ARTICLE

Totems and Tourism: Rereading Emily Carr's "Lost Years" Through the Model Totem Pole

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Cet article réexamine la période dite des « années perdues » (1913-1927) d'Emily Carr comme un moment de développement artistique plutôt que d'inactivité. Au-delà des explications habituelles qui attribuent la sophistication de ses peintures totémiques à sa formation en France ou à son association avec le Groupe des Sept, l'auteur propose une source d'inspiration différente, au croisement du tourisme et du marché des souvenirs. Durant ces années, Carr subvient à ses besoins en produisant des poteries, des textiles et plus particulièrement des modèles de totems ornés de motifs inspirés de la côte du Nord-Ouest. Cet engagement artisanal lui confère une compréhension matérielle et spatiale qui transformera son approche picturale. À travers un prisme praxiologique, l'article montre comment cette connaissance tactile et incarnée a façonné la puissance formelle et expressive de l'œuvre moderniste mature de Carr.

> A totem pole cannot be read like a book.[1]
> –Bill Reid, *Solitary Raven*

Following the devastating commercial failure of her Vancouver solo exhibition, *Paintings of Indian Totem Poles and Indian Life* (1913), settler Canadian artist Emily Carr (b. 1871) retreated from the public eye for fourteen years. During her self-imposed exile, which overlapped with a series of postwar recessions, she stopped painting almost entirely. Within Carr studies, this period, from 1913 to 1927, is known as the "lost years"—a designation that frames her hiatus from painting as a personal dark age.[2] Yet what if these years were not as lost as they have been made to appear?

It was during this lean interval that the struggling artist began to produce Northwest Coast-inspired craftwork—including model totem poles—for sale as tourist souvenirs. The shift to curio-making was borne of financial need, but it was also defined by Carr's prior experiences as a tourist, which had exposed her to the growing trade in Northwest Coast souvenirs at the turn of the century. Despite Carr's prolonged engagement with the model totem, no prior scholarship has considered its role in her art.

This article addresses that gap by redirecting attention to her craft production, arguing that the material knowledge she cultivated during the lost years was crucial for her mature painting. Situating Carr within broader histories of tourism and the souvenir trade, I show how the late totem paintings are the result of a hands-on encounter with the model totem and full-sized totem poles in situ—not just the influence of European and Canadian modernism. Seen through a praxiological lens attentive to embodied craft practice, Carr becomes an even more complex figure, her art standing at the intersection of totems and tourism.

Revealing the creative impact of the lost years has significant implications for Carr's paintings of Native Northwest Coast totem poles, arguably her most visible contribution to Canadian modernism.[3] Over a span of nearly four decades, she produced hundreds of such works across media. Scholars have traditionally divided Carr's totem paintings into early- and late-career groupings—the former, from 1907 to 1913, are of a more ethnographic bent; the latter, from 1928 to 1933, are marked by a modernist idiom. Critical attempts to account for the massive leap in sophistication between the early and late totem paintings tend to focus on two well-known moments: her 1910–11 sojourn in France, where she absorbed various avant-garde techniques, and her inclusion in the 1927 *Exhibition of Canadian West Coast Art: Native and Modern*, which began her association with the modernist painters of the Group of Seven.[4]

Neither explanation is fully convincing. While the first fails to address the drastic change from Carr's pre-1914 to post-1927 totems (Why were the lessons from Paris best integrated nearly two decades later?), the second casts her mature work as an outgrowth of the Group of Seven. By looking to the influence of the lost years instead—the very period bracketed by and overlooked in these accounts—her late totem paintings emerge as newly entangled with the cultural economy of the Northwest Coast.

The article proceeds in three interrelated parts. It begins by examining the history of monumental totem poles, the development of Northwest Coast tourism and the souvenir trade, and the logic of the model totem. It then turns to Carr's roles as tourist and curio collector, focusing on her ambivalent relationship to these closely linked subject positions and underscoring the essentially touristic nature of her artistic travel. Finally, it reconsiders the artist's lost years as a formative period of creative reengagement with Northwest Coast art and material culture, tracing the influence of her craft practice—model totems in particular—on her painted totems. In this account, her mature paintings emerge directly from the lost years.

FROM MONUMENT TO MODEL

The totem pole is a carved column that originates from the Indigenous cultures of the Northwest Coast of North America. Though variable in size and type, these poles always encode meanings of great collective significance. Aaron Glass and Aldona Jonaitis explain how totems "simultaneously advertise lineage identity, memorialize deceased chiefs, and mark specific claims to territory as well as hereditary property (tangible or otherwise)."[5] While the monumental figural carvings that settler society now calls "totem poles" predate European contact, there was an increase in the quantity and quality of their production during the years of the maritime fur trade (ca. 1780–1840), as new forms of wealth and steel-based tools enabled unprecedented scale and elaboration.[6]

If the sea-based fur trade was in decline by 1840, the "scramble for Northwest Coast specimens" was just beginning.[7] Within a few decades, buoyed by the emerging field of anthropology, World's Fair and museum alike sought the full-sized totem pole as a prized object for their ethnographic displays. In an

fig. 1 Philadelphia Centennial Exhibits, 1876. Photographic print, 25.4 × 20.3 cm. Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 285, Box 26, Folder: 5 (Negative Number 72-2383). Photo: Smithsonian Institution Archives

image from Philadelphia's Centennial Exhibition of 1876, the first World's Fair held on US soil, a large Tsimshian pole from Lax Kw'alaams (then Port Simpson, British Columbia) is visible to the left, presiding over rows of vitrines on the floor of the ethnological exhibit (fig. 1). Divorced from its Northwest Coast context and intermixed with other Native art and material culture from across North America, such poles became metonyms for Indigeneity, emblems of a "primitive" culture that was "vanishing" before the technological advances of a rapidly modernizing US. The example of the World's Fair, an institutional site heavily marked by colonial desires both cultural and personal, soon inspired the behavior of well-off tourists, who by 1890 travelled by the thousands to First Nations and Alaska Native villages to view the free-standing icons in person.[8] Corporations such as the Pacific Coast Steamship Company based entire advertising campaigns on summer excursions to "Alaska via Totem Pole Route."[9]

Meanwhile, the proliferation of tourist guidebooks in the late nineteenth century, such as *Baedeker's Guide* and *Appleton's Guide-Book to Alaska,* helped to satisfy the emerging need for information on the north, while also prescribing how to be a successful traveller. Everything from accommodations to souvenir shops, monthly temperature averages to proper attire was addressed in these publications. Such guidebooks, Robert Campbell explains, "formed a crossroads of sorts between the face-to-face exchanges through which elites corresponded and the mass tourist culture that took shape during the last decade of the nineteenth century."[10]

