

## Book Reviews

*Coast Salish Essays*, by Wayne Suttles. Vancouver: Talonbooks; Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1987. Pp. xiv, 320; index, illus., end-maps, appendix, bibliography. \$29.95 cloth; \$15.95 paper.

Among the sixteen articles in *Coast Salish Essays*, readers will find both familiar, previously published works from the period between 1952 (e.g., "Notes on Coast Salish Sea-Mammal Hunting") and 1976 (e.g., "Productivity and its Constraints — a Coast Salish Case") and less well-known papers presented at conferences over the past thirty years but not previously published. Suttles arranges the articles thematically into four topical areas and then chronologically, so that they can be read from a topical perspective if desired. No matter how they are approached, the essays are a useful and long-needed collection by one of the most distinguished ethnographers on the Northwest Coast.

Suttles identifies three central concerns, beyond a common ethnographic focus on the central Coast Salish, that lend unity to the pieces:

First, . . . ethnographic description . . . with the goal of presenting the insider's view of the culture . . . [and seeing] how the whole thing works[;] second, . . . the reconstruction of culture history, prehistoric and historic . . . looking for something beyond cultural determinism[;] and third, . . . [dispelling] a stereotyping of 'the Coast Salish' as culturally homogeneous and a pale reflection of the 'real Northwest Coast' to the north. (p. xii)

As Michael Kew points out in the Foreword, Suttles employs a strong Boasian heritage of reliance on fieldwork and "attention to linguistics" (p. x) with a cultural ecological interest in evolution and adaptation (p. x) and a sense of historical reality to deal with these three concerns. For example, one of Suttles' strongest contributions to anthropology in general and Coast Salish ethnography in particular is his success in using linguistics in the service of ethnography. He really does use native language to get inside a culture, both for the insider's view and so that we can understand how sub-systems of that culture work. In "Affinal Ties, Subsistence, and

Prestige among the Coast Salish," Suttles uncovers a series of key Halkomelem terms, including one which he translates as 'co-parent-in-law.' 'Co-parent-in-law' is conceptually related to an array of other native terms that together define an exchange of food for wealth among affines in distant villages. This exchange, Suttles finds, is an adaptive strategy that "plays an important part in the Native socio-economic system . . . [as a] link in the relationship between food, wealth, . . . high status" and, ultimately, the Coast Salish potlatch. Suttles has isolated native terms that are indeed keys, unlocking cultural doors and allowing us an enhanced understanding of process and pattern within central Coast Salish culture. Similarly, in a less well-known paper, "Time and Tide," he links native terminology for describing the characteristics of Pacific tides to location of resource sites and calendrical calculations. Both of these papers also demonstrate a cultural ecological perspective and are models of culture historical reconstruction.

Another of Suttles' major contributions is his unwavering affirmation of Coast Salish culture as anthropologically significant in its own right. Two articles illustrate particularly clearly this ethnographic uniqueness. In "Productivity and its Constraints — a Coast Salish Case," Suttles acknowledges that while carvings of high artistic quality were produced in the central Coast Salish area, "in historic times the area to the south of the Kwakiutl seems to have produced far less carving and painting than the area to the north" (p. 100). Further, he attempts to respond to Bill Reid, who, after viewing

. . . an especially fine Coast Salish spindle whorl . . . asked, in effect, when they could produce such a well designed and executed piece as this, why did the Coast Salish not produce more such pieces and more kinds of art? (p. 100)

Effectively dismissing the notion that Coast Salish art is a recent diffusion from the Wakashan (Kwakiutl or Nootka) area, Suttles examines the relationship between art and sources of power and prestige among the Central Coast Salish. He presents a convincing case of cultural reconstruction to show that concrete artistic expression and productivity, in the form of carving and painting, was constrained and restricted by a preoccupation among the wealthy with secrecy and the need to conceal from others even visual images of sources of supernatural power.

