

Revealing While Concealing:
The Dilemma of Cross-Cultural Sharing in Stó:lo Interpretive Centres
A Report on the UVic Ethnohistory Fieldschool

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Preface

This paper was prepared as part of the University of Victoria Ethnohistory Fieldschool held at Stó:lo Nation, Sardis, B.C. for a four-week period during May/June of 1998. I would like to acknowledge and thank the individuals who assisted me in this research, especially those who granted me interviews and were so generous in sharing their time and knowledge; these were Teresa Carlson, Darwin Douglas Jr., Katherine Grant, Helen Joe, Shirley Leon, Sonny McHalsie, Frank Malloway, Gwen Point, and Jeff Point. My gratitude also goes to the other staff members at the Longhouse Extension Program and Xáy:tem Longhouse Interpretive Centre who made me feel welcome and shared so much with me. I would also like to acknowledge the staff of Stó:lo Nation, and in particular Dave Smith, for their considerable assistance, as well as the course instructors John Lutz and Keith Carlson.

Today, those doing leading-edge work in the field of ethnohistory are moving in the direction of “writing themselves in” to their publications so that readers can have some insight into the author and the context of the research, and thereby presumably be better able to position and evaluate the product. In addition, there is a shift towards an emphasis on process rather than product. Such trends are beautifully exemplified by works such as Julie Cruikshank’s Life Lived Like a Story and Keith Basso’s Wisdom Sits in Places. I believe that these new directions are very important developments in the field and as an aspiring ethnohistorian, I hope someday to be able to do justice to them. Although my personal preference would be to attempt to write this entire paper with a focus on process rather than product, I recognize that this may not be entirely appropriate to the needs of Stó:lo Nation and would require more time and skill than I currently

possess. Therefore, my compromise will be to “write myself in” and discuss the experiential process of this research in an introductory section that is separated from a more concretely oriented discussion of my findings. However, because I feel that the true value of my research lies just as heavily, if not more so, in the experiential realm, I intend to devote a significant portion of my paper to my observations about the process of doing ethnohistory as a result of the month spent at Stó:lo Nation.

To begin with, I am a Masters student in the History Department of the University of Victoria undertaking my first graduate course. My interest is primarily in the area of Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relations in Canada and I have taken a number of courses on First Nations-related topics, i.e., in the areas of history, anthropology, history in art, and linguistics. I am of Russian descent and of Doukhobor heritage. I have had an interest in First Nations cultures from a young age, despite a lack of direct experience with them until my relocation to the West Coast approximately 10 years ago. The reasons for my interest in this area are varied and somewhat complex, however, I will spare the reader any significant treatise on the subject. Suffice it to say that there are a number of historical, cultural, and spiritual similarities between First Nations and Doukhobor cultures that facilitate my being able to relate to at least certain aspects of the cultures and struggles of today’s First Peoples. I believe that growing up as a member of a minority culture in Canada has given me a certain degree of insight into that experience, as well as a desire to seek just solutions for people who have been disadvantaged by their position vis-à-vis the “dominant” culture.

It is clear that we are at a watershed in British Columbia’s history in regards to addressing the issue of Aboriginal rights. At the same time, there appears to be a

considerable lack of understanding of First Nations cultures, beliefs, world views, and history on the part of the non-Aboriginal majority in this province. It is my belief that a better understanding of the above would facilitate more speedy and equitable negotiations and outcomes, and ultimately more satisfactory and respectful relationships for both groups. I also think that there is room for people on both sides of the Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal culture gap to be working on bridges to span that chasm. This has led to an interest on my part in representations of First Nations people in a variety of mediums including early ethnographies and popular books, as well as in museums. I am also interested in educational initiatives that strive to promote understanding through cross-cultural sharing. For these reasons, I chose to conduct my research on issues of representations of Stó:lo people.

My initial intention was to look at how Stó:lo self-representation had changed over the last century with a focus on an important cultural symbol, the sxwayxwey mask. I had also hoped to interview members of the community as to why they believed attitudes towards self-representation had changed over time. In the early part of this century, displays of the sxwayxwey mask, regalia, and associated performance could be seen conducted outdoors, and the presence of non-Aboriginal people and photography were permitted. Today, however, the sxwayxwey mask is considered to be a highly sacred item which, in the opinion of many, should not be seen by those outside the culture, written about, or photographed. My intent had not been to discuss any of the particulars of the use of the mask or its spiritual aspects, but merely to attempt to explore how and why attitudes towards its presentation had changed over the last hundred years or so. Sometime after commencing my archival research on this topic, however, I had

conversations with several individuals, in particular Sonny McHalsie, who expressed that some people could be offended by my even bringing up the topic of the *sxwayxwey*. This led me to the conclusion that attempting to focus my paper on historical changes in self-representation, which would unavoidably have to include the *sxwayxwey*, was not an appropriate choice. Since we were invited into the community to conduct research that the people, or at least the Stó:lo Nation government desired, I did not want to be engaging in a study that could be thought disrespectful to the beliefs of any community members. I therefore elected to change my focus and explore more general attitudes toward current Stó:lo representation and the cross-cultural sharing that was occurring in Stó:lo interpretive centres, including opinions about presentations of the *sxwayxwey* mask only if they were offered. I identified a number of issues on the topic of representation such as the perceived goals and values of cross-cultural sharing, the identification of images central to Stó:lo identity, the use of these images versus those of a pan-Indian nature, attitudes towards sharing aspects of spiritual or sacred concepts in both Stó:lo and non-Stolo institutions, the role of “private knowledge” and secrecy in Stó:lo culture, etc.

While using questions about these issues as a framework, I also attempted not to direct the interviews too strongly so that people could raise issues that I had not considered or that they felt were of importance. This is in fact what occurred. While I gathered a great deal of information on the topics I raised, almost every individual I interviewed brought up the issue of cultural loss, and often spoke of it in terms that were very personal. As I found this to be a very compelling and telling issue I elected to write

this paper in part on how cultural losses have impacted the way Stó:lo interpretive centres function today.

Due to the modification of my initial topic, the content of this paper is not as directly historical as first planned. Rather than focusing on how self-representations have changed over time, it examines current practices and how these have been influenced by “traditional” cultural beliefs such as private knowledge and secrecy, as well as historical events such as the culture loss caused largely by the residential school system. Although this was not my original intent, I believe that conducting good fieldwork means being flexible and open to new directions rather than rigidly adhering to preconceptions that may not be workable. This can lead to results that may not satisfy one’s original goal, but that are nonetheless very valuable. Such flexibility of purpose also allows for those being interviewed to play a greater role in directing the research towards avenues that are most meaningful to them and thereby restoring the power balance to a certain degree.

Methodology

The intention of this course was to gather material from both archival sources and oral interviews to explore a topic that Stó:lo Nation staff had identified as being of interest. Although historians are accustomed to working with archival materials, the process of working with oral sources presents some unique opportunities and challenges.

The following is not meant to be an exhaustive list of the strengths and benefits of using oral sources, but it does highlight some of the key contributions. Working with oral sources allows us to gather and explore historical information that may not otherwise be available to us, as oral histories have often not been previously captured in textual form. In the current circumstance, because some First Nations Elders may not be literate,

or at least not accustomed to communicating in a written medium, the gathering of oral histories allows us to hear the voices of individuals who have not typically been heard before in more mainstream versions of history. Incorporating previously unheard voices is a significant contribution to a more balanced view of the past. This method also allows us to capture unique memories that might otherwise be lost forever. In addition, we are able to hear these memories presented in the individual's own words, which can shed considerable light on world views and new perspectives of which we may otherwise be unaware. Also, by synthesizing a variety of oral narratives on a particular subject, we may be able to present a body of knowledge or conclusion that was not previously evident. Finally, the use of oral history introduces a somewhat more "human" element into what can sometimes be a rather impersonal enterprise. Hearing (or reading) the words of someone recounting specific events and times and how they were affected by these lends a richness, depth, and humanity to the process of interpreting history.

There are also a number of challenges to be faced when using oral sources. The following are the ones that I believe factored into this particular piece of research. There is a subtle, yet real, power dynamic that needs to be taken into account whenever a member of a "dominant culture" (for want of a better term) interacts with and attempts to gather information from members of a "minority culture". The results of such a dynamic, including the use of a tape-recorder, may serve to intimidate those being interviewed to a certain extent, which can result in the interviewee feeling less than completely open and at ease. In this particular instance, this effect was likely ameliorated somewhat by the fact that the majority of my sources were not unaccustomed to being interviewed since this work was conducted in an already highly-researched area. The downside of this fact

was that some people may have been less than completely enthusiastic or engaged in talking about material that had perhaps become somewhat repetitious to them. Another difficulty was the short time-frame of the fieldschool, which did not allow for any significant establishment of relationships with those interviewed, and this was problematic because the element of trust can play a major role in the amount and quality of information shared. In addition, members of the fieldschool were not staying in an actual Stó:lo community, but rather on Stó:lo Nation government grounds. This circumstance, in addition to the lack of any form of introduction to, or liaison with the community, made obtaining interviews from those not associated with the interpretive centres but having opinions to offer on self-representation more difficult. Thus, this study relies heavily on the opinions of individuals already working in the area of cross-cultural sharing, and there may be differing points of view not heard from.