The Northwest Coast was not the only heavily touristed region of the era—the US Southwest, for example, became a sightseeing-by-rail phenomenon through the Fred Harvey Company—but its steamship-mediated travel and remote location made it especially attractive for tourists. Combining rugged natural grandeur with scenic coastal villages, the area offered an ideal blend of the sublime and the picturesque, materially anchored by the powerful presence of the totem pole.[11] The texts of contemporary travel brochures are filled with "tropes of wonder and unrepresentability" in the face of such spectacular scenery, a sort of authorial aphasia which emphasizes that only seeing is believing when it comes to the Northwest Coast.[12]

Although the cost of a trip along the Inside Passage was beyond the reach of the average sightseer, armchair travellers could still access such experiences metonymically through the souvenir.[13] Northwest Coast curios soon circulated far beyond locations on the steamship route, becoming widely available in urban curio shops from Alaska to Washington State. Such stores, like Seattle's Ye Olde Curiosity Shop, featured a range of objects at various price points, everything from Tlingit baskets and moccasins to Haida masks and paddles.[14] By the 1920s, the demand for "authentic" pieces of Indigenous material culture was so strong that Ye Olde Curiosity Shop even offered a mail order souvenir catalogue.[15]

Perhaps no object embodies the complex history of Northwest Coast tourism as well as the model totem pole, a handicraft that flourished in response to the burgeoning souvenir market at the turn of the century. These small carvings were not unprecedented in Indigenous art, as models and miniatures existed in the pre-colonial period, but the tourist trade transformed their function from internal pedagogy to external commodity and greatly expanded their circulation. Indeed, the demand was so great that model poles were soon being produced broadly by the tribal nations of the Northwest Coast—even those that did not have a monumental carving tradition—as well as by non-Indigenous makers such as Carr.[16]

Until recently, these tiny totems—often no more than two feet in height—were cast as little more than tourist kitsch, a critical dismissal based on a variety of interrelated factors: cost (they were "cheap"); size (they were "insignificant" in scale and easily portable); material (they could be made with any kind of timber, unlike the fine cedar of monumental poles); age of makers (carvers were often

young children); gendering of tourist ware (craft production and consumption were frequently feminized, in contrast to the masculinization of "collectors" and ethnographers); quality; and, finally, authenticity (as tourist ware, they were understood to be less "purely" Indigenous). Reorienting the analysis of the souvenir totem away from such quantitative and qualitative measures, however, allows for fuller appreciation of its status as a "boundary object…[underpinned by] the mobile, the variegated, the hybrid, the apparently unclassifiable."[17] In its very diminutiveness, the model totem bears powerful witness to the colonial encounter.

Tourist art like the souvenir totem took on an ever-greater role in the wake of the 1876 Indian Act, which consolidated earlier colonial laws in its targeting of Indigenous peoples and their cultural practices.[18] From 1884 to 1951, Native communities of the Northwest Coast were prohibited from holding potlatches, lavish events crucial for the reinforcement of social and economic structure. Traditionally hosted by a chief or other high-ranking individual, the potlatch was a gift-giving ceremony that redistributed wealth in order to validate political authority, with the raising of a totem pole often serving as the celebratory climax.[19] Full-sized totem poles were not officially outlawed as part of the Potlatch Ban, but their numbers decreased as the event went "underground" and production shifted to settler-tailored miniatures.[20] This pivot to souvenir totems was far from Indigenous acquiescence to colonial demands.

fig. 2 Charlie James, model totem pole, ca. 1920. Carved and polychrome painted cedar, 63.5 × 29.8 cm. Richmojoe Gallery, Vancouver, BC. Photo: Richmojoe Gallery

Kwakwaka'wakw master carver Charlie James, for example, began to produce a series of model poles that reworked one of his large-scale totems, now housed in the U'mista Cultural Centre in Alert Bay, British Columbia. One miniature (ca. 1920) retains the prototype's deep-sea legend—a young, spread-winged Thunderbird or Sea Eagle (*Kulus*) at the apex and a plunging Orca below—but James has experimented by changing certain characters, altering their sequence, paring down the composition, and banishing white from the palette (fig. 2). Unlike his full-sized totem pole, whose sheer scale makes it fundamentally resistant to the settler gaze, James's model totem—some two feet in height and expressly made for the tourist market—comes in easily digestible dimensions. Under the guise of a seemingly inauthentic form, model poles functioned as Trojan horses that smuggled forbidden Indigenous crests into settler society. In other words, they were subversive agents that could simultaneously toy with the settler-colonial gaze, assert economic authority, ensure the continued transmission of cultural practices, and subtly protest anti-Indigenous policies like the Potlatch Ban.[21]

The settler premise of model poles as "inauthentic" thus reveals that the joke is on the colonizer, for these "idiot sticks"—as totem miniatures were sometimes called by Northwest Coast makers—enabled Indigenous carvers to profit from non-Native ignorance, while retaining control over the very notion of authenticity.[22] In effect, the production of such tourist totems reproduced some of the logic of potlatch circulation within the settler-colonial marketplace, as these objects were never fully divested of the ceremonial status of

monumental totems and, as travel souvenirs, were often purchased by settlers as gifts for friends and family. This relational mode of commodity circulation mirrored the historical exchange of settler commodities, like the Hudson Bay blanket, through the potlatch.[23] As cultural historian Robert St. George notes, "the commodity chains and ties of materiality lash[ed] both societies...differentially, together."[24]

This linkage between Indigenous and settler communities reminds us of the reciprocal relationship that always underpins production and consumption, the "wonderful, almost intimate sense of closure that things can provide."[25] For all of the Indigenous subversion and settler naivety bound up in the Northwest Coast tourist trade, we should not lose sight of the intellectual and aesthetic enjoyment derived from the model totem—its creation and its reception.[26] This exchange between carver and consumer is crucial for appreciating the function and popularity of the miniature pole, as well as its importance for Carr.[27]

CARR THE TOURIST

Born and raised in Victoria, British Columbia, Carr spent the better part of a decade training in San Francisco, England, and France, before returning to Canada permanently in 1912. Scholars have consistently emphasized her doubly marginalized position within the Canadian avant-garde as a woman artist working at the edge of Western Canada, far from the male-dominated art institutions of the East. Her eventual recognition in the late 1920s, following the lost years, has further contributed to the narrative of Carr as a belated but singular figure in Canadian modernism, removed from the broader cultural economy.

Carr's experiences as a tourist challenge this formulation by demonstrating how her art, from the beginning, was grounded in the cultural and material conditions of the Northwest Coast—all the more so because she was unlike the average tourist to the region. Growing up in Victoria, then a colonial capital, Carr was exposed to the local Coast Salish communities who were part of the fabric of daily life, as well as visitors from northern communities like the Haida and Tlingit, who travelled to the city periodically to participate in the expanding tourist economy and secure seasonal work. Furthermore, before her major tourist trip along the Inside Passage in 1907, to which I will return shortly, Carr had already made several painting and sketching trips to Ucluelet, on the west coast of Vancouver Island. In order to better appreciate how enmeshed Carr's oeuvre is with Northwest Coast tourism and the souvenir trade, her artistic and touristic travel must be understood as of a piece.

