

## Culture



**Wayne Suttles. *Coast Salish Essays*, Vancouver: Talonbooks and Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1987. 334 pages, \$29.95 (cloth)**

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purpose and even weather. The "ethnography of communication" school provides an extreme contrast to much current writing in symbolic, semiotic and humanistic anthropology, in which the goal seems to be to present the minimum of data with the maximum of free-association theorizing. Even more important is the careful attention paid in Darnell and Foster's collection to the dialectic between structure and practice. These papers are well ahead, conceptually, of the current French attacks in the name of "practice" on the old "structuralist" agenda. Since Boas, the American text-and-context tradition has been aware that practice must be structured and that structures are negotiated, and must be constantly renegotiated, in practice. Add to this the direct concern with experience as primary, most explicit in the Tedlocks' phenomenology, and we have a sophisticated body of theory, method and approach that is far too little recognized

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Wayne SUTTLES. *Coast Salish Essays*, Vancouver: Talonbooks and Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1987. 334 pages, \$29.95 (cloth).

By James McDonald  
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*Coast Salish Essays* represents a remarkable accomplishment, a retrospective look at the professional life of one of the premier ethnologists of the Northwest Coast. The sixteen essays presented in this volume, most of which were previously published, are a self-portrait of four decades of ethnographic observation that significantly revised our understanding of the area.

The collection is consolidated by the common theme of cultural change and adaptation, both pre-historic and historic. Suttles identifies three specific concerns that unify the essays (xii). The first is for rigorous ethnographic description that presents the insider's view as well as the total picture. The second is for the reconstruction of cultural history, but as something determined by more than cultural influences. Suttles left the Boasian tradition in favour of a cultural ecology that emphasized Salish adaptations to their physical as well as their cultural environment. The third concern is the heterogeneity of Coast Salish cultures and languages, which Suttles defends as being as vigorous and as worthy of admiration as any developments further north. His clear and exacting treatment of this complexity demonstrates his command of the Salish material and his grasp of the entire Northwest Coast. .pn2

The book has four sections. The first deals with models of historic social systems. In an essay on private knowledge, morality, and social class, Suttles suggests the Salish had distinct classes. He explores the relationship between their class system and Salish notions of morality. He postulates four operative factors forming the lower class: private ownership of resources, limitations in inheritance, slavery, and the social function of private knowledge and moral training.

The second essay examines the nature of the potlatch in the context of Northwest Coast social structure as a total socioeconomic system. By looking at the integration of affinal ties, subsistence and prestige, especially between communities, Suttles reveals the crucial adaptive role of the potlatch as a regulating mechanism redistributing wealth. This paper questions our understanding of the variation in habitat and culture on the Northwest Coast. He addresses this subject further in another chapter, to demonstrate that the coast is not uniformly rich and dependable, but characterized by a variety of types of resources, local diversity, seasonal variation in resource availability, and year to year fluctuation in resource abundance. He discusses the environmental adaptiveness of the most important features of the culture, and examines the correspondence between cultural and environmental differences along the coast.

Taking another approach in a chapter on coping with abundance, Suttles argues the richness of the coastal habitat is not sufficient explanation for the cultural development. He isolates other necessary conditions, including features in the technology and labour organization, social mechanisms for the redistribution of people and resources, and mechanisms in the value system for the motivation of the people. Extending these interpretations, he suggests the value placed on prestige distinguishes the Northwest Coast from other nonagrarian societies following a hunting ideology or nomadic lifestyle.

The second section focuses on knowledge, belief and art in the historic culture of the central Coast Salish. A conference paper on Halkomelem modes of classification examines Salish linguistic categories and discusses implications for thinking about and speaking about time and space. Next, Suttles goes on the cultural track of the Sasquatch, as he presents regional data on Salish beliefs concerning this creature. This chapter again looks at Salish categories for the world around them, to examine why they have a belief in the Sasquatch, and what that belief can tell us about the Salish. Another chapter discusses productivity and constraints in

Salish art. Looking at the meaning the art had in terms of knowledge and beliefs, Suttles suggests that productivity was circumscribed by the role the vision quest had in art, and by cultural limitations on the representation of these visions. The resulting relationship between art, power, and prestige motivated a different artistic expression than further north.