The nature of my topic must also be factored into the equation; although modifications had been made, I was still asking in part about the issues of private knowledge and secrecy and the roles of such concepts in Stó:lo culture. Although I attempted to be respectful and somewhat circumspect in my questions, these are none the less private issues by definition. There was no doubt a fine line that those interviewed were made to walk when discussing certain issues with a stranger, precisely because there are some matters, particularly spiritual ones, that are considered to be inappropriate to discuss with those outside the culture. It is also possible that I may have inadvertently offended some people by even broaching certain issues, thereby further limiting what they were willing to share with me, although I was not consciously aware of having done so.

Again, because of the nature of the topic, there were virtually no primary sources to be found in the Stó:lo Nation archives in regards to the issues of private knowledge or secrecy. Therefore, evidence in regards to these matters is based on secondary sources and the oral interviews which were conducted by myself.

Reflections

There were many valuable lessons learned in the course of conducting this research and reflecting on it after the fact. While many of these lessons are subtle, I believe that they are all important to the process of sensitively gathering and interpreting oral history, particularly within First Nations communities. While some of these observations may seem obvious to those with experience in the field, I mention them here because they were meaningful to my own learning process.

Initially, I was struck by the diversity of opinion that could be found within the community on certain issues. One example was the opposing points of view on whether artifacts should be handled by children. This issue will be described in the body of the paper, however, it appears that the policies of different interpretive centres varied according to the advice and direction that was received from the particular Elders with whom they were associated. On several other issues as well, it appeared that there were a variety of opinions depending on an individual's family background, age, education (both "traditional" and "formal"), personal experience, etc. This diversity of opinion, along with the current split between Stó:lo Nation and Coqualeetza supporters was suggestive to me of a very heterogenous community in many ways. In terms of pursuing oral histories, this fact is significant because it points to the need for a researcher to be aware of the many different points of view that may exist on any given topic, to not be surprised

by this fact, and to perhaps not expect much consensus. It also implies a certain responsibility to attempt to explore and capture a range of viewpoints on a subject from a demographic cross-section of the community.

Perhaps partially as a result of the range of opinions I encountered, when preparing this paper I was struck by the enormous responsibility of attempting to synthesize people's views. For example, at times it was necessary to quote certain statements in a somewhat different context from the original interview, i.e., perhaps by isolating one paragraph in order to compare it with another person's view on the same subject. I can (somewhat sheepishly) admit to having done this in the past with textual sources, not without care, but certainly with less compunction. My excuse for my more cavalier attitude towards textual sources (in which I suspect I am not alone) is that I am simply human. I found that there was something quite sobering about the thought of performing the same feats of synthesis with the words of people whom I'd dealt with face to face and who would later be reading the results. I believe the lesson I learned from this was two-fold; the first was that for this researcher, at least, working with oral sources carries with it an imperative to take great care with people's words and stories, partially by virtue of the fact that those interviewed will be reviewing the final product. There are those who might argue that having a direct relationship with one's sources and being conscious of them as members of your audience could potentially adversely affect the objectivity of the research. While this argument may be persuasive to a degree, it is my belief that objectivity is merely an illusion to begin with, as many postmodern theorists have argued. I will credit John Lutz with suggesting to me that perhaps the best we can strive for when writing history is an honest subjectivity. I believe that while having a

heightened sense of responsibility to one's sources may make the writing of history or anthropology somewhat more challenging and thought-inducing, stepping up to the challenge of having our work closely scrutinized by our sources can ultimately make us better historians or anthropologists, as we may be forced to consider the fuller implications of our work.

The second lesson I gleaned from my heightened sense of responsibility towards oral sources is that I should perhaps be striving to apply a similar standard of care when working with textual materials, even though the original writers may never have an opportunity to review my use of their words. An ideal, no doubt, but one I shall try to keep in mind.

A second point which relates to responsibility is that of handling personal and sensitive material. I was surprised by the highly personal and sometimes emotional direction which some of the interviews took (an issue that will be addressed later). While preparing transcripts of the interviews as well as this paper, I was constantly aware that both products would ultimately come to reside in the Stó:lo Nation Archives, potentially available for the use of many. Although one interviewee asked me to delete a specific portion of the interview that touched on sensitive issues, and although I am aware that people will be able to review the transcripts and paper before they are released, I was nonetheless very aware that I had been charged with a trust to deal as respectfully as possible with the stories and opinions of those with whom I spoke.

A final issue that I wish to address involves authority. In this paper, I include information about issues such as private knowledge, secrecy around spiritual matters, and to a small degree, the role of the *sxwayxwey*. It has come to my attention that many

Stó:lo people consider that if an individual writes about something, he or she is claiming understanding and authority about it.¹ Being a stranger to Stó:lo culture, I would not presume to claim that I speak with authority on these subjects in any way. To a small degree I have relied on the writings of other non-Stó:lo people such as Wayne Suttles, Pamela Amoss, Thomas McIlwraith, and Crisca Bierwert. However, I have tried as much as possible simply to gather together a number of Stó:lo people's opinions on these matters, hopefully for the benefit of the Stó:lo community in some way.

I am aware that some of the issues addressed in this paper are sensitive matters and I consider them with great respect. If I have given offense in any way, I apologize - it is only out of my ignorance, not out of disrespect, and I am very open to being educated. I would be very happy to hear from any Stó:lo people who might want to share their comments on this subject, particularly those who are reviewing this paper as a draft.

Introduction

For many years in Canada, virtually all images of Aboriginal peoples were constructed by the “dominant” non-Aboriginal society. Whether in popular books, school curriculums, or museums, First Nations cultures were represented by those outside the culture. Such representations were often based on misconceptions, stereotypes, or simply information or objects removed from their original context and therefore stripped of meaning. In the last decade or so, however, there has been a growing movement among First Nations to present their own images. At a 1988 conference between Aboriginal peoples and museum workers held in Ottawa, participants were told that Native peoples were planning on reconquering their homeland, not through violent means, but through exercising control over their own lives and cultures, most significantly through the interpretation of their own cultures, past and present.² In the ensuing years, many First Nations have begun doing so. Their efforts have included producing their own school curriculum, designing and running their own museums and interpretive centres, writing and producing their own television programs, etc. In these ways, First Nations people are taking the initiative in presenting accurate and relevant images of themselves and their cultures.

Two concrete examples of such initiatives are the U'mista Cultural Centre in Alert Bay and the Kwagiulth Museum and Cultural Centre on Quadra Island, both of which are run by the Kwakwaka'wakw peoples. These centres have chosen to organize their exhibits in two different ways, both of which are meaningful within the context of their culture. The contents of the U'mista Cultural Centre consist of regalia that was obtained under duress by the Canadian government following a large potlatch held in

1921, a time when the ceremony had been declared illegal. The regalia was repatriated by the Kwakwaka'wakw and is now displayed in a big-house setting in the approximate order of its appearance at the original ceremony. The regalia is not specifically labeled, but instead is organized into a procession that has a collective tale to tell. The story is also relayed by means of large cards bearing evocative quotations from Elders, Indian Agents, missionaries, and others about the potlatch.³ Thus, U'mista has created an exhibit that shows regalia in the (simulated) ritual context in which it was originally used. The exhibit is also contextualized in that it recounts stories of the 1921 potlatch and its aftermath, stories of the dynamics of the cultural struggle occurring during that period, and stories of cultural resilience. All of these subtexts are, needless to say, meaningful to the Kwakwaka'wakw people.

The Kwagiulth Museum, which was also the recipient of repatriated regalia from the same potlatch, has chosen to display its material according to family ownership. This is culturally significant because masks “traditionally” represented family rights and histories that were displayed to the community through their presentation at the potlatch.⁴

These are examples of First Nations museums that are sharing their cultural material in ways that are meaningful within the context of their own culture. After visiting these two locations, James Clifford stated that such centres are evidence that, “in some parts of their life dramatically changed, in others profoundly connected to tradition and place, these tribal groups continue to resist, reckon with, adapt to, and ignore the claims of the dominant culture.”⁵ He credits this to political resistance and the crucial resource of a strong, supple tradition.