This complex relationship has often been flattened by an art historical tendency to frame her artistic travel as somehow distinct, or partially removed, from tourism proper. On a painting excursion, the reasoning runs, Carr's role as creator took precedence over any touristic impulse that may have underlain the journey. Gerta Moray, for instance, claims that "Carr in fact slipped through a crack between the First Nations and white communities...[since] she was neither a tourist nor someone who had come with a practical or official role."[28] This critical separation of art from tourism has made it difficult to properly evaluate Carr as a tourist and how this experience shaped her art.

In the introduction to his seminal text *The Tourist*, sociologist Dean MacCannell provides a nuanced definition that is particularly helpful for reframing Carr's trips along the Northwest Coast. Per MacCannell, "the tourist is an actual person, or real people are actually tourists. At the same time, 'the tourist' is one of the best models available for modern-man-in-general.... Our first apprehension of modern civilization...emerges in the mind of the tourist."[29] In the literal sense of the term, Carr as tourist is fact; in the meta-sociological sense, Carr's work as an expression of the touristic mind offers a novel entry into her oeuvre. Sightseeing, the quintessential tourist act, is described by MacCannell as "a kind of collective striving for a transcendence of the modern totality, a way of attempting to

overcome the discontinuity of modernity, of incorporating its fragments into unified experience."[30]

As if embodying the inevitable failure of sightseeing to synthesize the fractured reality of modern life, Carr's illustrated travel diary *Sister and I in Alaska* (1907)—which details the tourist trip she took with her sister Alice from Vancouver, British Columbia, to Skagway, Alaska—was for many years known only in fragments.[31] Viewed alongside other written accounts, the journal provides essential insight into Carr's participation in tourism. Jay Stewart and Peter Macnair have demonstrated how, in later autobiographical texts such as *Growing Pains* (1946) and *The Heart of a Peacock* (1953), the older Carr "ascribe[s] to herself a greater understanding of Native art and culture than she demonstrates in the journal...[while] she also frequently misremembers what she saw on the trip."[32] A notable example of this revisionism is the stark shift in her response to the tourist trade as the years passed. In *The Heart of the Peacock*, her contempt for curios and dilettantish tourism is palpable:

> Tourists came back from their twenty-minute stopover at Sitka and lectured on totem poles and Indian culture, having seen a few old Indian squaws who spread shawls out on the end of planks of the wharf and sold curios—baskets, panther-claws, bear-teeth, whalebone in the raw.... There were quaint little rattles too, made of deer-hooves, and carved grease dishes made to hold oolichan oil. The tourist turned over, bartered, carried off the cheapest and poorest articles, exhibited them as specimens of Indian craftsmanship.[33]

Carr's retrospective dismissal of tourist behavior is especially ironic when juxtaposed with the opening sentence of her Alaska journal: "On August the 18th 1907, Sister and I set forth on the S.S. Princess Royal bound for Alaska and on pleasure bent."[34] The pleasure they sought was precisely that of the tourist, a fact Carr's later autobiographical work seems unwilling to admit. Just like the Sitka tourists she later decries, Carr and her sister "carried off the cheapest and poorest articles" from Alaska. Yet even as early as this 1907 trip, Carr demonstrates a level of self-awareness that reveals a deeply conflicted relationship to her subject position as a tourist.

Page thirty-five of *Sister and I in Alaska* provides a self-mocking commentary on Carr's personal involvement in the Northwest Coast souvenir market (fig. 3). A hand-written entry is provided on the left half of the sheet, while the right half features an illustration of Alice and Emily on the verge of toppling over from the mountain of souvenirs they carry. Their mid-step positions metaphorize how they have "stepped on" Indigenous culture—visualized here as a pair of Native women barely visible in the background—to acquire such curios. The text reads, in part, "as the day of our departure from Sitka drew near, we betook ourselves to the Indian village, and procured a curio or two as momentoes [sic] of our happy trip, and offerings for our freinds [sic]."[35]

The watercolour proudly displays their curio coup, which includes a model canoe, two baskets, and, amazingly, a pair of the deer-hoof rattles Carr had singled out in her *Heart of the Peacock* harangue (they are visible hanging from the artist's left elbow, breaking the margin at the right edge of the sheet).[36] Carr's hypocrisy highlights a tension that permeates her oeuvre: despite being an artist by training and developing an appreciation for Indigenous art and culture over the course of her career, her experience of the Northwest Coast was inseparable from her positionality as a sightseer. She was a settler woman visiting Native communities, seeking "authentic" experiences and "local" culture, always on the lookout for interesting passages to paint. However much she might convince herself of the strictly artistic purpose of her Northwest Coast travel, these trips were always "voyages of self-creation...[where] the Inside Passage refers as

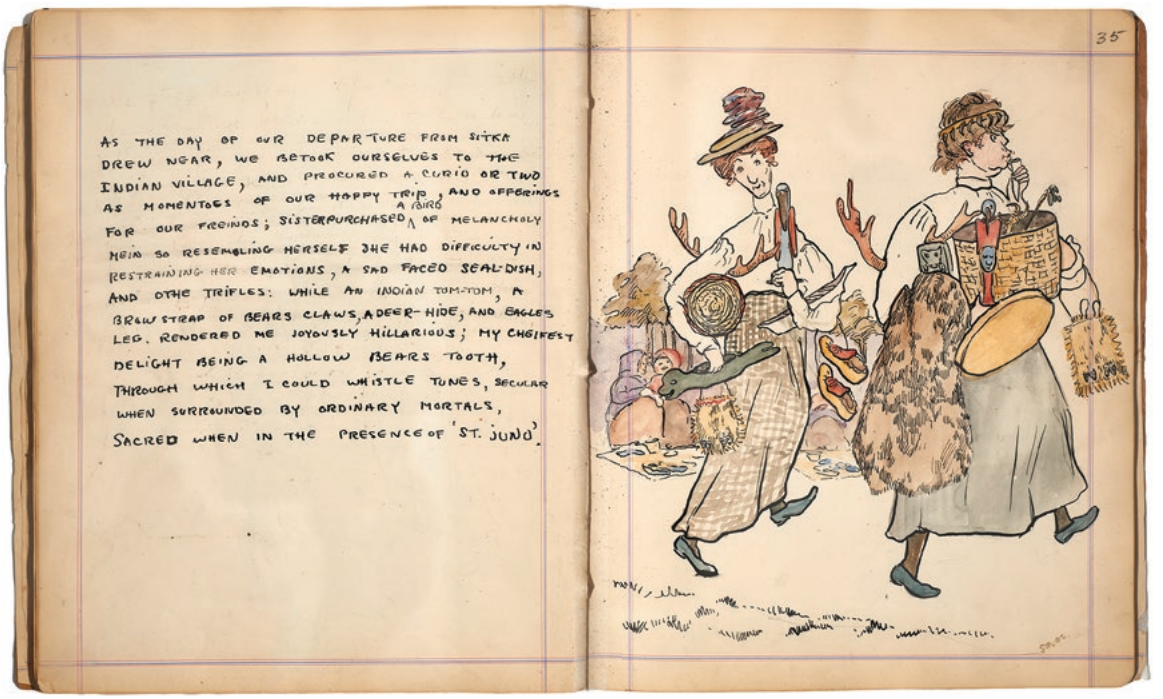

fig. 3 Emily Carr, *Sister and I in Alaska*, 1907, p. 35. Watercolour and black ink over graphite, 22.3 × 39 cm. National Gallery of Canada, 47000.35. Photo: National Gallery of Canada

much to...[her] internal mindscape...as it does to the perceived grandeurs of the seascape."[37]

