

“Centre from Which Underground Passages Radiate”:
Understanding Metaphysical Tunnels in a Stó:lō Spiritual Geography

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Walking around Pitt Lake with Melvin Bailey in May, 2009 he remarked that the lake was one of those “strong places” for the Stó:lō. This is a place not only of personal significance, but a place of spiritual power. Under the water, hidden from unknowing eyes, the “whole lake is honeycombed with tunnels.”¹ These tunnels have almost mystical properties – dangerous to those who do not know how to use them and sources of power for those who do. Bailey’s poignant description provides a beautiful, if unsettling, visual. The idea that under the surface exists an entire system of connections is a sharp reminder that there is more to the landscape of the Stó:lō people than can be appreciated in a superficial glance.

Throughout the territory known to the Stó:lō as S’olh Téméxw, in the lower Fraser Valley subterranean tunnels connect disparate locations. These portals are powerful elements of a uniquely Stó:lō geography that occupies both the physical and metaphysical landscape of the Fraser Valley, a landscape that shapes, and in turn is shaped by, the history, mythology and complex identities of community members.² The existence of the tunnels necessitates a re-imagining of social and physical distance as well as challenging Western notions of time and place.³ Geographer D.W Meinig argues, “any landscape is composed not only of what lies before our eyes but what lies within our

¹ Melvin Bailey, Interview with Margaret Robbins, Andrée Boisselle and Albert (Sonny) McHalsie, Katzie, May 14, 2009.

² Denis Cosgrove, “Landscapes and Myths, Gods and Humans,” in Barbara Bender, ed., *Landscape: Politics and Perspectives*. (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1993): 281.

³ Keith Thor Carlson, *The Power Of Place, The Problem Of Time: An Study of Aboriginal History and Collective Identity along the Lower Fraser River OR?? Aboriginal Identity in the Crucible of Colonialism*. (unpubl. PhD Dissertation, University of British Columbia, 2004):5.

heads.”⁴ The knowledge that tunnels, even when not in use, are pulling places closer together changes how we view, and understand, the geography of S’olh Téméxw. Tunnel stories exist, at the intersection of physical and supernatural geographies, as Stó:lō people “walk simultaneously through both spiritual and physical realms of this landscape.”⁵

How then can outsiders comprehend the significance of these portals and the places that they connect? Hearing and thinking about the tunnel stories is itself a gateway into a worldview composed of Stó:lō history, mythology, and geographies. Like travelers through the tunnels themselves, we engage in a transformative experience that brings us to a new place of understanding. Documenting and mapping the tunnel stories is a challenge to Western ideas of geographic and social space. The maps created for this project are meant to be a visualization of both the physical and metaphysical landscape of S’olh Téméxw. Re-imagining physical space is one step towards a more holistic understanding of the Stó:lō people who are concurrently connected to their sacred and physical geography.⁶ The tunnels may or may not physically exist in what we might understand as a literal or corporeal way – their physical truth does not matter. Christopher Tilley argues, “The real world is the perceived world is the phenomenal world”⁷ - what people believe about the places they inhabit imbues them with meaning and it is that meaning that inspires their actions and beliefs about themselves and their environment. The tunnel stories reveal cultural, literary, and spiritual truths about S’olh Téméxw and it

⁴ D.W. Meinig, “The Beholding Eye: Ten Versions of the Same Scene,” in D.W. Meinig, ed. *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979): 34.

⁵ Albert (Sonny) McHalsie, David M. Schaepe and Keith Thor Carlson, “Making the World Right through Transformations,” in Keith Thor Carlson, ed., *A Stó:lō Coast Salish Historical Atlas*, (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2001): 6.

⁶ The term ‘sacred geography’ is taken from Fernando Santo-Granero, “Writing History into the Landscape: Space, Myth and Ritual in Contemporary Amazonia,” *American Ethnologist* 25(2): 141.

⁷ Christopher Tilley with the assistance of Wayne Bennett, *The Materiality of Stone: Explorations in Landscape Phenomenology:1* (New York: Berg, 2004): 16.

is these truths that are of interest for this project.

Finding the Tunnels:

Stories about tunnels can be found throughout early ethnographic accounts of the Stó:lō up to present day narratives still recounted by community members and elders. While there are many tunnel stories, it is possible that the stories that have survived in the historical memory of the Stó:lō and the written documents are only a fraction of the possible tunnel sites. For example, there is a place at Tsawwassen known in Halkomelem as *Smakwts* which, when translated into English, means “centre from which (underground) passages radiate.”⁸ Despite this promising tunnel nexus, only a few references remain connecting Smakwts with any subterranean channels. The tunnels located and documented may be only a fraction of those in existence, and therefore should not be viewed necessarily as a comprehensive list.

Despite that caveat, the extant tunnel stories demonstrate a variety of interesting things about Stó:lō spiritual geography, the power of place, and the importance of storytelling. Tunnels themselves are transformative in nature; travel through them can result in an acquisition of power or in death.⁹ The stories that exist about them can be divided into two very general temporal categories. The first group is connected to both the Sxwoxwiyam, “the oral histories describing the distant past” and the Sxwó:xwey origin story.¹⁰ These tunnels are invariably associated with power – only those who have power can use them effectively and those who want to increase their strength seek them out. These mytho-historical accounts often describe the origin of the tunnels.

⁸ Keith Thor Carlson, ed. “Plate 45D”, in Keith Thor Carlson, ed., *A Stó:lō Coast Salish Historical Atlas*, (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2001): 148.

⁹ Keith Thor Carlson, *The Power Of Place, The Problem Of Time*, 4.

¹⁰ McHalsie, et al, “Making the World Right through Transformations,”: 6.

The second group of stories is more contemporary accounts of tunnel travel. These stories mostly occur within living memory – for example, stories recounted by grandparents about their contemporaries.¹¹ These stories almost always result in death for the tunnel traveler.¹² While the two groupings do not offer perfectly neat categories for understanding the tunnels, they do present some interesting points of departure. For instance, tunnels connected to ancient stories often reappear in the contemporary accounts – suggesting the continued activity of the site as well as the sustained importance and power of the tunnel itself. Tracing the tunnel stories through historical records and oral accounts can show where the tunnels are located and provide the basis for understanding the sacred geography of S’olh Téméxw. The tunnels, and the geography that they are a part of, are more than strictly environment. Denis Cosgrove argues that “the landscape is not passive; it is given a constitutive role as the stage set for the human drama itself.”¹³ The tunnels are both characters and settings for the stories that place them in the spiritual landscape.