Stó:lo Nation is presenting its own culture in a number of ways. Along with developing school curriculum that relates to First Nations people, Stó:lo Nation also runs two interpretive centres for area schoolchildren. These centres, the Xáy:tem Longhouse Interpretive Centre and the Longhouse Extension Program allow children to have a hands-on experience with aspects of Stó:lo culture. One of the goals of both centres is to show visitors who the Stó:lo are. Yet, what is perhaps most central to Stó:lo culture and identity are their spiritual beliefs and practices and these matters are considered to be very private and not for public display. Therefore, the goal of cross-cultural sharing and awareness must be balanced with the need to keep certain information private and protected. Such information most typically involves spiritual matters, but also includes certain concrete aspects of the culture as well. This paper will show that a tension exists between the self-identified need for the Stó:lo to be better understood through their own interpretive centres on the one hand, and on the other hand, both a culturally-rooted need to maintain secrecy around certain beliefs and practices, and a historically-rooted need to protect themselves from cultural loss. In addition, it will be shown that decisions about the revelation or concealment of information are made in a manner consistent with certain “traditional” Stó:lo beliefs. This serves to ensure that Stó:lo ways of life are presented in a manner that preserves their integrity and is culturally relevant. The evidence for these conclusions will largely be drawn from interviews held with individuals associated with both centres.

Initially, we will attempt to define the role that secrecy and the protection of knowledge has long played in Stó:lo culture. Traditionally, Stó:lo society was organized into several classes. The largest group was the upper class or “worthy people”, followed

by a smaller group of lower class or “worthless people”, and finally an even smaller class of slaves.⁶ Wayne Suttles has suggested that membership in the upper class was dependent upon links to natural resource sites, inherited privileges, wealth based on practical and ritual knowledge as well as on spirit power, and the possession of private or guarded knowledge.⁷

According to Suttles, private knowledge consisted of “genealogies and family traditions revealing family greatness, gossip about other families demonstrating how inferior they are, instruction in practical matters such as how to quest for the right kind of guardian spirit, secret signals for indicating that someone is of lower-class descent, and a good deal of solid moral training.”⁸ It appears that current usage of the term private knowledge among Stó:lo people may have expanded to include any knowledge that is guarded. One concrete example of private knowledge involves the sxwayxwey complex. The sxwayxwey mask, regalia, and performance were inherited rights owned only by certain families. The efficacy of the performance depended on the private knowledge of ritual words that had inherent power; this power could only be lost through revealing or forgetting the carefully guarded words.⁹

Upper-class people were those who preserved the knowledge of their own heritage and valued it. Lower-class people were those that “don’t have anything and don’t know anything” or who had “lost their history”.¹⁰ Thus, in order for a family to be included among the “worthy people,” it was necessary for them to maintain, guard, and pass on their practical, ritual, and private knowledge, as well as their family privileges.

In addition to guarding private family knowledge, Stó:lo people were expected to maintain secrecy around other issues as well. Secrecy and spirit power have been closely

associated in Coast Salish cultures, perhaps for a number of reasons. One possibility is that secrecy was required to protect an individual's spirit power. Suttles explains that it was considered dangerous for a person to reveal too much about his guardian spirit because this could "spoil" it, that is, cause the power to leave him, make him sick, or be taken away by an enemy.¹¹ Suttles suggests that fears about the consequences of overt, concrete representation of spirit powers may explain the limited range and quantity of artworks produced by the Coast Salish.¹²

Pamela Amoss suggests an alternative purpose of secrecy. She states that rules of secrecy existed surrounding spirit power, its sources, its limitations, and the nature of the arrangements between the power holder and the source of his vision. Amoss proposes that secrecy about an individual's power served to create an impenetrable centre to one's personality that allowed for personal privacy in an otherwise closely packed social group.¹³

Thomas McIlwraith cites issues of privacy as being one of the complicating factors in communicating a unique Stó:lo cultural identity to others. He writes that "Coast Salish images and customs, including stories, songs, and dances, are seldom discussed publicly; they are incorporeal, private property, owned by individuals and families."¹⁴

Finally, Crisca Bierwert explains that winter (or spirit) dancing is protected from outsiders because there is strong apprehension that it will be taken away. On the one hand it is feared that non-Natives will try to adopt it; on the other hand it is feared that they will outlaw it and eliminate the last riches of the Stó:lo people.¹⁵ Such concerns

may be prompted by the possibility of outsiders trying to take control or penetrate to the intimate experience of the group.¹⁶

Thus, the concepts of private knowledge and secrecy seem deeply embedded in Stó:lo culture. Private knowledge may have helped to maintain the status of families of the upper class; losing such knowledge may have helped to facilitate their descent into the lower class. Secrecy about spiritual power may have served to protect the efficacy of an individual's power, to create a sense of personal privacy in a highly interdependent, social community, or to protect the essence of a society's spiritual beliefs from outsiders who would wish to appropriate or eliminate them. Regardless of their underlying purposes, the influence of ideologies regarding private knowledge and secrecy make difficult the task of revealing the essence of Stó:lo culture and identity to others.

The Stó:lo concept of guarded knowledge is not unique to them. However, it may stand in opposition to non-Aboriginal ideas about knowledge. In a study of post-colonial museums, Moira Simpson points out that, "while western societies encourage open display and the transmission of knowledge, it is quite common in traditional societies for sacred objects to have restrictions regarding who may see them and when. Likewise, the transmission of knowledge may be restricted to those with ownership or other recognized rights."¹⁷ Peter Jemison, a Seneca man, expresses it this way, "The concept in the white world is that 'everyone's culture is everyone else's.' That's not really our concept. Our concept is there were certain things given to us that we have to take care of and that you are either part of it or not a part of it."¹⁸

The Sharing of Knowledge

Having established the existence of the concepts of private knowledge and secrecy in Stó:lo society, and having explored to some degree how deeply they may be embedded in the cultural fabric, we will look briefly at the role of sharing in Stó:lo culture. As the Stó:lo had no written language, the oral sharing of information was central to the continuation of the culture. Elders held a large proportion of the cultural knowledge and were expected to pass this on to future generations by sharing it orally with others, particularly their grandchildren. This was largely done through stories called *sxwoxwiyám* (myth-like stories set in the distant past) and *sqwélqwel* (stories relating to experiences in people's lives).¹⁹ The following *sxwoxwiyám* was told by Elder Bertha Peters,

“A person from Chilliwack Landing told me this story. The Great Spirit traveled the land, sort of like Jesus, and he taught these three *si:ya:m*, these three chiefs, how to write their language. And they were supposed to teach everyone how to write their language, but they didn't. So they were heaped into a pile and turned to stone. Because they were supposed to teach the language to everyone, and because they didn't, people from all different lands will come and take all the knowledge from the people - because they wouldn't learn to write they lost that knowledge.”²⁰

Sxwoxwiyám typically have layers of meaning, and one meaning that could certainly be read into the above story is that knowledge that is not shared is in danger of being lost.

This has been only the briefest of glimpses into the place of sharing in Stó:lo culture. However, evidence does suggest that the sharing of knowledge was a necessary and encouraged element of Stó:lo life.

Today, it is recognized that the sharing of information about Stó:lo ways of life must also extend in some degree to the non-Stó:lo inhabitants of the Fraser Valley. We will now turn our attention to the goals of cross-cultural sharing as they are perceived and practiced by those involved with Stó:lo Nation's two interpretive centres.

The Interpretive Centres and their Goals

The Xáy:tem Longhouse Interpretive Centre (hereafter referred to as Xáy:tem) is built at one of the Stó:lo people's spiritual sites. Xáy:tem literally means "sudden transformation"²¹ and refers to a large boulder that, according to Stó:lo oral tradition, contains the life force of three si:ya:m or leaders who were transformed into stone (i.e., the story by Bertha Peters previously quoted). Archeological excavations at this site have revealed evidence of a settlement dating 4,000 to 9,000 years ago.²² Xáy:tem offers hands-on cultural and archeology tours to Grade 4 and Grade 7 children from a number of area school districts, and as a National Historic Site, is also open to the public. Cultural tours include information about the Stó:lo people, their subsistence patterns and technology; the spiritual, historical, and archeological significance of the site; the recounting of Stó:lo oral traditions about the boulder and Mt. Cheam; and hands-on activities including weaving, cedar processing, cedar twining, and wood-working. Archeological tours provide similar background information about the Stó:lo and the site, with more focus on the scientific and archeological aspects. Previously mentioned hands-on activities are replaced by sifting for artifacts; making and working with stone tools; grinding red ochre; examining several artifact, art, and tool stations and participating in activities and questions related to these.