The reluctance to label Carr an ego-driven tourist is mirrored by a scholarly nuance often enacted when accounting for her relation to the souvenir trade. Moray offers a characteristic distinction: "Although she began as a tourist and trophy hunter, Carr went on to build up a sizable collection that included Indian baskets, carved spoons and bowls, canoe models, a drum, and many drawings of tattoo and other 'Indian' designs."[38] Carr also owned model totems; one of them, a Haida pole in argillite, is now in the Royal British Columbia Museum.[39] Moray feels compelled to distance Carr's later "collecting" from her beginnings as a "tourist," but no settler collection of Indigenous art and material culture can ever be divorced from tourism, or the ontology of the souvenir. Furthermore, this kind of analysis denies Carr's active engagement with and leveraging of the curio market.

During her lost years (1913–1927), the artist, in need of a way to generate income, resorted to the production of Northwest Coast-inspired crafts. Included in her repertoire were hooked rugs, clay pottery, hybrid lamps, and model totem poles. Carr was ethically troubled by her expedient appropriation, commenting, "I ornamented my pottery with Indian designs—that was why the tourists bought it. I hated myself for prostituting Indian Art; our Indians did not 'pot,' their designs were not intended to ornament clay—but I did keep the Indian design pure."[40]

Carr's loaded language, her self-hatred for "prostituting" Native art to tourists, requires further elaboration. Here she seems to be referring, quite colorfully, to compromising her artistic integrity by further commodifying Indigenous art for profit. Her phrasing suggests that this labour is temporary and compelled by the demands of the market and therefore separate from her "true" artistic practice. Much like her parodic, curio-bedecked self-portrait in *Sister and I in Alaska*, Carr's use of metaphor critiques the tourist trade within which she is embedded, registering her ambivalence toward commodification while also gesturing to the affective, even bodily dimensions of this exchange.

Her invocation of "prostitution," in particular, invites a reading of the Northwest Coast curio market as undergirded by desire. The appeal of an object like the model totem can be understood in relation to the erotics of collecting generally, and the specific materiality of a souvenir type understood by settlers to be of Native manufacture, however hybrid its form.[41] Art historian Ruth Phillips has argued that a key component of the Native North American souvenir trade was the "embodied pleasure" of production and consumption, an intimacy between maker and collector bridged by the tactile, sensual experience of the miniature.[42] As a physical proxy for the encounter between Native and settler worlds, the model pole penetrated into that most interior of Victorian spaces—the parlour—offering mediated access to the body of the Other, through the body of the souvenir.[43]

Carr was not profiting from the use of Native designs alone; she was a settler Canadian artist selling the otherness of the Indigenous carver and, crucially, attempting to inhabit this subject position through the creation of Native-inspired model totems and other tourist ware. Much of Carr's craftwork is signed "Klee Wyck" ("Laughing One"), a nickname given to her in 1898 by the Nuu-chah-nulth people of Ucluelet, British Columbia, where she stayed during her first Northwest Coast painting trip.[44] The nickname helped "authenticate" her ceramics and was a crucial component of an assumed "Indigenous" identity that grew with time—a form of settler nativism that no doubt contributed to her guilt over such craft production. Her only consolation—that she managed to "keep the Indian design pure"—is undercut by the sentence on the preceding side of the em dash, which admits that Native designs "were not intended to ornament clay." Nor, for that matter, were they meant to be translated to canvas.

Carr's acknowledgment of the material incommensurability underpinning her craftwork nods to the internal tension of her late totem paintings and their medium unspecificity. Fellow settler Canadian artist Lawren Harris seemed to intuit this dynamic when he suggested to Carr, in a 1929 letter, that she leave the totem pole alone for a year or more because it is "a work of art in its own right and it is very difficult to use it in another form of art."[45] The material (dis)junction of Carr's painted totems (totem pole into painting) is inseparable from the intermedia translation that troubles her souvenirs (Native designs applied to ceramics), as we will see.

To close this discussion on Carr the tourist, let us return to the venom of her retrospective writings. The steamer she took for a visit to Nootka Island, British Columbia, in 1929 provided just the kind of cramped, tourist-heavy environment she came to despise. Among the things she overheard during the trip, Carr angrily recalls some passengers' descriptions of the area's totem poles—"'certainly no[t] art,'" said one traveller, "'frightful and ludicrous,'" said another.[46] Arriving at Yuquot (Friendly Cove) on Nootka Island, the artist refuses to visit the monument honouring British Captain James Cook's 1778 "discovery" of Nootka Sound, and instead details her more "authentic" experience: "Tourists, how I hate them. They spend most of the time at the...monument with their cameras. I did not go to see it.... Stayed and talked to the old Indians who were friendly and interesting. How beastly superior the white race are. I don't wonder the Indians despise us."[47]

This exceedingly hostile response—much like her criticism in *The Heart of the Peacock*—is best understood as part and parcel of tourism's dialectical political positions: the pro-tourist and the anti-tourist.[48] Carr's anti-tourist stance was a reaction against the contemporary expansion and democratization of the tourist class to include a wide variety of travellers. Her resentment stemmed from a belief that these new sightseers would ruin her trip by denying her total access to an individualized experience.[49] As MacCannell observes, anti-tourists "point out only the tawdry side of tourism and the ways it can spoil the human community, while hiding from themselves the essentially touristic nature of their

own cultural expeditions to the 'true' sights."[50] Rather than absolving Carr from the motives and desires of the tourist, it is more accurate and more productive to foreground her Northwest Coast travel as inherently touristic. The late totem paintings, from 1928 onwards, mobilize the model totem in order to grapple with the kind of visual fragmentation that sightseeing aimed to integrate.