Yale to Spuzzum¹⁴:

“Xéls came to Spuzzum. He had many friends there. K^wiyútkl dug under the ground until he came up at Yale, while xéls was on his way. As soon as K^wiyútkl got to Yale, xéls walked underground to Spuzzum”. – Mrs. Louis George¹⁵

Franz Boas, in 1895, recorded the earliest surviving account of the tunnel connecting the communities of Spuzzum and Yale. Boas, working primarily with George

¹¹ This example is taken from Melvin Bailey, Interview with Margaret Robbins, Andrée Boisselle and Albert “Sonny” McHalsie, Katzie, May 14, 2009. Bailey describes tunnel stories set during his grandfather’s life, particularly about a doctor living on Pitt Lake who traveled through tunnels in his canoe.

¹² The tunnel that connects the whirlpool He’mk’alak to Tekwóthel is an exception to this generalization. The young man who traveled through this tunnel in a more modern account lived.

¹³ Cosgrove, “Landscapes and Myths, Gods and Humans,” 282.

¹⁴ See Map #2: Spuzzum to Yale and Hémq’ele to Tekwóthel. Attached.

¹⁵ Mrs. Louis George, recorded by Norman Hart Lerman, “Transformer Tale – First Version,” in Norman Hart Lerman, *An Analysis of Lower Fraser Indians, British Columbia*, (unpubl., M.A Thesis, University of Washington, 1952): 87.

Stseelis and his wife living at Chehalis, recorded a story about an Indian doctor, who Boas calls QelqElEmas, who encountered Xéls.¹⁶ In the version recorded by Boas, the tunnel was built by Sk.Ela'o, the brother of the doctor. The account reads, "Sk.Ela'o (Beaver), the brother of QelqElEmas, was the first chief of the Spe'yim (Spuzzum, the southernmost village of the Ntlakyapamuq). When he saw that Qals [Xéls] came to his brother, he dug an underground passage to his house to be able to help him in case of need."¹⁷ This account is similar to many of the accounts that follow chronologically in that the tunnel was built as an escape route for the doctor.

Norman Lerman, conducting interviews and publishing in the early 1950s, recorded the most detailed versions of this tunnel story. Mrs. Louis George is credited with the story appearing in Lerman's thesis *An Analysis of Lower Fraser Indians, British Columbia*. In her story the doctor is named K^wiyútkl and he himself builds the tunnel, starting at Spuzzum and coming up at Yale. He uses the tunnel to avoid a battle with Xéls. He goes back and forth multiple times through his built channel until finally, after finding his sister transformed to stone, he does battle with Xéls.¹⁸ According to cultural advisor Albert (Sonny) McHalsie, recounting a version of this story told to him by Agnes Kelly, the Indian doctor was misusing his power, necessitating a battle with Xéls. The doctor traveled through the tunnel from Spuzzum to Yale to do battle and was turned into

¹⁶ Xáls or Xexá:ls refer to the transformers, two brothers and one sister or, in some stories, one man. The transformers traveled throughout Stó:lō territory transforming people and animals in order to make the world right. See Albert (Sonny) McHalsie, David M. Schaepe and Keith Thor Carlson, "Making the World Right through Transformations," in Keith Thor Carlson, ed., *A Stó:lō Coast Salish Historical Atlas*, (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2001): 6 for a more in-depth description of the transformers. They also are referred to, in various sources as Xéls or Qals.

¹⁷ Franz Boas, *Indian Myths and Legends from the North Pacific Coast of America: A Translation of Franz Boas' 1895 Edition of Indianische Sagen von der Nord Pacifischen Kuste Amerikas*. Edited and Annotated by Randy Bouchard and Dorothy Kennedy. Translated by Dietrich Bertz. (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2002):108.

¹⁸ Norman Lerman with Betty Keller, *Legends of the River People*, (Vancouver: November House, 1976): 40.

Lady Franklin Rock, a prominent landmark in the Fraser River.¹⁹

Oliver Wells, an ethnographer in the Chilliwack district during the 1960s, recorded a number of references to the Spuzzum to Yale tunnel but, due to his own research interests, he did not pursue the topic and therefore did not record any complete versions of the stories. In his interview with Mrs. August Jim, Mrs. Albert Cooper, Joe Lorenzetto, and Willie George, conducted in October of 1962, Mrs. Margaret Jim mentions the sacredness of Lady Franklin Rock, equating it to a person named Xéylxelemòs.²⁰ Later in the same interview Willie George makes reference to a tunnel coming out near Xelhálh, close to Yale.²¹ In these instances, the story of the tunnel is not recounted in full, but the references to both the significance of Lady Franklin Rock and the tunnel itself indicate the continued importance of the places associated with the story. Interviews with elder Amelia Douglas, recorded in 1988, mention the tunnel in a similar way. While visiting the area near Xelhálh, she states, “there was one powerful person that made it, had a tunnel and it went out up to Spuzzum I think somewhere.”²² She does not provide a more complete narrative.

The story of the tunnel from Yale to Spuzzum has changed over time. Early accounts name the doctor transformed by Xéls, while later accounts refer more generally to him. The tunnel is one of the few documented that seems to be bi-directional, although all accounts describe the tunnel beginning at Spuzzum and being built to end at Yale. Mrs. Louis George, recorded by Norman Lerman, talks of multiple trips through the tunnels. This tunnel is also a built channel, as it has an origin story related to human

¹⁹ Albert (Sonny) McHalsie, Interview with Margaret Robbins, Chilliwack, B.C., May 12, 2009.

²⁰ Mrs. Margaret Jim, Mrs August Jim, Mrs. Albert Cooper, Joe Lorenzetto and Willie George, Interview with Oliver Wells, *Edenbank Farm Collection*, Chilliwack, B.C, October 1962: 219.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 221.

²² Amelia Douglas, Interview with Sonny McHalsie, Interview number DA88-25, Chilliwack, B.C, n.d.

intervention – making it a part of a Stó:l̓ō built metaphysical environment. The tunnel was created to serve a storied purpose. It fits into the category of tunnel stories related to the distant and mythical past. It was created to connect two places that are physically disparate and, while undergoing changes to meet the needs of the community, the tunnel continues to serve that purpose. This assertion is based on the resilience of the stories associated with the tunnel. If the metaphysical connection had proven redundant, the spiritual connection would presumably have reseeded in cultural memory. The significance of the tunnel may have changed over time, but the cultural importance of the places concerned has not - Spuzzum and Yale continue to be linked in a spiritual geography.