The Longhouse Extension Program (hereafter referred to as the LEP) consists of activities in the Coqualeetza Longhouse and the building called Shxwt'a:selhawtxw (The House of Long Ago and Today). Previous to the establishment of this centre, Stó:lo Nation staff were traveling to individual schools to offer a cultural awareness program for Grade 4 students. The LEP was established in 1993 in order to centralize and expand

this offering.²³ The program consists of introductory information about the Stó:lo people and the centre, and stations that present basket-making, bannock and slahal (bone game), weaving, beadwork, carving, and fishing, the first three of which are hands-on activities. The children also have the opportunity to watch several young dancers perform and to engage in a question and answer period. Pictorial wall panels and accompanying text in Shxwt'a:selhawtxw provide information in regards to various aspects of Stó:lo history, particularly after contact. Topics include the fur trade, gold rush, impact of settlement, smallpox, residential schools, etc.

This has been only a very rudimentary overview of the interpretive centres to give a sense of their offerings, since what is of interest in this study is not so much what specific information is shared, but rather how and why it is shared (or omitted). For a detailed description of the programs offered by the LEP and Xáy:tem, please refer to Lisa Hiwasaki's "Examining Stó:lo Cultural Representations and Interpretations: A Report on the UBC Ethnographic Fieldschool".²⁴

Xáy:tem has a number of formalized objectives; those that relate to cross-cultural sharing are the following: 1) Offer opportunities for cultural interaction and sharing that go beyond traditional heritage interpretation. 2) Increase public knowledge regarding historical and contemporary Stó:lo culture particularly as it relates to environmental and cultural/spiritual heritage. Other stated goals include providing opportunities for Stó:lo cultural activities, providing employment opportunities for Aboriginal youth, conserving and managing the archeological and cultural resources, etc.²⁵ For a complete list of objectives as published by Xáy:tem, see Appendix 1.

Chief Frank Malloway, Cultural Advisor for Xáy:tem, also identifies the following as objectives: making people aware of how long the Stó:lo have been here, teaching children from different communities the ways of the Stó:lo people, giving them living proof of what they are studying in the school curriculum, and giving a sense of pride to Stó:lo children, many of whom don't know their own history.²⁶

In regards to the objectives of the LEP, Coordinator/Curator Teresa Carlson states that one of the main goals is to make people aware of the existence of the Stó:lo, as many are familiar with various First Nations that have received more attention, but are not aware of the Stó:lo people's presence in the Fraser Valley. In addition, it is hoped the program conveys the main idea of who the Stó:lo are as a people; that many "traditional" practices are still being carried on today although they may be slightly altered to fit the times; and that the culture is alive and ongoing and it is not necessary for people to go to museums to see it. Also, it is the program's goal to educate non-Aboriginal children about history and issues such as residential schools since it may be these same children who will be in a position to be making decisions on treaty-related issues in the future.²⁷

Such are the more formal objectives of the programs. However, people also discussed the programs' goals in terms that, if more informal, were certainly more personal and striking. For example, Gwen Point, Education Manager for Stó:lo Nation and originator of the LEP, states that the program was designed to remedy a lack of knowledge in the community about the Stó:lo people. She offers,

"So it's almost like - by omission, that our people are viewed as the stereotypes that are seen, that have been seen on TV over the years, or the historical material that has been written about our people. That whole mentality still exists in the minds of a lot of the people - and it's damaging. And who does it damage?... Our kids are in the schools every day, for the majority of their lifetime, their young

life anyway, and they're the ones that are on the receiving end of that kind of mentality."²⁸

To make her point, Gwen recounts a story about her son when he was in Grade 1. While the family was watching a TV show regarding First Nations people, her son turned to his parents and said, "When I grow up, I'm not going to be an Indian... they're nothing but drunks and dirty and I'm not going to be an Indian when I grow up."²⁹ When his father informed him that he was an Indian and always would be, her son burst into tears.

Almost exactly the same scene was repeated three years later when her daughter started school.

The existence of stereotypes and misconceptions about First Nations people was brought up by several people. For example, in regards to the significance of the age of the longhouse found at Xáy:tem, Frank Malloway says,

"... and a lot of people say that we were not civilized, you know, we didn't have a civilized structure or government or anything, but we always maintained that we did have a government structure and organization - or how would we survive over the 10,000 years without a structure of some sort?"³⁰

When asked what kinds of messages he thought it was important for the children to hear, Jeff Point, an Elder who gives the opening and closing remarks at the LEP, said,

"I always try to bring the message that we're human beings and we like to be treated as such... if we could put in their minds that I ain't an evil person, I ain't the devil... And until we can show them that we're humans, just like them - you know, it has to start with these kids - not with somebody that's already been told, hey those are - those people are just tax burdens, what would they want with their land?"³¹

Finally, Linnea Battel, Executive Manager at Xáy:tem, succinctly states, "When you're raised with racism, underneath it all you want to break that barrier between cultures."³²

In an attempt to break down such barriers and stereotypes, Stó:lo Nation has taken

on the job of presenting its own culture. The importance of this was described by Darwin Douglas, Jr., a Stó:lo Nation employee who once worked as an interpretive guide at

Xáy:tem. Darwin states,

“The museums sort of portray First Nations culture a lot of the time as stagnant... We try and show through our interpretive programs... the continuation of our culture and the continuation of our traditions, even though they’ve changed... We want people to know that we’re still here and we still believe - basically, the way we always have. Our teachings have carried on.”³³

The desire to express a sense of continuity was mentioned frequently. This point was often made in terms of the message that the Stó:lo people are here, always have been, and always will be, and that their teachings have carried on although they may have changed to fit the times. Gwen Point conveys the idea in her own words:

“... to find out that, you know, our people just didn’t do this thousands of years ago, we still do it. We still have basket-weavers, we still have the carvers. Years ago we used the canoes to travel on, today we race them. Years ago we made the baskets as a functional part of our everyday life, today they’re decoration. Years ago we made the weavings for blankets, and now they’re for display items. So that maybe what we do with things has changed, the purpose has changed, and maybe our people have changed as a result of contact, but essentially what teachings we have left [are carried on]...”³⁴

However, for the Stó:lo people, presenting their own culture may not be as straightforward as someone looking in from the outside might assume. For indeed, many Stó:lo beliefs and traditions are very much alive, and although they may have evolved to fit today’s circumstances, they can be found informing many of the presentation decisions made by Xáy:tem and the LEP.

The Effects of Cultural Beliefs

It appears to be a widely held opinion among Stó:lo people that is appropriate to share certain types of cultural information with others, but very inappropriate to share others. Such beliefs appear to be informed by cultural ideologies regarding private

knowledge and secrecy surrounding spiritual matters. Two images that will not be found in Stó:lo interpretive centres today are those that refer to the sxwayxwey mask and the winter dance (as well as the regalia and performances associated with these). The sxwayxwey and winter dance are central to Stó:lo spiritual life and are considered to be sacred and very private matters.

As explained previously, the sxwayxwey is an inherited right of particular families, and its efficacy is related to the guarded knowledge of ritual words. Thus, the sxwayxwey complex is an example of private knowledge that was likely related to a family's status (and may still be). Today, many, if not most Stó:lo people believe that the sxwayxwey should not be written about or photographed; some believe that the Stó:lo Nation Archives should not have pictures of the sxwayxwey in its collections. In previous times, however, the sxwayxwey was seen in outdoor performances attended by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and a significant number of photographs of such occasions can be found in archival collections. A 1928 film by Harlan Smith entitled "The Coast Salish Indians of B.C." shows a man in sxwayxwey mask and regalia dancing on a blanket for the camera. A video of the original film was played at the opening of Shxwt'a:selhawtxw several years ago; it was thought that this would be an interesting addition to the event because it showed original film footage of Stó:lo people spinning, weaving, etc. in the "traditional" way. However, an individual who had rights to the mask became very upset when the sxwayxwey footage appeared, and the video was pulled immediately.³⁵

It is ironic, however, that although a Stó:lo interpretive centre cannot display even a few seconds of film footage of a sxwayxwey mask, non-Stó:lo museums have enjoyed

the ability to display the *sxwayxwey* for some time. The UBC Museum of Anthropology displayed several *sxwayxwey* masks for a number of years. Recently, however, they removed these masks from public view at the request of the Musqueam Coast Salish people who took exception to their display. Somewhat surprisingly, the Langley Centennial Museum currently contains a full-sized mannequin wearing the *sxwayxwey* mask and regalia. Albert “Sonny” McHalsie, community leader and Cultural Advisor for Stó:lo Nation, states that although a number of Stó:lo people are aware of this display, there has been no significant movement to remove it as yet.³⁶