THE LOST YEARS: CRAFT PRACTICE AND PAINTED TOTEMS

The polemical nature of Carr's totem paintings revolves around a fundamental question: How do we read them? Extant scholarship on these images is heavily weighted toward semantic and syntactic readings that focus on content and form, respectively.[51] Art historian Johanne Lamoureux has shown how a pragmatic approach can shed light on the way Carr combined thematic and formal concerns as a means of eliciting an affective response from the viewer (one that echoed the artist's own charged experience in front of monumental poles during her Northwest Coast travel).[52] She connects the emotional valence of Carr's work to the fifteen months the artist spent in France in 1910–1911, especially the fetishistic primitivism then being modelled by Picasso.[53] While this reading provides a beautiful account of the viewer's experience before a Carr painting—and how subject matter and style work synergistically to encourage this affective encounter—it is less convincing from the perspective of influence.

A praxiological approach, on the other hand, allows us to appreciate how Carr's enhanced ability to render the volumetric reality of totem poles came not just from exposure to avant-garde art (whether European or Canadian), but from the tactile understanding gained through her craft practice during the lost years.

If souvenir-making posed an ethical dilemma for Carr, it also provided critical experiential learning. Moray notes that Carr began her lost years assembling "a collection of motifs by making drawings from ethnographic books that she borrowed, such as Swanton's book on the Haida, A.P. Niblack's *Coast Indians*, and Franz Boas' monograph *Primitive Art*."[54] One of Carr's drawings (ca. 1914) depicts a tale from Haida mythology that explains a common form of lunar pareidolia (fig. 4). "The Woman in the Moon" tells of a girl who, on the way home from fetching water one evening, sticks her tongue out at the moon. In retaliation to this insult, the enraged moon decides to capture her. The woman desperately grabs at a salal bush in a vain attempt to stop herself from being pulled up into the moon's orbicular embrace—but to no avail. According to Haida legend, the figural form sometimes visible on the face of the moon is this same woman, still holding the water pail and salal bush.

Carr's image is a copy of Haida artist John Wiah's drawing (1905), included as figure five of Plate XXI in John Swanton's *Contributions to The Ethnology of the Haida*, published that same year (fig. 5). The coincidence in subject matter notwithstanding, what is most revelatory is how unconvincing Carr's rendering is in comparison to Wiah's. Although this is a summary sketchbook rendition aimed at a general impression rather than exact verisimilitude, Carr's effort is notable for the way it fails to capture the rhythm of formline—the distinctive curvilinearity characteristic of Northwest Coast art.[55] In contrast to Wiah's confident delineation of the legend, Carr's depiction replicates neither the interplay between the "U" and "S" shapes that construct the figure's body nor the ovoid of the head with its encased eyelid form. The drawing speaks to the amount of maturation that Carr's formal language still required.

By 1916, the artist had exhibited a set of hooked rugs that bore Northwest Coast iconography taken from ceremonial screens and drums. In 1924, she began to produce Northwest Coast–inspired pottery at the suggestion of Kate Mather, a tenant who operated a summer gift shop in Banff, Alberta (as another means of generating income during these lean years, the artist turned her home into a boardinghouse). Carr describes the pottery-making as odious, placing it last (and em dashed) on a list of ways she sought to supplement her finances:

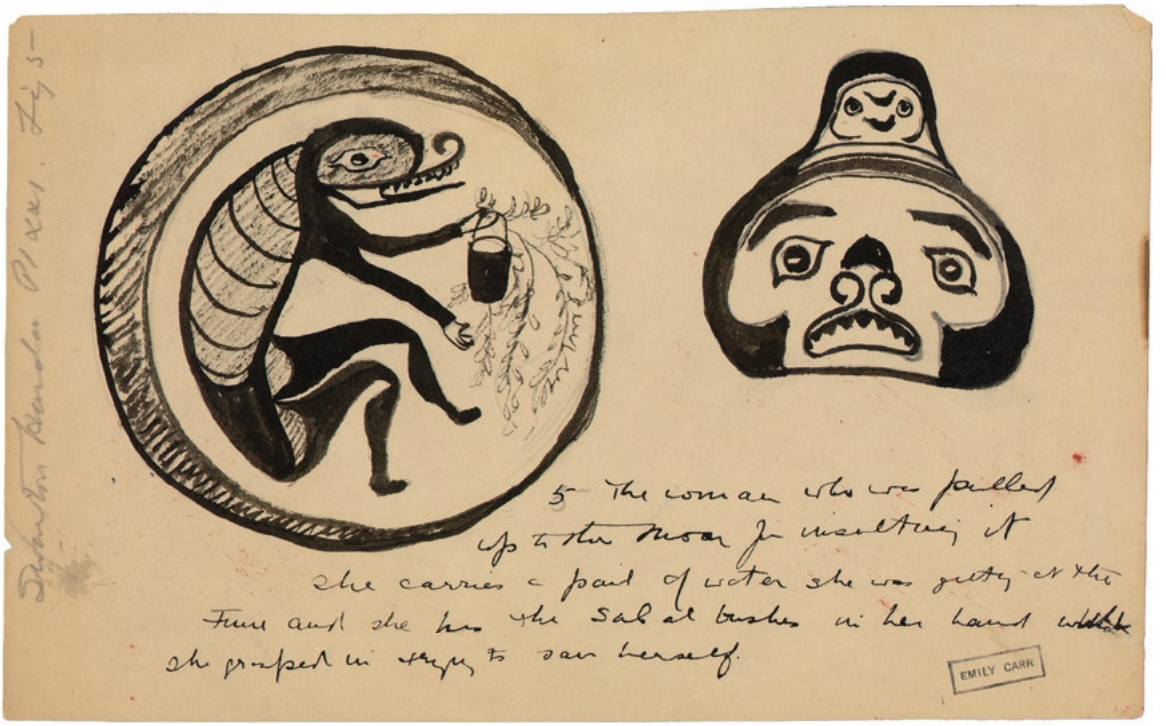

fig. 4 (above)
Emily Carr, *The Woman Who Was Pulled Up to the Moon for Insulting It* (Swanton Pl. XXI, fig. 5), ca. 1914. Pencil and ink on paper, 15.2 × 25.4 cm. BC Archives, Royal BC Museum, PDP00862. Image courtesy of the BC Archives

fig. 5 (left and below right)
John Wiah, *The Woman Who Was Pulled Up to Moon for Insulting It*, 1905. Illustration and detail (right) from Plate XXI in *Contributions to the Ethnology of the Haida* by J.R. Swanton, from *Memoirs of the American Museum of Natural History*, v. 5, pt. 1, original artwork from Division of Anthropology Archives. Photo: AMNH

"Small fruit, hens, rabbits, dogs—pottery."[56] But, much like her collection of drawings, the potting process forced an important reorientation toward the source material.