The third section draws attention to Salish adaptation and survival in the face of the European invasion. Here Suttles presents some of his work on understanding the persistence of old traditions and the invention of new ones. The section begins with an inquiry into how the structure of a culture influences the incorporation of new ideas. The case is the early diffusion of the potato among the Salish. His presentation has significance for our general understanding of the relationship between food gathering and cultivation, particularly the origins of agriculture.

Two chapters further examine the incorporation of new ideas, this time into spiritual areas. Suttles reconstructs the history of the spread of the messianic Plateau prophet dance among the Salish, and suggests that its appeal was not due to social deprivation or disruption caused by the fur trade. Rather, it fulfilled needs internal to Salish society. He traces how the Salish reinterpreted and compromised elements of the native and Christian belief systems. This theme is again pursued in a conference paper on recent spirit dancing and the persistence of native culture in the realm of ceremonialism. As he describes a 1960 winter dance, Suttles is looking for the relationship between modern ceremonies and aboriginal culture. How and why do native ceremonies continue to exist? This question is posed again when he challenges our understanding of native communities as self contained units. He shows these resulted from assimilation pressures and reconstructs a dynamic alternative, situating the communities as one type of social grouping embedded in a regional structure. Today this aboriginal intervilage social continuum is preserved, under a veneer of reserve assimilation, in Salish ceremonials at the winter dances and the summer sports events.

The final section draws inferences about the pre-history of the Northwest Coast. His descriptive notes on Coast Salish sea mammal hunting compare the Salish with the Nuuchah-nulth and Inuit, to discuss their cultural history in the context of hunting practices. Another chapter identifies anthropological prejudices in the theory, going back to Boas, that represents the Salish as recently emerging on the coast from the Plateau where they acquired their

areal characteristics from Wakashan predecessors.

Suttles' Boasian training surfaces when he explicitly employs linguistic means for anthropological ends, such as the tracing of historical patterns. He takes the evidence of Northwest Coast linguistic history to argue further for a continuity model of development on the coast and against the theory of successive migrations.

*Coast Salish Essays* is an excellent and highly readable source for an ethnographically complex area. It is also an excellent reference for ecology papers that contributed to a dynamic period in the history of anthropological thought. On both accounts, it will be useful for professionals and students alike.

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Bernard SELLATO, *Nomades et sédentarisation à Bornéo: Histoire économique et sociale*, Paris, Editions de l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences sociales, 1989. 293 pages.

Par Jérôme Rousseau  
Université McGill

Cette étude se penche sur les processus de transformations sociales des chasseurs-cueilleurs de Bornéo, en particulier leur adoption de l'agriculture. Nous avons ici une contribution majeure à l'ethnologie de Bornéo, dont le secteur nomade était jusqu'à maintenant assez peu connu. Sellato a passé plusieurs années au centre de Bornéo, et il a fait de longs séjours avec divers groupes de chasseurs-cueilleurs, ainsi qu'avec des agriculteurs dont les ancêtres étaient nomades. Dans sa thèse ("Les nomades forestiers de Bornéo et la sédentarisation: Essai d'histoire économique et sociale", EHESS, 1986), dont cet ouvrage est une version abrégée et remaniée, Sellato a décrit de façon minutieuse les fortunes des Bukat, Kereho Busang, Punan Murung, Punan Ratah et Aoheng. Ici, les deux premiers groupes servent à illustrer les processus de transformation vers une économie sédentaire. En deux chapitres distincts, il présente une reconstruction historique des Bukat et des Kereho Busang, à partir de 1800. Dans les deux cas, des cartes détaillées nous permettent d'en suivre les migrations. Dans un deuxième moment, il documente les changements au sein de ces deux groupes. Le dernier chapitre présente d'abord une analyse générale du système social des chasseurs-cueilleurs de Bornéo; il se penche ensuite sur le processus de sédentarisation. Ce chapitre de synthèse ne se limite pas aux Bukat et Kereho Busang; il bénéficie du travail colossal que Sellato a effectué dans ses études de terrain chez les autres nomades et anciens nomades de Bornéo.