Similarly, no information or images regarding the winter dance are found at *Xáy:tem* or the LEP, although for somewhat different reasons. While the *sxwayxwey* mask is considered to be a form of private knowledge that belongs only to certain families, the winter dance is protected by the secrecy that has surrounded Coast Salish spirit power perhaps for millennia. Those involved with the winter dance are not allowed to discuss their training, initiation, or the nature of their power. The reasons for protection of spirit power are no doubt varied and complex and cannot be fully explored here, nor am I at all qualified to do so. However, Frank Malloway explains that,

“... if you expose things too much, everything - the only word I got for it is watered down, you know, it loses its strength. It’s the same as the Elders that have been given secrets of medicine that help people. You know, you can cure illness with a certain tea - and if you tell people what it’s made of, it loses its potency, it loses its power, and that’s the same as the spirit dancing. You tell too much about it - you tell what’s going to happen to you, and what you feel like when you’re under the trance of the spirits - you know, it’s going to get weak. It’s going to get watered down - diluted.”³⁷

Although culturally appropriate, from the point of view of cross-cultural awareness, it is rather paradoxical that *sxwayxwey* and the winter dance, two areas that give the Stó:lo an identifiable cultural persona, cannot be openly shared with outsiders.³⁸

There are those, however, who would like to see information about these practices shared in a limited way. For example, Sonny McHalsie states,

“Sometimes I think that some people even get offended if there’s even mention of *sxwayxwey* or winter dance - and I think those are such important aspects of our history that they need to be mentioned, and we need to look at those two areas and try to identify just how far can we go into talking about it ... and still retain the importance of it... I’m not sure how to draw the lines there - but I think the *sxwayxwey* is so important to us that it needs to be shared so that people can realize that it’s there - and that they need to realize that, well, this is all you can reveal about it, this is all you can tell about it because it’s so important to us...”³⁹

In addition to *sxwayxwey* and the winter dance, which cannot be shown at all, the issue of private knowledge also comes up in regards to cultural information that is displayed in the centres. Teresa Carlson states that at the LEP, the children are not taught all the specifics of making certain items at the hands-on stations, that some details are deliberately left out by the workers. She believes that one reason for this is a fear of appropriation, which will be discussed later. However, she has been told that another reason is the influence of private knowledge, or the sensibility that families use somewhat different techniques or materials and people are not willing to give away their guarded family knowledge.⁴⁰

It appears that there is also a reluctance to teach specific techniques to outsiders because of a deep-rooted cultural belief that individuals have to earn the right to learn certain skills. Katherine Grant, who is employed at the LEP, gives an example from her childhood. She explains that before certain gifts were shared with children there was much close observation by the Elders:

“But, all this behaviour was being watched, and my mother told me that, and my sisters and brothers, that we were being watched all the time, and each one of us, they could identify our strengths - where, you know, the young boys might be observed for their talents in what area of ... possibly fishing, hunting, and spiritual work - the girls with the hands, the knitting, knowing the different plants, their

patience, those types of things. You know, just the natural things that parents normally do anyway, but at that time, your behaviour related to the rest of your life and your teachings. And so, Mom would often tell us that, with my aunt that was raised to be a medicine person, that she was naturally born with it - but although she was naturally born with it, she would not be given the right to use it, even still, unless she earned that by behaving properly, because it could be misused.”⁴¹

Katherine explains that behaving properly included being upstanding, listening well, being humble, paying attention, being willing to learn, respecting parents and Elders, appreciating the teachings, etc. Katherine sums up her opinion on this point by saying,

“Some people feel we should share more, but... if we haven’t, our own people, earned the right to share it in our own family, I don’t think we have the right to go beyond that boundary with other people... and I think we should have the right to say, ‘No, this is where we have to stop.’”⁴²

Gwen Point re-iterated the idea that it would be inappropriate to openly teach certain skills to outsiders that must be earned by her own people. She uses the example of schools requesting that the LEP allow visiting children to make drums:

“We can show you how to make a drum and teach you about it and say why we make it, why it’s sacred, why it’s special, why is it only men drum, why don’t women drum, why is it you have songs for this and songs for that, we could share the songs. But why would we let somebody else make a drum, and then go home and the only one allowed to drum is my husband. My son has to earn the drum. So why would I let 30 kids make a drum and take it home? But we can still teach them about it.”⁴³

Gwen also alludes to the fact that because the drum is used for spiritual purposes, there could be consequences to sharing its use openly with those who don’t understand its meaning. She submits that the Elders would say,

“You can’t make drums. Are you going to be responsible if these people get hurt? That’s the way they would put it to us. Because it’s not a toy. You know what the drum represents? And that’s what they say to you.”⁴⁴

Respecting what the Elders say about sharing information appears to be very important to many of the Stó:lo people who work in the interpretive centres. For example, Jeff Point states,

“And up to this point, myself - there’s many things that tell me that I cannot give out too much information. And not that I’m stingy, or - something in my mind tells me, like, that my grandfather told me - Just tell so much, cuz - what are they going to do with it?... I haven’t got the right to make the decision. I got family to be responsible to. And my mother’s, right now, the last carrier of many things in our family, and I have to speak to her whether I can say these things or not, or say what needs to be said.”⁴⁵

Jeff’s statements suggest that respect for Elders, as well as concerns regarding private family knowledge, play a role in his decisions about what information to share with others. Katherine Grant emphasizes the need to carry out the Elders’ wishes in the face of outside demands for more information:

“We have our teachings, our respect, and if we don’t start learning, and standing up for that, then we’re in the wrong place, we’re the wrong person here... I think there are things that we need to, to respect and understand, because our Elders are depending on us, the younger generation, to maintain that. When they explain to us that, no, we can’t share it, we don’t... question it and say ‘Why?’, because they have their reasons, they’re the knowledgeable ones, and the fact that they are our Elders, that should be enough, and to respect that.”⁴⁶

Although Elders’ advice is sought out and heeded, it should not be assumed that such advice or its applications are always uniform. Indeed, Elders can at times have differing opinions due perhaps to their own expertise or experience regarding certain matters. The disruption of the transmission of knowledge due to such influences as residential schools may also play a factor in this matter. In addition, the interpretation of Elders’ advice by others can sometimes differ. For example, at the LEP, children are not permitted to handle original artifacts because Elders’ advice has been interpreted to mean that the spirit or life force of an artifact’s maker still exists within it and children can be

especially open to being affected by this power.⁴⁷ However, at Xáy:tem, the advice of different Elders has been interpreted to mean only that certain precautions must be taken when artifacts are removed from their original location in order not to displease the spirit of the original owner; if this is done correctly, there will be no consequences to allowing children to handle the material.⁴⁸ Although beliefs regarding spirit power affect the interpretive centres, such beliefs are not necessarily homogenous across the community.

Thus, the Stó:lo interpretive centres are proscribed from exhibiting or sharing certain aspects of Stó:lo culture because of belief systems around private knowledge, the protection of spirit power through secrecy, and the requirement to earn the right to be taught certain skills. It is acknowledged that decisions about sharing information are not to be made on the part of individuals, but rather according to the (sometimes varied) advice and wisdom of the Elders. These belief systems have their roots in Stó:lo culture and may have existed in one form or another for thousands of years.

The Effects of the History of Contact

In addition to long-standing cultural traditions, there is a much newer “tradition” that has affected Stó:lo culture for the 200 or so years since contact, and this one was not of the Stó:lo people’s choosing. I am speaking of the ongoing pattern of cultural disruption and loss that has occurred since first contact with Europeans. Keith Carlson makes the point that first contact was actually experienced by the Stó:lo, not when they encountered a European for the first time in 1808 in the person of Simon Fraser, but rather when the smallpox epidemic of 1782-3 decimated their population by approximately 62%.⁴⁹ Subsequent epidemics of smallpox, measles, influenza and other diseases claimed many more lives, especially those of Elders, who were vulnerable to

disease because of their age. As Elders were the carriers and transmitters of cultural knowledge within Stó:lo society, much of this knowledge was lost with their passing.⁵⁰ The second major cause of culture loss was the residential school system, which was in place in Stó:lo territory for approximately a century beginning in 1863.⁵¹ The residential school was designed to facilitate the assimilation of First Nations children by removing them from their homes and inculcating in them European and Christian value systems. Children lost not only knowledge of Stó:lo traditions and beliefs, but also knowledge of their language and of the experience of growing up within a family structure. Not only was the Stó:lo culture denied to these children, it was often replaced with a deeply ingrained shame about their cultural heritage.

In addition to disease and the residential school system, the Stó:lo people experienced other assaults on their culture. For example, the anti-potlatch law, which was in place from 1884 to 1951, made illegal the potlatch, an important cultural and economic complex (although its practice did not completely disappear, but rather went underground). Other government assimilationist policies as well as the influence of missionaries made further inroads into altering the Stó:lo way of life.⁵²

As a result of all the above-mentioned factors, there is a strong sense of cultural loss among Stó:lo people, despite growing initiatives towards cultural revival. It appears that the sense of loss and fears of appropriation of Stó:lo beliefs and practices play a significant role in attitudes about cross-cultural sharing. As much as possible, I will let the Stó:lo people speak for themselves in the following section because their words on this subject convey their message so powerfully.