Whirlpool to Tekwóthel²³:

“Don’t be running away from the whirlpool!” –Willie George²⁴

Geographically near to the Yale end of the aforementioned passageway exists another portal – connecting a powerful whirlpool called Hémq’eleq²⁵ to the cave Tekwóthel.²⁶ The stories describing this tunnel do not have the same rich genealogies that the previous tunnel stories possessed, but they do have contemporary significance. This tunnel is part of the second category of tunnel – those accompanied by stories within living memory. Albert (Sonny) McHalsie, recounting a story told to him by the late Peter Dennis Peters, describes a young man canoeing on the Fraser River. He was using the

²³ See Map #2: Spuzzum to Yale and Hémq’ele to Tekwóthel.

²⁴ Mrs. Margaret Jim, Mrs August Jim, Mrs. Albert Cooper, Joe Lorenzetto and Willie George, Interview with Oliver Wells, *Edenbank Farm Collection*, Chilliwack, B.C, October 1962: 224.

²⁵ Spelling taken from Amelia Douglas, Interview with Sonny McHalsie, Randel Paul, and Richard Daly, Chilliwack, B.C, October 3, 1989.

²⁶ Albert (Sonny) McHalsie, Interview with Margaret Robbins, Chilliwack, B.C, May 12, 2009. For a geographic location of Tekwóthel see ‘Map F’ in Keith Thor Carlson, ed., *A Stó:l̓ō Coast Salish Historical Atlas*, (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2001): 140.

edge of the whirlpool to propel himself up the river when he was sucked into it. His family, waiting for him to come up in the water near Hémq'eleq, heard him yell. They looked up and saw their son in the cave of Tekwóthel. Travel through this channel was almost instantaneous for the youth, appearing in the cave one or two minutes after falling into the whirlpool.²⁷

This story has a historical counterpart told by Robert Joe to Wilson Duff in 1950. Joe describes Hémq'eleq as a “whirlpool just below Yale. Hole in mountain comes right down to this large whirlpool. River boats had trouble with this whirlpool.”²⁸ While Joe does not describe anyone traveling through the tunnel, his anecdote provides context for Peter Dennis Peters account. McHalsie prefaces his retelling by stating, “I don't know what the origin of the tunnel is, but it's a story that's told about to prove that it exists.”²⁹ This demonstrates the continued significance of the passage to the Stó:lō understanding of their environment, despite a gap in the continuity of stories about it. Some of the significance may have been lost, but the connection remains open.

The tunnel connecting Hémq'eleq and Tekwóthel has not generated a comparable number of stories as many of the other tunnels. There is no origin story, no apparent linkage to the mytho-historical past, and no destructive power associated with it. The young man who traveled through the tunnel survived, a remarkably different outcome compared to the other temporally equivalent stories.³⁰ There is no story currently recorded detailing the building of the tunnel, perhaps suggesting that this tunnel is part of

²⁷ Albert (Sonny) McHalsie, Interview with Margaret Robbins, Chilliwack, B.C, May 12, 2009.

²⁸ Robert Joe, Interview with Wilson Duff. *Wilson Duff's Stalo Notebooks*. Notebook #1, July 1950, Yale. (Binder 1 of 3): 66.

²⁹ Albert (Sonny) McHalsie, Interview with Margaret Robbins, Chilliwack, B.C, May 12, 2009.

³⁰ Most of the stories set in a more contemporary time frame result in the death of the traveler – they will be detailed later in this paper.

the natural geography of the sacred world. The tunnel has powerful properties – particularly evident in the near instantaneous travel through it. Requiring no effort to travel through and resulting in no harm, the Hémq’eleq to Tekwóthel tunnel is remarkable in its benignity. It is located near Lady Franklin Rock and no doubt contributes to the power of the place. It may be that many of the stories associated with this tunnel have not been collected or are no longer part of the Stó:lō canon. The legacy of the tunnel, however, manifests itself in the names of the places brought together through it. Translated to English, Hémq’eleq means “getting swallowed” and Tekwóthel means “where things pile up.”³¹ This tunnel primarily transports driftwood swallowed by the whirlpool and piled up in the cave – a natural force of transportation between the Fraser River and the canyon surrounding it.

Point Roberts and Pitt Lake³²:

“‘When the Lord Above created you,’ he said, ‘he gave you power over all the underground channels that lead from Point Roberts to Sechelt, Pitt Lake and other places.’” – Old Pierre³³

Pitt Lake is a powerful and storied place in S’olh Téméxw. The tunnels that run underneath the lake, connecting it to places as far away as White Rock, are only one element of the spiritual geography of the site. These tunnels have a rich genealogical tradition. The Pitt Lake channels have all the origin stories and tales of the distant past that the Hémq’eleq to Tekwóthel tunnel lacked. This rich oral tradition is directly tied with a family genealogy. The stories collected about the Pitt Lake tunnels for this project all come from the family line of Old Pierre, the key informant for anthropologist

³¹ Albert (Sonny) McHalsie, Interview with Margaret Robbins, Chilliwack, B.C, May 12, 2009.

³² See attached Map #3: Pitt Lake.

³³ Diamond Jenness, *The Faith of a Coast Salish Indian*, (Victoria: British Columbia Provincial Museum, 1955): 11.

Diamond Jenness in the 1930s. His eldest son, Simon Pierre, played a similar role in the 1950s working with Wayne Suttles. His great nephew, Melvin Bailey, spoke with me in 2009, continuing this notable tradition.³⁴The connotations of this family tunnel connection are complex. It is worth noting that all the stories found about the Pitt Lake tunnels came from these sources, but that does not mean that other community members, both historically and contemporarily, do not have stories to share. It was both a coincidence and a point of interest that the stories are so closely linked to a familial line. The direct line of the stories can help excavate some of the underlying shifts that shape the Stó:lō spiritual landscape of Pitt Lake.

Old Pierre, who was living on Katzie Indian Reserve, narrated the earliest recorded lower Fraser Valley tunnel stories to Diamond Jenness in 1936. The stories told by Old Pierre about the tunnels appear in the chapter titled by Jenness ‘The Katzie Book of Genesis.’ They were stories of the earliest times – Sxwoxwiyam stories, equated by Jenness with Christian mythology – a connection that has since fostered significant debate about the nature of the narratives. Old Pierre told of sma’k’wec, a leader in the community at Point Roberts, whose son became very powerful and transformed his mother into south wind and father into the north wind.³⁵ Before transforming his father, he mentioned that he had been given power over “all the underground channels that lead from Point Roberts to Sechelt, Pitt Lake, and other places.”³⁶ Jenness footnotes this statement with truncated anecdotes of other tunnel systems that he had been told about. They included a tunnel running from the Orcas Islands to Point Roberts, Pitt Lake to Point Roberts and “Certain other deep pools were supposed to communicate

³⁴ The stories from all three generations were collected when the interviewees were elderly men.