The second article, "Spirit Dancing and the Persistence of Native Culture among the Coast Salish" (pp. 199-208), recreates from fieldnotes a winter dance that Suttles attended in 1960 at Kuper Island, near Nanaimo. He emphasizes that the elaborate ceremonial gathering is not unusual or

infrequent on modern Coast Salish reserves, and he remarks that in spite of prolonged contact with white urban society,

... and the almost complete disappearance of Salish material culture, Salish ceremonial life is flourishing. Moreover, ... nothing like this degree of constant activity has been reported for any other part of the Northwest Coast in recent years. This calls for an explanation. What does this Coast Salish ceremonialism really consist of? ... [How] much of it is a direct survival from aboriginal culture, how much is revival, and how much is something newly developed in response to modern conditions? And why should any Native ceremonialism at all persist so vigorously among the Coast Salish here and not among any other group in the area? (p. 203)

Again, Suttles turns to reconstruction of culture history to contrast the modern spirit dance with its aboriginal counterpart and to find clues for its persistence. He points out that the modern version is actually an “uneasy ... alliance between two separate Native institutions” (p. 206) — the spirit dance and the potlatch. Here, his explanation for this “modern melange” (p. 207) becomes harder to follow and not entirely satisfactory. He accounts for the disappearance of the aboriginal form of the potlatch, usually held in late spring or early autumn, in terms of not only its legal suppression and the active opposition of Christian missionaries, but also the decline of the native economic system and the emergence of summer wage work that made winter ceremonies more practical.

On the other hand, Suttles attributes the persistence of spirit dancing to a nativistic expression of Indian identity. More important,

spirit dancing has become the vehicle for the survival of a good deal of potlatch behavior, if not the total potlatch ... [and] this survival implies more cultural isolation than casual observation would suggest. (p. 208)

Suttles seems to be suggesting that the original potlatch has disappeared as a complex socioeconomic adaptation to variation in the physical environment (p. 29) but that the religious and social aspects of the potlatch have survived, embedded in spirit dancing ceremonies, because the Central Coast Salish are not as affected by the proximity of white settlement and the impact of wage economy as we might think. Yet he is puzzled by the survival of some economic aspects of the old potlatch complex, and his tongue-in-cheek suggestion that the Central Coast Salish simply haven't acquired “the good Western virtues of banking, budgeting, and being miserly ...” (p. 208) is acknowledged as unsatisfying. What Suttles apparently does not consider is that the aboriginal environment which he describes with such insight in “Variation in Habitat and Culture on the Northwest Coast” has also changed since the coming of the Europeans.

The habitat of the Central Coast Salish now includes a new cultural dimension — the political economy of white society. Resources in that environment are still predictable, if highly inadequate, in some cases — access to and availability of government transfer payments, for example — and highly unpredictable in others, where employment and unemployment are concerned. Poverty, in the form of restricted and unstable access to adequate income, housing, and other essential resources is well documented for modern Northwest Coast reserves. Kin still help each other out on a daily basis and in times of emergency. When unexpected sources of wealth become available, recipients can put down a new dancer in the big house and potlatch, thereby enhancing their prestige by redistributing both cash and food resources, and ensuring that reciprocity will continue.

Aside from this lapse into cultural determinism, Suttles' work is a joy to read. He writes elegantly and cogently, whether applying his ethnographic skills to an impressive and fruitful analysis of the Sasquatch debate (pp. 73-99) or to more traditional topics.

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*Shattered Images: Dialogues and Meditations on Tsimshian Narratives,*  
by John Cove. Ottawa: Carleton University Press. Pp. 318.

Surprisingly, nothing formal had to be done other than a mental clearing. It was as if Cannibal was there to be reflected without any need to do visualizations or to engage in other beings. I experienced a pure emotion similar to an all-encompassing rage. The closest western metaphor I can think of to describe it would be like Freud's depiction of Id, so basic and indiscriminate that, if unrepressed, could swamp social and cultural overlays.

Rage and self were inseparable. (p. 273)

Thus Cove begins a description of his meditations on the Tsimshian Cannibal initiate, as known from texts collected by Henry Tate (and published by Boas) and Marius Barbeau and William Beynon (preserved in the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Ottawa). Earlier in this densely written book he describes trips to a Tsimshian shamanic reality experienced during meditations on shamanic texts and a reconstructed shaman's mirror (so-called; that shamans used these handled ground slate objects is conjectural; that they are mirrors at all seems unlikely insofar as they are poor reflecting surfaces, even when greased). Cove wet the object he used with water which, as it evaporated, produced a tunnel image through which