Clearly, for many Stó:lo people, the part of their history that saw their culture being eroded by non-Aboriginal intervention is still very fresh in their memory. For example, Gwen Point talks of her uncle's experiences:

“My uncle was also the one that witnessed the RCMP and the Indian Agents breaking into ceremonies, hauling Elders away. He was also young enough that he remembers them going into hiding in the underground pithouses, one was in Squiala, where they'd hide and dance and sing. And he witnessed young men, when the RCMP would say, “Who's party is this?”, young men would stand up and say it was theirs. They would go to jail instead of the Elders because if the Elders went, some of them died, so the young men started to sacrifice their own well-being. That's why they don't talk about it.”⁵³

When he was older, the same man who witnessed such events stopped a canoe race in an attempt to protect it from non-Aboriginal intrusion. Gwen explains,

“But my uncle stopped the races because there was a non-Native guy on the canoe. I grew up with that non-Native guy. He was more First Nations than some of our First Nations people.... But although it hurt my friend's feelings, and the family's that the canoe he was sitting on, they respected my uncle. And my uncle explained, ‘We've lost enough. This is all we have left for our children. This belongs to our children - and if you start putting the non-Native people on here, you're going to have these canoes filled with non-Native people. And where're our people going to sit? They're going to sit back there watching.’”⁵⁴

Elder Jeff Point also talks about the connection between what was lost because of contact and the current need to protect knowledge, if only until it regains some of its former strength:

“... I believe lot of things should be kept private, basically because of what happened in the encounter of the Europeans when they first came here. They, they like cut off your belief. Now, only way to bring back the true feeling within one, is to let him practice what he has, and protect it for awhile. It was like taking your mother away - saying, this is wrong for what you're doing this. So, I believe, for a long point of time, that it should be that our people should be allowed to protect - allowed to give what they can to let the people know we're here, and how we live, but at the same time, protect lot of things that they've lost, until such a point that they're ready to open that door.”⁵⁵

According to Sonny McHalsie, previous losses may explain why certain beliefs are so closely guarded today. Sonny states,

“... often when you hear people when they talk about one of the traditions that has been maintained, like the winter dance or the sxwayxwey, often they say, ‘Well, that’s all we have left, everything else has been taken away from us, and that’s all we have...’”⁵⁶

As a result of previous losses, there exists today a fear of appropriation and exploitation of Stó:lo culture by non-Aboriginals. Teresa Carlson explains,

“There’s been a lot of things that have been lost over the years - and we’ve heard of some people who have shared that with people that they thought were going to respect it, and then, no sooner do they learn it and they run off and open their own gallery, or whatever, and ... are mass-producing these things, and have passed that knowledge on to... other people who are out picking cedar bark and - ravaging the environment, sort of thing, for these materials so they can market it. So, yeah, there’s a lot of reluctance, I guess, to do that.”⁵⁷

Such fears of exploitation for profit may be tied to much larger issues than baskets, as evidenced by Gwen Point’s comments:

“And I have Elders that teach basket-work, and I will bring a non-Native teacher there, and she’ll say, ‘Why do you want to learn this?’ And that teacher has to explain herself to this Elder, and she’ll say, ‘Well, I want to teach your students that come into my class - I want to be able to teach them how to do this.’ ‘If you’re going to teach our children, fine, but you’re not allowed to go out and sell this, and make money.’ They’ve seen how things are exploited, they’ve seen how all the land is taken, and they’re telling you - you can’t live there anymore, but they take all the land and they cut all the trees down - there goes the hunting and fishing. Everything, the dollar is tied to it.”⁵⁸

In regards to spiritual matters, the fear of appropriation by others may be tied to a fear of loss of meaning, and hence, a weakening of the power of the spiritual complex.

Frank Malloway explains,

“One of the reasons why a lot of people don’t want to share things, the spiritual things that are out there, is that - a fear of losing it or a fear of being watered down of some sort, that’s all. You know, our mask dance, we don’t let really too many people witness our mask dances, and our people have to understand the reason why... they have to realize that a lot of things have been copied by other

tribes, even by other tribes, by our own brothers and sisters from different nations, and not really understanding what the meaning behind the ceremony is about... they want to use it, it looks good, they want to use it, you know, but they don't know what it's all about and it damages it, and it waters it down and everything."⁵⁹

Another view is that without adequate protection, the integrity of spiritual knowledge may be lost even to the Stó:lo themselves. Sonny McHalsie believes that although private knowledge can play a role in a family's status, it may also serve to ensure that spiritual knowledge is protected and retained intact by certain families. He explains why he believes this to be important:

"...I think people lose the meaning of certain aspects of the tradition - and so that's why it's important to know - you need to protect that knowledge and know why it is you do it this way, why does it function this way and that way. Otherwise, if you start losing that and then you start thinking it's not that important, then you start crumbling it down yourself, and then you can start changing it, making it easier..."⁶⁰

Fear of further cultural losses seems quite prevalent in Stó:lo society today. How much to share of the Stó:lo people's history of loss as a result of contact is treated differently by the two Stó:lo interpretive centres. At Xáy:tem, the focus is on cultural and archeological exhibits and no mention is made of contact or its consequences. At the LEP, the children are exposed to some of the history of contact in the opening and closing remarks made by Jeff Point, as well as through wall panels and text that relate to various aspects of contact. Jeff believes strongly that it is important that the children understand something of the history of contact. He feels that if non-Aboriginals turn their backs on that knowledge they will not learn from it and may repeat their mistakes. Jeff recognizes that the message can be difficult to hear, however, and acknowledges that one school district may pull out of the program because they are not comfortable with this aspect of it.⁶¹

The loss of cultural knowledge and traditions has been so profound among the Stó:lo that the interpretive centres play a role not only in cross-cultural education, but in educating Stó:lo people themselves. Katherine Grant claims,

“At this time, I feel that the program itself is representing the losses that we had in the past, and that it’s important to share, basically because we’re not sharing just with ... the non-Native, but with our people too who have lost the culture, so we’re reclaiming a loss and learning something that we felt we had lost, but we never did.”⁶²

Ironically, however, the fact that so many people were alienated from their own culture by experiences such as the residential school has in some ways negatively impacted the centre and its workers. According to Katherine,

“It’s a struggle even now for this program to operate because we have our own people who have been away from it for so long that they - we’re trying to train them, we’re trying to teach them, and some of them don’t believe in it - and they don’t have the respect. And it’s not their fault, it’s the fault of the society, and the things that happened in our lifestyle, in our background, in our educational system. It was made fun of so often that, you know, our own families started making fun of it and poking fun at it, so that we were ashamed and embarrassed by it... So it’s a struggle to continuously try to prove to the people and convince them that we should be proud of ourselves, and there’s a lot to be proud of.”⁶³

Katherine herself attended residential school from the ages of 6 to 15 and shares some of her feelings about the knowledge that she lost:

“It bothers me at times to see a non-Native go out and try to teach our culture, because sometimes they know more than me - and it hurts - it hurts because I’ve never had that opportunity to learn all this and I’m learning it very slowly and anything that I learn - stays here in the heart - and it means a lot... It becomes very difficult sometimes to see people that are not Native knowing more, talking more, or teaching the history that you feel was stolen from you...”⁶⁴

Yet, Stó:lo interpretive centres may play a role in healing the Stó:lo people themselves as they revive old memories and validate the past. In addition, cross-cultural awareness can run both ways when people are willing to share their traditions and beliefs

and this may help the Stó:lo people to gain an important perspective on the value of their culture. In Katherine's words,

“A lot of what I was seeing when I first came here to volunteer, were things that I had learned from as a child, and these people were sharing it naturally. It gave me a feeling that - of almost close to tears, because I realized that these feelings that I had shared as a child were not lost, that my people were still sharing with other people.”⁶⁵

“So now it's the teaching of our people, and the non-Natives as well and ironically, we're finding out that we're not so much different than a lot of the other cultures, that we share in a lot of - in similar beliefs, and it's really interesting, and it's heart-warming to know that these things that we were maybe ashamed or embarrassed about with our children are beliefs that other cultures have...”⁶⁶

Stó:lo interpretive centres sometimes face a conflict between what the Stó:lo people feel they can share and what is requested of them by the schools. Sometimes the gulf in understanding can be significant:

“There are certain things that I feel that other people, other nationalities ask of us - it still bothers me - there's personal things that they request, and almost demand out of us to share. I know that... the schools have asked to do more, for example, with the cedar, and to try to explain to them that this is not something that we have the right, even as workers here, to share with you, and they, they in their head think, well, yes, it's your place, your job, you're getting paid for it - do it. It's not as simple as that - we have our teachings, our respect...”⁶⁷

This lack of understanding is one of the reasons that people like Katherine believe that the non-Aboriginal population needs to be educated about residential schools and the impact they had on the Stó:lo people. She sums up the relationship between history, cultural loss, and cross-cultural sharing very poignantly:

“But unless people are aware of how we had to live and what happened in our lifestyle, they won't understand how we live and why we struggle quite so hard to keep what we have, and that this is why it's so important. If we've had to live this way and we've had to live on the edge and fearful of losing even our own life, then - darn it, we're going to have to really hang on to what we've got and not let it go...”⁶⁸

In the final analysis, it can be said that the Stó:lo interpretive centres share with others what they can while attempting to remain culturally appropriate by respecting Stó:lo teachings. They ask only for respect from their visitors in return. The closing comments on the subject come from Helen Joe and Gwen Point respectively:

“But there are traditions and parts of our culture that are only for us. And I think that needs to be respected.”⁶⁹

“Like when we started dancing, one of my granddads said, ‘Don’t you say entertaining. You’re not entertaining, you’re not a clown. There’s clowns, there’s people that do that - entertain. When you’re singing, don’t you forget that you’re sharing a part of who you are.’ You see the difference? And we have to make sure we say that to the people. We’re sharing a part of who we are and please respect this...”⁷⁰

Conclusion

Stó:lo interpretive centres must find a balance between the poles of two opposing needs. On the one hand, their primary goal is to educate others about who the Stó:lo are as a people in order to counteract the damaging stereotypes and lack of understanding found in non-Aboriginal society. On the other hand, they are prevented from fully revealing Stó:lo identity because of culturally-rooted beliefs about private knowledge and secrecy, and historically-rooted fears about cultural loss.

The sharing of knowledge is an important tradition in Stó:lo culture. Although the Stó:lo did not have a written language, they had formalized oral traditions that ensured that information would be passed from generation to generation. In recent years, they have felt the need to share information cross-culturally in order to challenge the stereotypes and misconceptions that exist in the minds of the non-Aboriginal population with whom they must co-exist. This need has arisen in part from Stó:lo Nation’s

involvement in the treaty process which would be assisted by a greater cultural understanding on the part of those outside the culture.

Certain material such as that regarding the sxwayxwey complex cannot be displayed in Stó:lo interpretive centres because it is considered not only to be sacred, but also a form of private knowledge. Such knowledge was closely guarded by families in the past because it affected their status in the society, and aspects of this belief may still persist. Information regarding the winter dance also cannot be displayed or discussed, as secrecy in regards to the spirit power involved with this practice is of fundamental importance. Therefore, the two most uniquely identifying aspects of the Stó:lo cultural persona, the sxwayxwey and winter dance, are prohibited from being included in Stó:lo presentations of their culture.

Exhibits are also affected in more minor ways. Private knowledge plays a role in limiting the display of certain specifics in regards to material culture, since particulars such as weaving techniques often vary from family to family and are valued as guarded family knowledge. Due to a cultural belief that individuals must earn the right to learn certain skills within their own family, it is considered inappropriate to share such skills indiscriminately with outsiders. Finally, knowledge is not typically considered to be personal property, but rather family property, and Elders' wishes regarding the sharing of information is respected.

A number of the above-mentioned beliefs are consistent with Moira Simpson's observations that in traditional societies it is common for the viewing of sacred objects or the transmission of knowledge to be restricted to those with ownership or other

recognized rights. Unfortunately, such concepts can be difficult for non-Aboriginals to understand, as the Stó:lo themselves have experienced.

Stó:lo interpretive centres are also affected by community fears of cultural loss and appropriation that are grounded in historical experience. Disease, residential schools, missionaries, and government assimilation policies all served to separate Stó:lo people from the ways of life that had sustained their culture for millennia. Today, it is widely felt that what is left of the culture needs to be carefully protected from appropriation, exploitation, and alteration. The cultural losses experienced by the Stó:lo have been so profound that the interpretive centres are also serving to re-educate, and possibly even heal, some members of the Stó:lo community. Indeed, the losses have been so profound that some Stó:lo people do not support the centres because they are no longer able to recognize the value of their own culture. Some people feel it to be important that the history of contact, and in particular the residential school system, be presented to others in order to foster understanding of the impact of contact on the Stó:lo, as well as how such impacts continue to affect the community today. Some attempts to do so have met with resistance from the non-Stó:lo audience.

Stó:lo interpretive centres do indeed experience tension between what to reveal and what to conceal. However, like the U'mista Cultural Centre and the Kwagiulth Museum belonging to the Kwakwaka'wakw, the Xáy:tem Longhouse Interpretive Centre and the Longhouse Extension Program of Stó:lo Nation are presenting their culture in ways that are consistent with "traditional" beliefs. That which is considered to be private knowledge, to relate to spirit power, to be restricted to those who have earned certain rights, to be contrary to the wishes of the Elders, is not shared with those outside the

culture. Different approaches aside, both Stó:lo interpretive centres are presenting Stó:lo culture in accordance with Stó:lo teachings. In doing so, they are taking control of the interpretation of their culture in ways that preserve its integrity and are culturally appropriate and relevant. A message often heard was that the centres wanted to convey a sense of continuity, not only of the presence of the Stó:lo people in the Fraser Valley, but also of their beliefs and traditions - that their teachings have carried on. Xáy:tem and the LEP are examples of how traditional Stó:lo teachings have indeed carried on and been incorporated into contemporary inventions such as interpretive centres. Recalling James Clifford's conclusions about the Kwakwaka'wakw museums, Stó:lo interpretive centres provide ample evidence of a strong, supple tradition that continues to grapple with the claims of the so-called "dominant" society.

This paper has attempted to explore how "traditional" Stó:lo teachings are being applied in today's world, in a modern setting - the interpretive centre. It has used oral interviews in order to explore people's memories of the past as well as their opinions about the present and future. It is hoped that this study may be of use to the interpretive centres and/or to the Stó:lo community in a number of ways. One potential benefit may be to non-Stó:lo people who are or will be involved with the centres or with other Stó:lo cross-cultural education initiatives; it is hoped that this paper may help to identify some of the current issues and conflicts faced by Stó:lo Nation in this area. Another potential benefit, if the centres deem the paper to be of value in this regard, would be to use it to better inform the schools as to what issues are involved with sharing the Stó:lo culture with students. It is hoped that this study might be of use to further inform non-Aboriginal school liaisons or teachers and thereby facilitate greater cultural awareness

and perhaps decrease misunderstandings or conflicts between the schools and the interpretive centres. In addition, the paper, or parts of it, could possibly be used to inform the Stó:lo community about how it is being benefited by virtue of the centres being places where Stó:lo people themselves are learning about their culture and regaining a sense of pride in it; this could potentially assist in generating more community support for the centres. Finally, although the information in this study is certainly not new to those working in the area of cross-cultural education, since it has been gathered from such individuals, it may perhaps serve in a small way to focus some of the issues for them.

Such suggested practical uses of this paper stem in part from the fact that this is not a typical “scholarly” presentation. A more conventional historical study would have focused more concretely on how Stó:lo self-representation has changed over time. Its primary sources would most likely have been archival documents and photographs. However, as stated previously, such a study would likely be deemed offensive by many Stó:lo people today because past representations at times included material that is considered to be extremely private today. In addition, a more typically academic historical paper may have served to shed light on past representations without necessarily relating these directly to today’s issues and concerns. Part of the value of conducting oral interviews is to gain information about the past while at the same time being able to hear directly about people’s present-day concerns, and hopefully to be in a position to show how the former may impact on the latter. In addition, “scholarly” papers often convey a rather detached, impersonal, seemingly “objective,” authoritative stance (although of course, the subjectivity of the author’s point of view is inescapable). A paper such as

this one, which is based on based on fieldwork and oral interviews, while not necessarily less “scholarly” in my opinion, does perhaps offer a different tone and potential application. By using oral interviews, people are given the opportunity to speak in their own voices, which can often go unheard by virtue of a less than privileged position in the larger society. The writer’s authority may be somewhat minimized as a consequence, while the authority of those interviewed is enhanced, thus equalizing the potential power imbalance that can be present in ethnohistorical studies. In addition, the process of using interviews as primary sources may subtly alter the purpose of producing the paper for some authors. Requesting information of human beings can carry with it an implicit responsibility to produce something that is relevant to them, that will be of use to the people who have so generously shared their time and thoughts, and who will be in a position to read and pass judgement on the final product. I propose that this does not make the work less “objective,” but instead perhaps more responsible.