³⁵ Jenness, *The Faith of a Coast Salish Indian*, 11.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

subterraneously with Point Roberts. The Indians carefully refrained from bathing in them lest they be drawn under and drowned.”³⁷Jenness, unfortunately, does not include references for these stories, leaving us with only sparse information about the tunnel system.

In this document we can see the stories of the tunnels of the distant and more recent past existing together. Jenness’ footnote describes events within the living memory of the community whereas the story being told by Old Pierre references the very remote past. The tunnels that originate at Point Roberts were not only remembered vaguely, the tunnels continued to be active – with unplanned travel through them resulting in death. The idea that someone had ownership over the tunnels appears only in the Old Pierre story. It is unclear if ownership of the subterranean network was passed down, as it is not mentioned, in any clear way, in later accounts. ³⁸

Simon Pierre, son of Old Pierre, referenced the tunnel stories when in conversation with Wayne Suttles in the 1950s. He indicates, on a map drawn by Suttles, a place called x^wta’q^weset in reference to a slough between Pitt Lake and Alouette.

Included in this place description is the following: “a hole here leads to an underground

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 11. Jenness’ footnote reads as follows: “Some of the Indians still believe in the existence of subterranean channels extending from Point Roberts to places far distant, and they related the following anecdotes in partial substantiation. Two dogs belonging to a Nooksack Indian chased a deer on Orcas Island and did not return. A few days later their owner found the bodies of the three animals on the beach at Point Roberts, where they had been carried, apparently, through an underground channel. A youth who had performed for the first time at the winter dances went to bathe at a deep pool in Pitt Lake, hoping by that means to augment his supernatural powers. His companions tied a long rope round his waist and advised him to dive to the bottom and to ascend with the first object he grasped with his hands. The youth dived into the water and disappeared from sight. Suddenly an irresistible force pulled the rope through the hands of the watchers above. Anxiously they waited for a short time, and when the youth failed to emerge, returned home and reported that he had drowned. Soon afterwards the Tsawwassen Indians sent word that the corpse was lying on the beach at Point Roberts, carried there evidently through an underground channel from Pitt Lake.”

³⁸ Melvin Bailey does mention tunnels owned by, or at least only known and used by, a doctor during his Grandfather’s time. These tunnels do not seem to be the same as those discussed by Old Pierre.

passage that comes out at Point Roberts.”³⁹ In contrast to this more sparse recollection of the tunnel, Melvin Bailey told multiple stories of the tunnels of Pitt Lake in May 2009. He recounted a story of a tunnel connecting Penn Island to Crescent Beach, near White Rock.⁴⁰ A young man of Bailey’s fathers’ generation fell into the tunnel and came through it to Crescent Beach drowned. Bailey states, “One of my uncles told my grandfather and he knew. Well he says you got a tunnel there he says.”⁴¹

Along with that tunnel, which is potentially the same channel described by both Old Pierre and Simon Pierre, Bailey talked about another tunnel, or rather a set of tunnels used by a doctor, named Slumuk,⁴² who lived on the shores of Pitt Lake during his Grandfather’s era (contemporaneous with Simon Pierre). Slumuk was a powerful, but dangerous, doctor. Bailey describes him as having little respect for human life. He also had a gold mine never found again after his death. Part of his power was tied to his ability to use a set of tunnels starting at the north end of the lake and going back into the lake, which he traveled in his canoe.⁴³ Bailey describes him as having sole access to these tunnels.

The Pitt Lake tunnel stories indicate some interesting things about the genesis of tunnels in the area. New stories, and new tunnels, appear after the account of Old Pierre. The original tunnel, or at least the one first accounted for, remains a part of the spiritual geography of the area along with stories of Thunderbird and Slalikums.⁴⁴ The lake, and

³⁹ Wayne Suttles, *Katzie Ethnographic Notes*, (Victoria: British Columbia Provincial Museum, 1955): 19.

⁴⁰ Melvin Bailey, Interview with Margaret Robbins, Andrée Boisselle and Albert (Sonny) McHalsie, Katzie, May 14, 2009.

⁴¹ Melvin Bailey, Interview with Margaret Robbins, Andrea Boisselle and Albert (Sonny) McHalsie, Katzie, May 14, 2009.

⁴² This is a phonetic spelling based on my best guess.

⁴³ Melvin Bailey, Interview with Margaret Robbins, Andrea Boisselle and Albert (Sonny) McHalsie, Katzie, May 14, 2009.

⁴⁴ Melvin Bailey, Interview with Margaret Robbins, Andrea Boisselle and Albert (Sonny) McHalsie, Katzie, May 14, 2009.

the points that connect to it, are imbued with power. Dangerous doctors can use tunnels for transportation, but accidental tunnel travel results in death. The tunnels are themselves actors, not passive geographic features on the landscape, making decisions about the life and death of travelers. The doctor Slumuk could control, and possibly even build, his own channels while others, from Old Pierre's time up to the present day, suffered fatally from attempting to enter them.

The genealogy of the tunnel stories and its connection to the Pierre family line shows how tunnel stories have been passed down through generations. While each man told different stories of the tunnels, the central passageway remained prominent. More modern stories took root and the older tales were not as readily told. The meaning of the tunnel is perhaps undergoing a transformation from a mytho-historical reality to a more current one. However, the tunnel stories still seem to provide a connection both between places and to the power of those places. Despite narrative shifts, the same powerful places are brought together through tunnels.

Cultus Lake⁴⁵:

“If anyone got drowned at Cultus Lake, they were never found. A lot of people think there is an undercurrent there.” – Mr. Gus Commodore⁴⁶

Cultus Lake, like Pitt Lake, is a place of significant power – it is a strong and storied place in the Stó:lō landscape. The stories about the tunnels connecting it to other locations also, like those connected to Pitt Lake, have an intricate and complex pedigree. Mrs. Cooper, interviewed by Oliver Wells in 1962, said that the lake used to be named Swilhcha. It was a place where people wanting to gain power, to become doctors, went

⁴⁵ See Attached Map #4: Cultus Lake,

⁴⁶ Gus Commodore, Interview with Norman Lerman, *Lower Fraser Indian Folktales Collected by Norman Lerman, 1950-1951*, (Typescript, Chilliwack: Stó:lō Nation Archives, n.d): 226.

for weeks at a time. Because of this it was called a “cultus” place. Mrs. Cooper said, “It’s “bad” in Chinook.”⁴⁷ ‘Cultus’ could also be translated as ‘worthless’ in reference to a decrease in the potency of the lake when too many people attempted to harness its power. These translations suggest both the power and the hazard located there, and tunnels are an integral part of what makes it a “cultus” place.