In a 1927 article for *Maclean's* magazine titled "Women Potters and Indian Themes," N. de Bertrand Lugrin writes:

> That Miss Carr has hit upon something which makes an instant appeal is evidenced by the fact that this year there was a greater demand for the "Brown pottery" than could be met. Among her best-known pieces are her little...totems, quaint grease pots, flower jars which are replicas of old feast dishes, and plates and plaques, on the rim of which are painted miniature ravens or life-like frogs.[57]

That Carr's "little totems" were in demand and among her best-known ceramic pieces underscores the volume at which the artist was producing souvenir art. She writes, "with the help of a chimney sweep I built a brick kiln in my backyard, firing my own pots.... I could bake as many as five hundred small pieces at one firing."[58] Producing this enormous quantity of unglazed ceramics without a potter's wheel was a distinctly tactile, sensual process. Unguided by the centrifugal motion of the wheel, handbuilding entails a direct shaping of every contour of clay, a call and response between maker and material dictated by the time and pressure of the hands. Carr valued the intimacy of this dialogue, noting how she "loved handling the smooth, cool clay" before it was fired.[59] Thinking as both producer and consumer, Carr developed a fully rounded approach that allowed her to contemplate the model totem pole from the inside out. This experiential knowing of craftwork is what Michael Polanyi terms "tacit knowledge"—a material intelligence that eludes language and allows the maker to "know more than... [she] can tell."[60] How does this embodied comprehension inform Carr's treatment of the totem pole in her post-1927 paintings? To formulate a response, we must begin with a pre-1914 totem.

Consider *Yalis, Home of the 'Nâmuis* (ca. 1912), which depicts the village of Alert Bay in British Columbia (fig. 6). Created immediately after her return from France, the painting exhibits the post-impressionist palette and broad brushwork Carr had by then adopted. Artistic licence is evident throughout: there is an overall compression of space so that the wings of the Thunderbird-topped totems appear to be touching; non-naturalistic colouring such that the central house front is painted mauve; and an elimination of certain totems for the sake of a more simplified composition (in a contemporary photograph by Edward Curtis, a thinly tapered pole stands just to the right of the entrance to the central house front, roughly where a fourth figure stands behind the arc of women seated in Carr's foreground).

Overall, the canvas is remarkably static and self-consciously composed. The three seated 'Namgis women appear to lack any sense of agency, huddled together and effectively quarantined by obstacles in every direction (even the naked expanse of dirt in the foreground serves this purpose, creating a ring that contains the women and separates the viewer). Pentimenti form brushy haloes around the heads and bodies of the bird carvings that extend diagonally from the nearest Thunderbird and across the roof of the central house front to faintly rendered poles in the upper right corner of the composition. These reworkings underscore how deliberately Carr has composed the painting in order to fit the entire length of the totems within the confines of the canvas. This emphasis on documentary totality—entire poles rendered within village contexts—will be inverted in her post-1927 paintings, which insistently isolate fragments of poles, foregrounding their sculptural relief and scalar ambiguity, and decontextualizing the setting in a manner that mirrors the logic of the model totem. One final detail antithetical to Carr's mature aesthetic is the inclusion of a flagpole between the

fig. 6 Emily Carr, *Yalis, Home of the 'Nâmuis* (Alert Bay, Cormorant Island), ca. 1912. Oil on canvas, 63.5 × 81.28 cm. Collection of the Beaverbrook Art Gallery, Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada, Gift of Lord Beaverbrook, 1959.30. Photo: Beaverbrook Art Gallery.

pair of totems in the upper right quadrant, flying what looks to be a British flag. While the 'Namgis reappropriated such flags as anticolonial subversions, in her late works, Carr would not risk including such intra-pictorial avenues for settler self-identification.[61]

To jump from *Yalis, Home of the 'Nâmuis* to *Base of Kitwancool Pole* (1928) is to visually traverse Carr's lost years (fig. 7). The latter image could not have been made without the artist's practical engagement with craftwork. For Moray, the radical reframing of the totem within this picture "resemble[s] religious icons in their presentation of powerful, frontally posed figures to the viewer."[62] Certainly the figural pairing calls to mind a long history of Madonna and child imagery, dating back to early Christendom, but this alone does not account for the orientation of the pole within the picture plane. Beyond its correspondence with Western religious iconography, the totem in *Base of Kitwancool Pole* resembles Carr's own ceramic totems, which usually depict single figures (such as bears or beavers) resting on prominent, circular bases.

In a photograph of Kate Mather's collection of Carr pottery, two such model totems are visible on the left and right sides of the top shelf of her curio cabinet (fig. 8). By focusing on the base of this Gitxsan pole from Kitwancool, British Columbia (now Gitanyow), and cropping out its remaining length, Carr frames it as a model totem, effectively "shelving" it within the space of the canvas. This is a crucial transformation since, traditionally, full-sized totem poles erected outdoors did not have separate bases, but instead had their uncarved bottom ends buried directly into the ground.[63] In all likelihood, the circular "base" below the figures is actually the uncarved log in the round, which Carr has rendered as a self-contained form that resists the illusion of continuation below ground and thereby echoes the bases of her model totems.[64]

Carr's very title—*Base of Kitwancool Pole*—conflates one base (the lower end of the monumental pole), with the other (the mounting platform of the model totem), further encouraging the viewer to read the painted pole as a ceramic totem. A strong sense of three-dimensionality is lent to the pole by Carr's abstraction of the landscape background into undulating bands of colour. This flattening of illusionistic recession enhances the plasticity and relief of her painted totem, which seems to project into the viewer's space.

In *Queen Charlotte Islands Totem* (1928), Carr repeats this compositional strategy in her depiction of a Haida beaver pole, whose characteristic paired incisors hang over its bottom lip like a tongue (fig. 9). The Haida pole in Carr's watercolour is strikingly similar to the model totem that serves as the shaft for a Carr table lamp (ca. 1924–28) in the Royal British Columbia Museum (fig. 10). With the exception of the chewing stick inserted between the ceramic beaver's forepaws, these totemic beings mirror one another—from the large unblinking eyes and buck-toothed grin down to the cross-hatched tail bracketed by inwardly turned hind limbs. By modelling the form of the painted totem through deeply cast shadow (the beaver's limbs emerge from voids of black pigment), Carr gives the watercolour a sculptural aesthetic that reads like the high relief of the model pole. The artist's fluency in moving between painting and ceramics—and the blurring of these boundaries—is an integral part of her post-1927 totems.