It strikes me that historians are accustomed to dealing with events in the lives of people, yet usually do so without ever having to encounter the people themselves (often because they are long gone). In doing oral history, the people are right in front of you, telling their own stories. I believe one benefit to this is that it can humanize history; it can remind us that the writing of history is not just an abstract academic exercise. Perhaps it can even assist us in presenting history in ways that can appeal to a broader audience than just academia, while still withstanding academic scrutiny.

There are a number of ways in which this study could be further developed. Examining Stó:lo self-representation as it has changed over time and the reasons for such changes could perhaps be useful if it was desired by the community and if it was done

either by a Stó:lo person, or by an individual who was known and trusted by the community. Such changes could perhaps be tracked against potential non-Aboriginal influences such as changes to the Indian Act, as well as Aboriginal influences such as the cultural revival movement that originated in the 1970s. Alternatively, Stó:lo self-representations over time could be analyzed in terms of the oppositions of concrete versus spiritual content, or individual versus collective representations. Another avenue would be to explore how Stó:lo representations of their culture have differed from non-Stó:lo representations, either in museum settings or through the written word. Taking a less historical approach, a potentially useful tool for the interpretive centres would be to attempt to gain input from Stó:lo people not currently involved with the centres as to their attitudes about Stó:lo representation and cross-cultural education. Of particular interest would be attitudes toward the acceptability of providing certain information about the existence and importance of the sxwayxwey or winter dance without revealing inappropriate details. Yet another avenue of study would be to explore the attitudes and knowledge of teachers, parents, students, and school administrators with regards to the Stó:lo people and their culture, perhaps by tracking changes in attitudes and beliefs before and after visits to the centres. This is not an exhaustive list of suggestions by any means.

The issues of self-representation, control of interpretation, and cross-cultural awareness will no doubt become more important for Stó:lo Nation over the coming years. They will also no doubt pose many challenges for the Stó:lo community. It will not be surprising if these challenges are met in part through reliance on the Stó:lo teachings that

have carried on for so many years while being adapted to apply to ever-changing circumstances.

Epilogue

Although this paper has not taken a direct historical approach, I believe that I, for one, learned a very valuable lesson about history in the process of producing it. Essentially, I came to appreciate how present “history” is in the lives of many Stó:lo people today. Here, I am speaking primarily of the history of the residential school system and of cultural loss due to non-Aboriginal demands for assimilation in all their various forms. Naturally, I was aware that many people had suffered greatly because of the effects of residential schools. However, I was not entirely prepared for the fact that speaking to people about what seemed to me the rather impersonal issues of representation and cross-cultural sharing would at times evoke very personal stories as well as strong feelings. For two of the individuals I interviewed, discussing cultural losses and the effects of residential schools on themselves or on family members was a very emotional experience at certain points. I became very aware that for many Stó:lo people, certain events that non-Aboriginal people may view as being part of “history,” as having happened in the past, (and even as no longer relevant in the minds of some) are very much alive, very personal, and very present for Stó:lo people on a daily basis. The residential school experience is not “history” for many people because they have no alternative but to live with its effects every day of their lives, despite the fact that they may be trying to heal from it.

Thus, it is hoped that a paper such as this, which includes real voices, can make history somewhat more alive and relevant for its readers. At the very least, producing this paper has certainly served that purpose for the author. For that, I again thank the people who shared a part of who they are so generously with me.

Notes

- 1 Crisca Bierwert, "Tracery in the Mistlines: Semiotic Readings in Stó:lo Culture," University of Washington, Ph.D. Dissertation, 1986, p. 456.
- 2 Michael M. Ames, Cannibal Tours and Glass Boxes: The Anthropology of Museums (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992), pp. 145-6.
- 3 James Clifford, The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 227, 236-39.
- 4 Clifford, The Predicament of Culture, pp. 229, 244.
- 5 Ibid., p. 248.
- 6 Wayne Suttles, "Private Knowledge, Morality, and Social Classes among the Coast Salish," Coast Salish Essays (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1987), p. 11.
- 7 Ibid., p. 8.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Wayne Suttles, "Productivity and its Constraints: A Coast Salish Case," Coast Salish Essays (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1987), p. 132.
- 10 Suttles, "Private Knowledge," p. 8.
- 11 Suttles, "Productivity and its Constraints," p. 131.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Pamela T. Amoss, "The Power of Secrecy Among the Coast Salish," The Anthropology of Power ed. Raymond Fogelson and Richard Adams (New York: Academic Press, 1977), pp. 134-5.
- 14 Thomas McIlwraith, "The Problem of Imported Culture: The Construction of Contemporary Stó:lo Identity," American Indian Culture and Research Journal, Vol. 20:4 (1996), p. 42.
- 15 Bierwert, "Tracery in the Mistlines," p. 471.
- 16 Ibid., p. 498.
- 17 Moira G. Simpson, Making Representations: Museums in the Post-Colonial Era (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 202.
- 18 Ibid.

- 19 Keith Thor Carlson, ed. You Are Asked to Witness: The Stó:lo in Canada's Pacific Coast History (Chilliwack: Stó:lo Heritage Trust, 1996), p. 182.
- 20 Bertha Peters, "Fieldnotes of Keith Carlson," 20 September 1995.
- 21 Xáy:tem Longhouse Interpretive Centre Brochure.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Interview with Teresa Carlson, 2 June 1998.
- 24 Lisa Hawasaki, "Examining Stó:lo Cultural Representations and Interpretations: A Report on the UBC Ethnographic Fieldschool," September 1997, Stó:lo Nation Archives.
- 25 Xáy:tem Longhouse Interpretive Centre Publication.
- 26 Interview with Chief Frank Malloway, 17 June 1998.
- 27 Carlson Interview, 2 June 1998.
- 28 Interview with Gwen Point, 3 June 1998.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Malloway Interview, 17 June 1998.
- 31 Interview with Jeff Point, 3 June 1998.
- 32 Mission Times, 22 May 1998, p. 22.
- 33 Interview with Darwin Douglas Jr., 10 June 1998.
- 34 Gwen Point Interview, 3 June 1998.
- 35 Carlson Interview, 2 June 1998.
- 36 Interview with Albert "Sonny" McHalsie, 28 May 1998.
- 37 Malloway Interview, 17 June 1998.

- 38 Stó:lo identity is also being heavily influenced by the rise of pan-Indianism. For a discussion of this issue, see McIlwraith, “The Problem of Imported Culture” as previously cited.
- 39 McHalsie Interview, 28 May 1998.
- 40 Carlson Interview, 2 June 1998.
- 41 Interview with Katherine Grant, 10 June 1998.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Gwen Point Interview, 3 June 1998.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Jeff Point Interview, 3 June 1998.
- 46 Grant Interview, 10 June 1998.
- 47 McHalsie Interview, 28 May 1998.
- 48 Malloway Interview, 17 June 1998.
- 49 Carlson, You Are Asked to Witness, pp. 28, 37.
- 50 Ibid., p. 39.
- 51 Ibid., p. 101.
- 52 Ibid., pp. 95-99.
- 53 Gwen Point Interview, 3 June 1998.
- 54 Ibid.
- 55 Jeff Point Interview, 3 June 1998.
- 56 McHalsie Interview, 28 May 1998.
- 57 Carlson Interview, 2 June 1998.
- 58 Gwen Point Interview, 3 June 1998.
- 59 Malloway Interview, 17 June 1998.
- 60 McHalsie Interview, 28 May 1998.
- 61 Jeff Point Interview, 3 June 1998.

- 62 Grant Interview, 10 June 1998.
- 63 Ibid.
- 64 Ibid.
- 65 Ibid.
- 65 Ibid.
- 66 Ibid.
- 67 Ibid.
- 68 Ibid.
- 69 Interview with Helen Joe, 10 June 1998.
- 70 Gwen Point Interview, 3 June 1998.

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Interviews

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Douglas, Darwin Jr., Stó:lo Nation employee, 10 June 1998, at Stó:lo Nation offices.

Grant, Katherine, LEP Employee, 10 June 1998, at Shxwt'a:selhawtxw, Stó:lo Nation grounds.

Joe, Helen, Stó:lo Nation Employee, 10 June 1998, at Stó:lo Nation grounds.

Malloway, Chief Frank of Yakweakwioose, Xáy:tem Cultural Advisor, 17 June 1998, at Sardis, B.C.

McHalsie, Albert "Sonny", Community Leader and Stó:lo Nation Cultural Advisor, 28 May 1998, Stó:lo Nation offices.

Point, Gwen, Stó:lo Nation Education Manager, 3 June 1998, at Stó:lo Nation offices.

Point, Jeff, LEP Employee, 3 June 1998, at Stó:lo Nation grounds.