The story of the formation of Cultus Lake itself is a tunnel story. Norman Lerman, in his literary recounting of many Stó:lō stories, *Legends of the River People*, describes how Cultus Lake used to be a basin inhabited by a community. A young man who was very fast and growing up to be powerful, named Koothlak, went swimming at a small lake he constructed on the side of a mountain. He slowly damned more and more space, creating a large body of water. The boys in his community used to tease him about going to swim there every morning until one day he released the collected waters thereby drowning the community. Lerman describes how before the basin was flooded, all the water flowed into an underground river leaving the basin free for the community.⁴⁸ When Koothlak released the water “The branches from the dike went into the underground river, stopping it up, and the lake which we call Cultus Lake covered that place.”⁴⁹

The underground river was only partially covered in this story, and, what used to keep the basin inhabitable becomes, in stories set after the formation of the lake, a source of both power and danger. Men desiring the power of Indian doctor’s often ventured to the bottom of the lake. In one of Chief Sepass’ (1843-1943) poems he mentions a doctor who went to Cultus to acquire power. He calls him “Tslam, the Magician.”⁵⁰ This doctor

⁴⁷ Mrs. Cooper, Interview with Oliver Wells, in Ralph Maud, Brent Galloway and Marie Weeden, ed., *The Chilliwacks and their Neighbors*, (Vancouver: Talon Books, 1987): 48.

⁴⁸ Lerman, *Legends of the River People*, 17.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁵⁰ Oliver N. Wells, *Myths and Legends of the Staw-loh Indians of South Western British Columbia*,

may be the same man spoken of in Charles Hill-Tout's 1902 *Report on the Ethnological Survey of Canada*. This young man ventured to the bottom of Cultus Lake seeking power and returned to the community a very influential doctor. Others who tried a similar feat were pulled up to the surface as skeletons.⁵¹ Oliver Wells also recorded a story with Albert Louie that describes a powerful doctor digging a hole from a small lake and ending up in Cultus Lake, perhaps describing the origin story of yet another powerful tunnel.⁵² Still others did not resurface at Cultus Lake at all, but rather their bodies were retrieved sometime later after they were transported through the underground river to Mud Bay, Washington.⁵³ The partially clogged river still was able to transport and kill those who were unworthy of the power granted by the forces living under the lake.⁵⁴

Gus Commodore told a story to Norman Lerman about the power of the tunnel. He stated that some youth "wanted to see if they could conquer the lake. If they could, they would become pretty good medicine men. . . There was a story about one young man who didn't take anyone with him at Cultus Lake, and when he came to, he was on the beach, way down there in Bellingham."⁵⁵ This is the only account on record of anyone surviving the tunnel travel from Cultus to another location. Mr. Bob Joe, also talking to Lerman, said, "There were other young men watching when the undercurrent took him right under. Well, he was lost – drowned. Sometime after, down there at Mud Bay,

(Vancouver: Frank T. Coan, Ltd., 1970): 34.

⁵¹ Charles Hill-Tout, *Report on the Ethnological Survey of Canada*, (London: British Association for the Advancement of Science, 1902): 15.

⁵² Albert Louie, Interview with Oliver Wells in Ralph Maud, Brent Galloway and Marie Weeden, ed., *The Chilliwacks and their Neighbors*, (Vancouver: Talon Books, 1987): 160.

⁵³ Bob Joe, Interview with Norman Lerman, *Lower Fraser Indian Folktales Collected by Norman Lerman, 1950-1951*, (Typescript, Chilliwack: Stó:lō Nation Archives, n.d): 264.

⁵⁴ Dan Milo, Interview with Oliver Wells, *Edenbank Farm Collection*, Chilliwack B.C, July 1964. Milo tells of the community buried by the young man who formed Cultus Lake. In some versions of the story they then become the underwater people of Cultus Lake.

⁵⁵ Gus Commodore, Interview with Norman Lerman, *Lower Fraser Indian Folktales Collected by Norman Lerman, 1950-1951*, (Typescript, Chilliwack: Stó:lō Nation Archives, n.d): 226.

between White Rock and Point Roberts. . . They didn't know where this underground river was until this young man was drowned and came out at Mud Bay."⁵⁶ While the tunnel remained a part of the spiritual geography underneath Cultus Lake, the exact location of the tunnel entrance had been lost. Its rediscovery contributes another story to those attributed to the Cultus Lake tunnel.

The tunnel, or potentially tunnels, of Cultus Lake go to Mud Bay, Bellingham, and White Rock. They seem to be associated with the recurring underground river originally draining the basin. The lake continues to have power and the tunnels continue to violently transport those seeking them. The multiple exit points of the tunnel could suggest multiple passageways or a tunnel with the ability to change its course – or perhaps a course that has changed over time. These tunnel stories combine the spiritual landmarks of the mytho-historical past with more modern stories. With one exception, contemporary seekers of the power of Cultus Lake are more likely to be drowned than to return to their community with power equivalent to Tslam. The powers of Cultus Lake, while clearly still active in the 20th century, have become either more powerful or more discerning over time. Cultus Lake was founded on the site of a tunnel and it may be that this original underground river, and its history, provides the place with its strength.

Kawkawa Lake and the Sxwó:xwey Mask Stories

“They hired Beaver to make a little tunnel from the lake to a little pond out in the river.” -Mrs. Harry Uslick⁵⁷

The Sxwó:xwey mask origin story is one of the most culturally significant stories of the Stó:lō. The masks, regalia, songs and dances associated with the Sxwó:xwey are

⁵⁶ Mr. Bob Joe, Interview with Norman Lerman, *Lower Fraser Indian Folktales Collected by Norman Lerman, 1950-1951*, (Typescript, Chilliwack: Stó:lō Nation Archives, n.d): 264.

