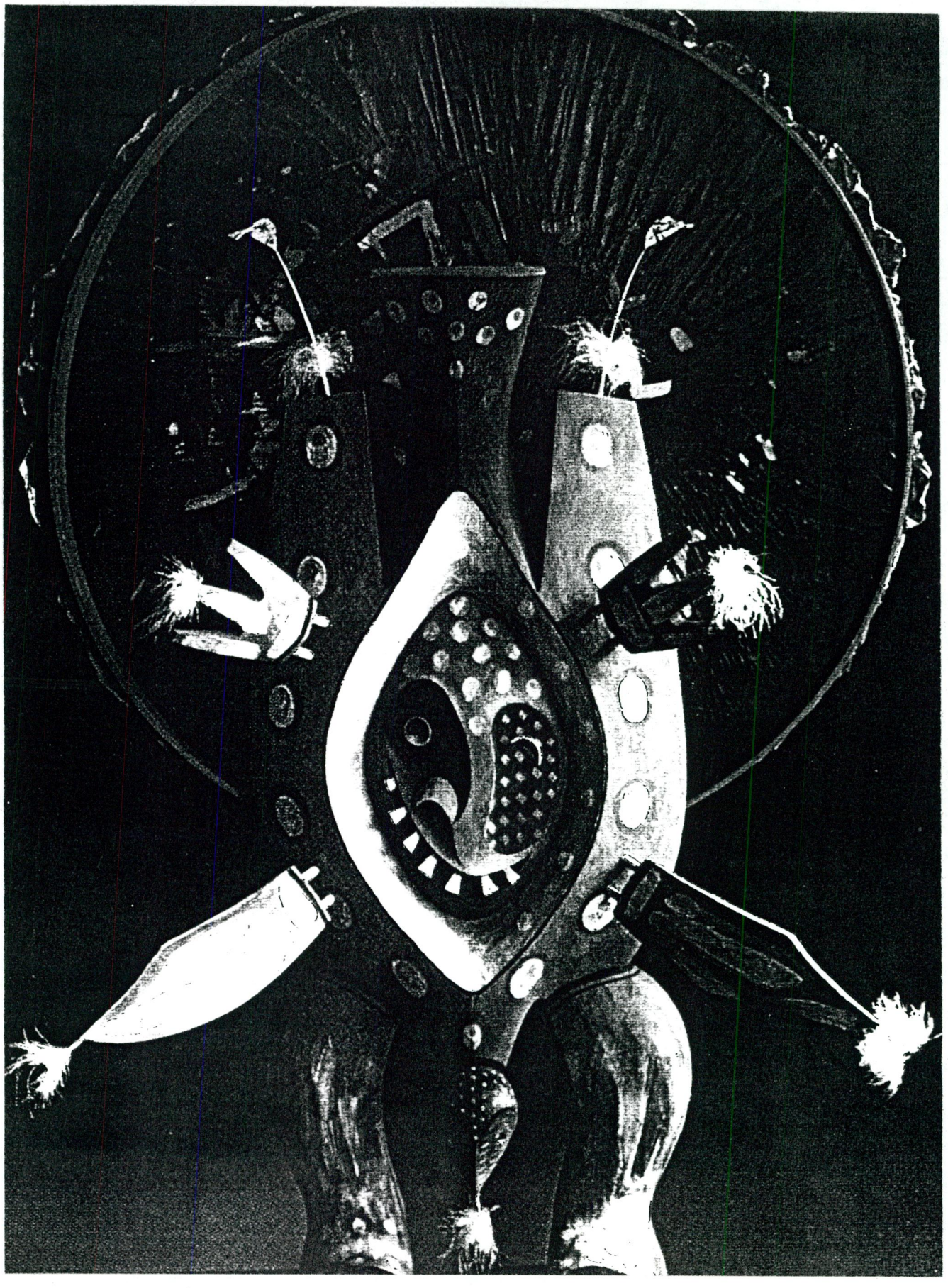


Plate 20: Tlingit: Migrations James G. Schoppert

Wood, Walrus stomach, acrylic, string and feathers

'The Northern Northwest Coast Indians [have] been unable to cling with equal tenacity to their artistic traditions and resist the onslaught of missionary and Government opposition to the creation of art'. (13:p244)

There are a few carvers however, who have, through the study of the Tlingit work available, re-established the traditional carving style of this tribe. Amos Wallace of Juneau, Alaska, is one such person emphasising creative effort rather than copying.

During the 1960's there was an introduction of contemporary Indian art works in American society. Native artists (such as James Schoppert PL. 20) proud of their traditions were able to convey this new awareness through a highly personalised abstract form, whilst loosely complying to their traditional form lines.

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