It is through intermedial dialogue that these paintings achieve their remarkable dynamism; namely, their insistence on expanding the souvenir totem into large-format painted images. In *The Poetics of Space* (1958), philosopher Gaston Bachelard offers a useful model for appreciating how the miniature pole animates the scale play in Carr's work. He writes: "It must be understood that values become condensed and enriched in miniature. Platonic dialectics of large and small do not suffice for us to become cognizant of the dynamic virtues of

fig. 7 (left) Emily Carr, *Base of Kitwancool Pole*, 1928. Oil on canvas, 105.41 × 68.58 cm. Collection of Glenbow Museum, 56.2.4, 1955. Photo: Glenbow Museum

fig. 8 (right) Kate Mather's collection of Carr pottery (*The Daily Colonist*, Victoria, BC, November 21, 1948).

fig. 9 (top)
Emily Carr, *Queen Charlotte Islands Totem*, 1928. Watercolour and graphite on paper, 76.2 × 53.8 cm. Collection of Vancouver Art Gallery, Emily Carr Trust, VAG 42.3.97. Photo: Vancouver Art Gallery

fig. 10 (bottom)
Emily Carr, *Table Lamp and Shade*, ca. 1924–28. Ceramic base and painted fabric shade with ceramic ornaments, 30.5 × 25.5 cm. BC Archives, Royal BC Museum, PDP05255. Image courtesy of the BC Archives

miniature thinking.... If a poet looks through a microscope or a telescope, he always sees the same thing.... Tiny and immense are compatible."[65]

This dimensional dynamic imbues the model totem with a power that belies its size, turning these humble objects into portals of monumentality. Consider the scalar oscillations in *Totem and Forest* (1931), which depicts the Tow Hill pole in Haida Gwaii, British Columbia (fig. 11). The hole at the base of the totem, originally the doorway to a house, opens into an orifice within the folds of the forest that envelop it.[66] By obscuring the base of the pole with a mound of verdure, Carr ungrounds the totem so that it appears to float inside the composition. This is a free-standing pole and yet it hovers in the canopy; tremendously large cedars surround the totem, yet their trunks look like twigs beside it. The painting's vertiginous compression and expansion of space and scale also render the totem susceptible to dimensional ambiguity, as if it were a model pole metastasized to nearly four feet in height. Carr's insistent manipulation of scale ensures the viewer has no foothold within the painting. This looming, confrontational quality—the affective ascendancy that Lamoureux connects to modernist interest in the fetish function of non-Western art—can itself be understood as an engagement with the model totem and its epistemological resistance.

Thus far, my analysis of Carr's post-1927 paintings has focused on images that emphasize the hieratic pose of the totem, shelved within

fig. 11 (left) Emily Carr, *Totem and Forest*, 1931. Oil on canvas, 129.54 × 55.88 cm. Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Emily Carr Trust, VAG 42.3.1. Photo: Vancouver Art Gallery

fig. 12 (right) Emily Carr, *The Laughing Bear*, 1941. Oil on paper mounted on plywood, 76.6 × 55.3 cm. Art Gallery of Ontario, Gift from the Estate of R. Fraser Elliott, 2005, 2005/145. Photo: © AGO

pictorial space as though a souvenir pole. *The Laughing Bear* (1941) maintains this aesthetic but forces a radical reorientation. Here, the viewer is not face to face with the totem but contemplating its backside (fig. 12). The title announces affect, yet the viewer does not have access to the bear's facial expression.[67] This disjunction between *seeing* and *reading* is at the core of the model totem pole, whose epistemic intelligence lies "in its rejection of total assimilation, in its resistance to cognitive appropriation despite its material accessibility, its strategic ambiguity and...[transmission of] cultural knowledge."[68] Foregrounding the subversive agency of the model totem dramatically alters our understanding of Carr's formal choices and how they relate to her craft practice (rather than to modernist impulse alone). In their uncanny oscillation between the miniature and the gigantic, the model and the original, the graspable and the ungraspable, these late paintings seem to wrestle with the souvenir pole's apparent legibility and ultimate resistance to settler consumption.

The Laughing Bear features a significant visual double. By positioning the bear post as a "surveyor" of its local landscape, Carr forces the viewer to look at the totem as it gazes out upon the land and visually reclaims it as an

Indigenous space denied to the imperial eye of the settler. Art historian Joseph Koerner, describing the kind of looking that attends such *Rückenfiguren* (figures seen from behind), writes that "their anteriority, expressed as our view of their backs...elicit[s] within us an experience of our own lateness as subjects."[69] This bear post *Rückenfigur* makes explicit the originary presence of Northwest Coast Indigenous communities by forcing settler viewers to visualize and thereby experience their essential belatedness and their necessarily incomplete gaze.

CONCLUSION

Highlighting the role of the model totem in Carr's art reshapes our understanding of the reciprocity between her craft and painterly practices and their broader relationship to Northwest Coast tourism. Throughout her life, Carr remained deeply conflicted about her experiences as a tourist, curio collector, and curio maker, and the model totem powerfully bridges these subject positions. The humble stature of the souvenir pole belies its epistemological complexity and its outsized importance within her oeuvre.

During the lost years, Carr engaged with the model totem as both producer and consumer, developing a multidimensional approach that allowed her to comprehend it from the inside out. She applied this hard-won tacit knowledge in her late totem paintings, which are animated by the tensions of intermediality and the subversive qualities of the souvenir pole. These paintings, so long accounted for through European and Canadian modernism, are revealed to be profoundly entangled with Northwest Coast tourism. Attending to Carr's lost years as artistically formative rather than creatively barren resignifies a long-overlooked period in her life and provides a novel praxiological approach to her mature work. The lost years were never as lost as they have been made to appear.