⁵⁷ Mrs. Harry Uslick, Interview with Norman Lerman, *Lower Fraser Indian Folktales Collected by Norman Lerman, 1950-1951*, (Typescript, Chilliwack: Stó:lō Nation Archives, n.d): 222.

central to the cultural vibrancy and spirituality of the Stó:lō people in the Fraser Valley.⁵⁸ Three tunnels are associated with the Sxwó:xwey, all built in order to bring the masks from the underwater people of Kawkawa Lake to a small pond in the Fraser River near the village of Iwowes. The stories surrounding these tunnels differ in the nature of their construction, but almost all versions of the story include at least one tunnel, suggesting their importance to the sacred geography of Stó:lō.

Albert (Sonny) McHalsie tells the story of the Sxwó:xwey as it was told to him by Amelia Douglas. He states, “the underwater people were trying to figure out how can we bring this mask from Quelquem⁵⁹ to the village of Iwowes which is across the mountain and there is a little lake there so they figured that’s how they would bring it but they needed to dig or make a tunnel.”⁶⁰ The underwater people asked three animals to dig tunnels in turn. The first unnamed animal dug a tunnel that came out at a rock bluff around the corner. The second animal was Bird, but this tunnel ended too far north of the village and resulted in many small tunnels at a place called Sqweliqwehiwel, meaning “many small tunnels.” Finally the third animal, Beaver, successfully dug a tunnel from Kawkawa Lake to the deep pool near Iwowes.⁶¹ The tunnel was necessary, according to McHalsie, because the underwater people could not bring the mask across land. They needed to travel underground in order to gift the mask to the Stó:lō people.⁶²

In recordings, Amelia Douglas tells a nearly identical story of the mask tunnels. In one version she tells of how some of the underwater people did not want to give the

⁵⁸ For a detailed description of the Sxwó:xwey story and significance see Albert (Sonny) McHalsie, “Sxwó:xwey Origins and Movements,” in Keith Thor Carlson, ed., *A Stó:lō Coast Salish Historical Atlas*, (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2001): 10.

⁵⁹ I am unsure about this spelling.

⁶⁰ Albert (Sonny) McHalsie, Interview with Margaret Robbins, Chilliwack, B.C, May 12, 2009.

⁶¹ Albert (Sonny) McHalsie, Interview with Margaret Robbins, Chilliwack, B.C, May 12, 2009.

⁶² Albert (Sonny) McHalsie, Interview with Margaret Robbins, Chilliwack, B.C, May 12, 2009.

young man the mask after he had cured their sickness, and they in turn had cured his. The one who did not want to give the mask did not tell the people the right way to make the tunnel to the boy's home. She says "they were all too far away from where they were supposed to go. So, finally the one that was mad and the one that knew the trail, which way to go, finally took him home."⁶³ In this version the multiple tunnels are not mistakes of the animals that helped, but rather the result of one underwater person being reluctant to give the masks. The multiple tunnels are, then, either the result of a fallible but honest effort of the animals or the reservations of one of the underwater people. Either way the multiplicity of tunnels in these versions suggest that getting the masks to Iwowes was an ordeal – a task that took effort, thought, and multiple attempts making the final tunnel a greater achievement.

Some descriptions of the story do not include the multiple tunnels. Instead only one tunnel is mentioned – the successful tunnel made by Beaver. Mr. Peters, talking to Oliver Wells in 1964 only describes one tunnel.⁶⁴ The account given to Wilson Duff in the 1950s by Mrs. R.J describes two tunnels, but Beaver constructs both. Her account reads "Beaver was told to dig a tunnel from the lake down through the mountain to the deep pool in the Fraser at the village. He dug one hole, but came out too high above the water, then dug another which came out in the deepest part of the pool."⁶⁵ Robert Joe recounts this similarly.⁶⁶ While the accounts may vary, the centrality of the tunnels and

⁶³ Amelia Douglas, Interview with Sonny McHalsie, Randel Paul, Peter John, Interview number: DA88-26, Chilliwack., B.C., August 17, 1988. A similar version is also recorded in Amelia Douglas, Interview with Sonny McHalsie, Randel Paul, and Richard Daly, Interview number: DA89-10, Chilliwack B.C., October 3, 1989.

⁶⁴ Edmund Peteres, Interview with Oliver Wells, *Edenbank Farm Collection*, Chilliwack B.C., August, 1964: 221.

⁶⁵ Mrs. R.J, Interview with Wilson Duff, *The Upper Stalo Indians of the Fraser Valley, British Columbia*, (Victoria: British Columbia Provincial Museum, 1952): 124.

⁶⁶ Mr. Bob Joe, Interview with Norman Lerman, *Lower Fraser Indian Folktales Collected by Norman Lerman, 1950-1951*, (Typescript, Chilliwack: Stó:lō Nation Archives, n.d): 264.

their building suggests that they are vital to the acquisition of the masks. They are, like the tunnel from Spuzzum to Yale, part of a built metaphysical environment. The tunnels that were unsuccessful are also part of the physical landscape – increasing the physicality of the story by inscribing it onto the environment.⁶⁷ It is perhaps instructive that the failed attempts are easily visible whereas the successful tunnel remains hidden in the deepest part of the pond. The most important avenue of transportation in this story remains hidden in the depths of a spiritual geography concealed from those who do not know it is there.

Only a single account of the tunnel's modern activity is recorded. Patrick Charlie, speaking with Wilson Duff, told of the possibility of being able to visit the underwater people at Kawkawa Lake. He said "Today, people live under the lake. Go there, jump down. You'll hit a roof. . . then the person comes out at outlet of lake. If he is lying on the N. side of creek he is dead. If S. side, alive."⁶⁸ Charlie went on to say that the body could lie for one or two days and then come back to life with the power of the lake. He also told Duff that one white man, named Murphy, tried this but ended up drowning – the only time a white person is mentioned directly in a tunnel story. White people do not seem to either be aware of the spiritual landscape or do not attempt to use the tunnels. These routes of transportation are protected from the colonizer's eyes by virtue of their concealment. It seems that, like Cultus Lake, Kawkawa Lake retains its power and the tunnel remains active, although leading more often to a violent end for those who attempt to harness its power.

⁶⁷ Santos-Granero, "Writing History into the Landscape," 140. Santos-Granero discusses this process as the creation of "topograms" – landmarks that have acquired their present form because of the actions of people or supernatural forces in the past. They are a physical inscription of history onto the landscape.

⁶⁸ Patrick Charlie, Interview with Wilson Duff, Duff, Wilson. *Wilson Duff's Stalo Notebooks. Notebook #1*. Patrick Charlie. July 1950, Yale. (Binder 1 of 3): 51.

The tunnels associated with the Sxwó:xwey masks are the most mentioned of all the tunnels in contemporary stories. This is not surprising given their significance in the story, and the place of the Sxwó:xwey in Stó:lō culture. The significance of the Sxwó:xwey is integral to the spiritual geography of the area. The tunnels are an important part of this cultural landscape, providing the means necessary for giving the gift of the Sxwó:xwey.⁶⁹

No single meaning can be drawn from the collective tunnel stories. The possible significance of each story is as diverse as the number of stories that exist about it. However, some themes emerge about the place of tunnels, and tunnel travel, in the Stó:lō understanding of their landscape. Anthropologist Christopher Tilley argues that “Places such as scared mountains associated with light and air that lie up and above always tend to be privileged culturally and emotionally while places situated down below tend to be associated with darkness and death.”⁷⁰ I have yet to come across any literature describing a Stó:lō understanding of what the tunnels could mean but tunnels, in a Stó:lō intellectual framework, are clearly powerful, but hazardous, places thereby fitting into Tilley’s understanding of how cultures, generally, understand impressive landscapes. Part of what makes them so potent is their seeming invisibility. An unsuspecting person could potentially fall into a tunnel, be swallowed by a landmark they were not even aware of. Only a very small group of people can safely travel through tunnels and gain power from the places they connect. Stories of tunnel travel occurring within the living memory of people usually end in death. This seems to be a fairly clear divide between stories set in

⁶⁹ I have heard mention of some, as yet, unrecorded stories that describe a tunnel from Iwoves to a spiral pictography on Harrison Lake, Cultus Lake, and Musqueam (in Vancouver’s Stanley Park) that was used to bring the masks to these other communities.

⁷⁰ Tilley, *The Materiality of Stone*, 6.

the distant past and those occurring in a more recent time. Perhaps tunnel travel has become increasingly difficult. There also seems to be a difference between tunnels existing within the natural spiritual landscape and those built for specific purposes within the stories. The natural and the built metaphysical environment coexist, but built tunnels represent a more conscious act of creation – a human alteration of the landscape.

Stories and Storytellers:

The tunnels, because of their secretive nature, are only as detectable as the narratives told about them. As such, the role of story and storyteller becomes increasingly important to this spiritual landscape. The primary source material for this study comes from a variety of people and eras. The stories change over time and with each retelling they may be consciously or unconsciously altered to meet the needs of the storyteller, audience and culture. A myriad of causes could inspire these alterations and they could reflect the process of collective forgetting, new construction, new knowledge or changes in the tunnels themselves. The relationship between story, storyteller and place is essential to understanding and honestly engaging with the hidden topography of the Stó:lō world. It is through the stories themselves that the buried tunnel environment is made visible. Academic Kent C. Ryden writes that every place has “an unseen layer of usage, memory, and significance – an invisible landscape, if you will, of imaginative landmarks – superimposed upon the geographical surface and the two-dimensional map. To passing observers, however, that landscape will remain invisible unless it is somehow called to their attention.”⁷¹ Our access to this invisible landscape is mediated by the stories told about it. Those stories are themselves mediated by the thoughts and ideas of

⁷¹ Kent C. Ryden, *Mapping the Invisible Landscape: Folklore, Writing and the Sense of Place*, (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993): 40.

the storytellers– we cannot access the tunnels without them.

White anthropologists and ethnographers collected many of the stories recorded about the tunnels. Accessing the voice of the informant in these cases can be challenging, particularly because of the phenomenal nature of the stories dealing with tunnels. They are a challenge to Western ideas of the real and the imaginary. Michel De Certeau postulates that cultures exist within a framework of the “thinkable.” Each group defines what ideas are even possible to entertain, and every culture differs in what falls into this category.⁷² Stories of unseen portals with mystical qualities probably fell into early ethnographer’s realm of the “unthinkable” in terms of reality. The classification of these stories as mythic resulted. The air of disbelief is problematic, and may colour early accounts. Stories collected later by Stó:lō people, such as those collected by Albert (Sonny) McHalsie, have a different tone as the relationship between informant and interviewer changes the kinds of stories told. This is particularly evident in the level of detail the stories lack when recorded by such ethnographers as Oliver Wells. Wells, trying to collect the language and place names of the Stó:lō, often interrupted stories that dealt with spirituality or mythic histories.⁷³ The tunnel stories are now approached with greater sensitivity – allowing them to enter the realm of the “thinkable.”

Robin Ridington, working with the Dunne-za First Nation, attempted to deal with this in his own writing about Indigenous people. He discovered that it was an unending struggle to reconcile his own culture with the culture he was trying to understand and write about. He writes, “style cannot be separated from substance. The way we write

⁷² Michel De Certeau, *The Writing of History*, translated by Tom Conley, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988): 21.

⁷³ For instance: Edmund Peters, Interview with Oliver Wells, *Edenbank Farm Collection*, Chilliwack, B.C., August 1964: 222.

about culture is highly cultural.”⁷⁴ The separation of story and storyteller is impossible. Understanding the stories of the tunnels is an exercise in understanding the role of stories in the Stó:lō world – both literary and geographic. The stories reflect both personal and collective connections to the spiritual landscape. There is an intimate bond between these collective histories, personal connections to them and the ability to experience them in a tangible way.⁷⁵

The role of the storyteller in the construction of the tunnel narratives also raises the question of who can tell this type of story. Wilson Duff, in his section on the Sxwó:xwey stories, gets a story from a Mrs. R.J. “whose family owns the right to use it.”⁷⁶ Mrs. R.J.’s family probably has a hereditary right to use the Sxwó:xwey mask, but the idea of right to use could also reflect a right to tell the story. The same could potentially be said for the Pitt Lake stories told in the Pierre family genealogical tradition. The stories of the Pitt Lake tunnels begin with a reference to the ownership of the tunnels that have been passed down through the familial line of the storyteller, perhaps indicating rites to both the stories and the tunnels themselves.⁷⁷ It is not possible to make any concrete statement about story ownership, but the tunnel stories seem to be held by individuals with connections to the places they link.⁷⁸

Many of the stories, both those that appear in historical ethnological accounts and those that are told by contemporary community members, include references – either

⁷⁴ Robin Ridington, *Trail to Heaven: Knowledge and Narrative in a Northern Native Community*, (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1988): xii.

⁷⁵ Yi-Fu Tuan, “Place: An Experiential Perspective,” *The Geographical Review*, 65(2), (1975): 164.