ENDNOTES

1 Bill Reid, *Solitary Raven: Selected Writings of Bill Reid* (Douglas and McIntyre, 2000), 78.
2 Gerta Moray, *Unsettling Encounters: First Nations Imagery in the Art of Emily Carr* (University of British Columbia Press, 2006), 281.
3 Throughout, I use "Indigenous" and "Native" to refer collectively to the original inhabitants of what is now the Northwest Coast of North America: the First Nations of British Columbia, Canada and, in the United States, the Native peoples of Alaska, Washington, and Oregon. This article focuses on British Columbia and Alaska, since these were the regions where Indigenous communities carved totem poles (the Native Nations of Washington and Oregon did not), and where Carr travelled for her subject matter.
4 Moray, *Unsettling Encounters*, 276–77.
5 Aaron Glass and Aldona Jonaitis, "A Miniature History of Model Totem Poles," in *Carvings and Commerce: Model Totem Poles 1880–1920*, ed. Michael D. Hall and Pat Glascock (Saskatoon: Mendel Art Gallery, 2011), 11.
6 Glass and Jonaitis, "A Miniature History," 11. The long-since disproven theory that totem poles were a post-contact phenomenon is attributed to Canadian anthropologist Marius Barbeau. See Wilson Duff, "Contributions of Marius Barbeau to West Coast Ethnology," *Anthropologica* 6, no. 1 (1964): 63–96; and Julia Roe, "'The Mystic Dragon Beyond the Sea': Ethnographic Fantasy in Marius Barbeau's Depiction of Northwest Coast Indigeneity," *Ascendant Historian* 3, no. 2 (2016): 53–70.
7 Douglas Cole, *Captured Heritage: The Scramble for Northwest Coast Artifacts* (University of Washington Press, 1985), 212.
8 Robert Campbell, *In Darkest Alaska: Travel and Empire Along the Inside Passage* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 49. By the end of the 1890 season, 5,007 sightseers had embarked on the Inside Passage to Alaska.
9 Glass and Jonaitis, "A Miniature History," 11. See also Aaron Glass and Aldona Jonaitis, *The Totem Pole: An Intercultural History* (University of Washington Press, 2010), 59–68.
10 Campbell, *In Darkest Alaska*, 64.
11 Glass and Jonaitis, *The Totem Pole*, 61.
12 Glass and Jonaitis, *The Totem Pole*, 59.
13 Campbell, *In Darkest Alaska*, 49. The cost of a two-to-four-week trip along the Inside Passage was more than one hundred US dollars.
14 Kate Duncan, "1001 Curious Things: Tales from Ye Olde Curiosity Shop," *Columbia: The Magazine of Northwest History* 17, no. 2 (Summer 2003), 18.
15 Glass and Jonaitis, "A Miniature History," 14.
16 Glass and Jonaitis, "A Miniature History," 11, 14.
17 Aaron Glass, "Objects of Exchange: Material Culture, Colonial Encounter, Indigenous Modernity," in *Objects of Exchange: Social and Material Transformation on the Late Nineteenth-Century Northwest Coast*, ed. Aaron Glass (New York: Bard Graduate Center, 2011), 7.
18 In addition to the Potlatch Ban, the most damaging component of this "de-Indianization" legislation was the formation of the government-funded and church-administered Indian residential school system, which subjected Native Northwest Coast children to brutalized "instruction" in settler ways. See Jack Davy, "The 'Idiot Sticks': Kwakwaka'wakw Carving and Cultural Resistance in Commercial Art Production on the Northwest Coast," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 42, no. 3 (2018): 33–35.
19 Davy, "The 'Idiot Sticks,'" 34.
20 Douglas Cole, "Underground Potlatch: How the Kwakiutl kept the faith," *Natural History* 10 (October 1991): 50–53.
21 Davy, "The 'Idiot Sticks,'" 27.
22 The derogatory term "idiot sticks" dates to the early twentieth century and is thought to be of Indigenous origin. It served as a commentary on the proliferation of model totem production among Native peoples – where, as Kwakwaka'wakw artist Doug Cranmer remarked, "any idiot could [now] carve [one]" – while also suggesting that the ultimate "idiot" was the settler consumer who treated these objects as simple tourist art. See Davy, "The 'Idiot Sticks,'" 28–31; and Jennifer Kranmer, *Kesu': The Art and Life of Doug Cranmer* (Douglas and MacIntyre, 2012), 45.
23 Robert St. George, "Ethnographic Things: Objects and Subjects in Haida History," *Ethnologies* 34, no. 1–2 (2012): 20.
24 St. George, "Ethnographic Things," 22.
25 St. George, "Ethnographic Things," 22.
26 Ruth B. Phillips, *Trading Identities: The Souvenir in Native North American Art from the Northeast, 1700–1900* (University of Washington Press, 1998), 74–75.
27 Phillips, *Trading Identities*, 74.
28 Moray, *Unsettling Encounters*, 88.
29 Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (University of California Press, 1999), 1.
30 MacCannell, *The Tourist*, 13.
31 Before its rediscovery in 2014, select illustrations from Carr's journal had been copied by historian James K. Nesbitt in 1950. See Jay Stewart and Peter Macnair, "Reconstructing Emily Carr in Alaska," *Emily Carr: New Perspectives on a Canadian Icon*, ed. Marnie Butvin and Denise Sirois (Douglas & McIntyre, 2006), 13.
32 Stewart and Macnair, "Reconstructing Emily Carr," 14.
33 Stewart and Macnair, "Reconstructing Emily Carr," 27.
34 Emily Carr, *Sister and I in Alaska* (Vancouver: Figure 1 Publishing, 2014), 1.
35 Carr, *Sister and I in Alaska*, 35.
36 Stewart and Macnair, "Reconstructing Emily Carr," 29.
37 Campbell, *In Darkest Alaska*, 9, 59.
38 Moray, *Unsettling Encounters*, 65.
39 See Moray, *Unsettling Encounters*, 65, for a reproduction of this model totem.
40 Emily Carr, *The Complete Writings of Emily Carr*, ed. Doris Shadbolt (Douglas and McIntyre, 1997), 439.
41 Phillips, *Trading Identities*, 74; Russell W. Belk, "The Double Nature of Collecting: Materialism and Anti-Materialism," *Entnofoor* 11, no. 1 (1998): 13–14.
42 Phillips, *Trading Identities*, 74.
43 Campbell, *In Darkest Alaska*, 182.
44 Carr, *The Complete Writings*, 25–26.
45 Quoted in Doris Shadbolt, *The Art of Emily Carr* (University of Washington Press, 1979), 76.
46 Quoted in Moray, *Unsettling Encounters*, 65.
47 Quoted in Moray, *Unsettling Encounters*, 307.
48 MacCannell, *The Tourist*, 162.
49 MacCannell, *The Tourist*, 164.
50 MacCannell, *The Tourist*, 164.
51 Johanne Lamoureux, "The Other French Modernity of Emily Carr," in *Emily Carr: New Perspectives on a Canadian Icon*, ed. Charles C. Hill, Johanne Lamoureux, and Ian M. Thom (Douglas & McIntyre, 2006), 47.
52 Lamoureux, "The Other French Modernity," 47–50.
53 Lamoureux, "The Other French Modernity," 45–50.
54 Moray, *Unsettling Encounters*, 278.
55 Bill Holm, *Northwest Coast Indian Art: An Analysis of Form* (University of Washington Press, 1965), 35.
56 Carr, *The Complete Writings*, 439.
57 N. de Bertrand Lugrin, "Women Potters and Indian Themes," *Maclean's*, March 15, 1927, 78–79.
58 Carr, *The Complete Writings*, 439.
59 Carr, *The Complete Writings*, 439.
60 Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (Doubleday, 1966), 4.
61 Jonaitis and Glass, *The Totem Pole*, 54.
62 Moray, *Unsettling Encounters*, 329.
63 James Hay, "Creating Steel Mounts for the Exhibition of Totem Poles," *Journal of the Canadian Association for Conservation*, no. 36 (2011): 29.
64 I am grateful to Ellen Carrlee, conservator at the Alaska State Museum, Juneau, for her insight into the structure and carving of full-sized totem poles.
65 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Beacon Press, 1958; repr., 1994), 150, 172.
66 James Hart, "The Tow Hill Pole: Emily Carr's *Totem and Forest*," in *From the Forest to the Sea: Emily Carr in British Columbia*, ed. Sarah Milroy and Ian Dejardin (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 2014), 65–67.
67 Lamoureux, "The Other French Modernity," 49.
68 Glass and Jonaitis, "A Miniature History," 18.
69 Joseph Koerner, *Caspar David Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape* (Yale University Press, 1990), 233.