⁷⁶ Mrs. R.J, Interview with Wilson Duff, *The Upper Stalo Indians of the Fraser Valley*: 124.

⁷⁷ The reference to tunnel ownership is from Jenness, *The Faith of a Coast Salish Indian*, 11.

⁷⁸ This assertion is based on the communities from which the storytellers come from. Storytellers tend to tell stories about the places where they grew up or currently live, perhaps with the exception of Kawkawa Lake stories, whose cultural capital seems to transcend community borders.

written or oral – indicating the source for the story. These citations provide legitimacy to the storyteller and provide a link to the narratives of the past. Storytellers recounting the tunnel stories today infuse their narratives with references to the people who told the stories in the past. Stories have genealogies and their changes can be traced. For example, Albert (Sonny) McHalsie credits many of his stories to Amelia Douglas based on interviews he conducted with her in the late 1980s. The transcripts of those interviews reveal that the stories, while remaining largely the same, undergo transformations with every telling. They also reveal the difference between reading a story and hearing it in person. Listening to the intonation and cadence of stories changes their felt meaning – perhaps accounting for some of the difference between listening to McHalsie and reading Amelia Douglas.

The tunnel stories, then, are intimately tied to the stories of the past. They are also intimately tied to the places described. They are localized narratives and, as such, are inextricably connected to the places described. The physical landscape of S’olh Téméxw, like all storied landscapes, provides places that are mnemonic – providing physical and visual prompts for the stories about them.⁷⁹ It is around these places that collective histories and personal biographies connect, rooting the narratives produced in a place.⁸⁰ The importance of the places connected by tunnels provides part of their significance. These stories and storytellers are decidedly place-bound. The locations and the narratives compliment and shape one another. Place, according to Ryden, “is in fact as much a verbal as a physical or geographical phenomenon.”⁸¹ Tilley pushes this idea further by suggesting that words, or stories, create place. He states “this is the task of a richly

⁷⁹ Ryden, *Mapping the Invisible Landscape*, 26.

⁸⁰ Santos-Granero, “Writing History into the Landscape,” 141.

⁸¹ Ryden, *Mapping the Invisible Landscape*, 42.

textured carnal phenomenological ‘thick’ description in which we truly attempt to reflect on the character of our experience.”⁸² The tunnels and the narratives about them are dependant on one another and both are complexly rooted in the physical and metaphysical landscape of S’olh Téméxw.

Space, Place and Spiritual Landscapes:

Tunnels connecting geographically distant places in S’olh Téméxw raise questions about how the Stó:lō think about space – be it social or geographic. Subterraneous channels provide links, however rarely operationalized, between distant communities.⁸³ This necessarily affects social spatiality as these connections make S’olh Téméxw a much smaller place. Belief in the tunnels fosters a social closeness and inspires a collective identity based on physical and social proximity. Christopher Tilley argues that “Personal and social identities are played out in the context of landscapes and the multitude of places that constitute them. To be human is to be place-bound in a fundamental way.”⁸⁴ Tunnels bring places socially closer and provide another bond between communities and people who seem far apart to the unknowing eye. They also help shape the identities of those who know of them, and believe in their existence. Landscape phenomenologist Edward Casey writes “If imagination projects us out *beyond* ourselves while memory takes us back *behind* ourselves, place subtends and enfolds us, lying perpetually *under and around* us.”⁸⁵ The places in which people live, and tell stories about, is the site of both history and mythology. Identities are likewise physically located, providing the literal and metaphorical ground for communities to share experiences and

⁸² Tilley, *The Materiality of Stone*, 28.

⁸³ Keith Thor Carlson, *The Power Of Place, The Problem Of Time*: 6.

⁸⁴ Tilley, *The Materiality of Stone*, 25.

⁸⁵ Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back Into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993): xvi.

culture.⁸⁶ The tunnels fit into this collective imagining of space and place. They bring places, and therefore people, closer together and inspire a connectedness by simply existing in the Stó:lō landscape and providing a possibility of operationalization.

Their existence requires a re-imagining of geographic realities and the meaning of ‘place.’ The landscapes that create S’olh Téméxw are littered with important places – rocks transformed by Xáls, hereditary fishing spots, and the boundaries of reserves are only some examples of the kinds of places that inform the Stó:lō geographic landscape. Tunnels occupy a place somewhere between the physical and the spiritual realm. They also can be viewed as a stark reminder for outsiders that Stó:lō people may not divide the spiritual and the physical in the same way. Journeys through tunnels are journeys to, and between, specific places - important places for various reasons.⁸⁷ Tilley argues, “it is mistaken to draw distinctions between natural and cultural landscapes and places or the material and the mental. They are intertwined in social Being.”⁸⁸ Tunnels are one part of this landscape – at once geographic, cultural and spiritual. They are though, by their own nature, intractably mysterious. They are places that, if the stories about them were lost, could disappear from the geography they inform. Experiential geographer Yi-Fu Tuan writes that place “is a construct of experience; it is sustained . . . by the quality of human awareness.”⁸⁹ The geography inspires the stories and the stories create the place. Tunnels, then, are places vulnerable to erasure because of their secretive locations, sustained by the stories told about them.

Tunnels are part of a mental geography that is intimately connected to the

⁸⁶ Tilley, *The Materiality of Stone*, 25.

⁸⁷ Casey, *Getting Back Into Place*, 274.

⁸⁸ Tilley, *The Materiality of Stone*, 24.

⁸⁹ Tuan, “Place,” 165.

physical world and also firmly rooted in a spiritual plane. Denis Cosgrove writes that the “surface does not delimit our imaginative life and it is given ‘depth’ or meaning only in relation to what exists above and below it.”⁹⁰ Tunnels, in this estimation of the meaning of landscape, provide the hidden depths and the mystery of the place. The landscape of tunnels may appear to outsiders as an environment of the imagination – mythical rather than part of a geographic reality. The physical existence of the tunnel, however, is irrelevant. The belief in them is what makes them a part of the metaphysical geography. Spiritual landscapes inform a culture and collective identity just as much as a physically tangible place does, arguably even more. Yi-Fu Tuan argues that landscape, that is ideas and meanings attached to specific locations, is a function of the mature human mind.⁹¹ The creation of a landscape is itself a mental exercise – an effort of imagination. Kent C. Ryden writes “It is stories . . . of what happened to people in a place, of what they have done with the things that they found there, that best reveal the “real geography”:
geography, that is, experienced and understood as place.”⁹² In this estimation, tunnels are not a challenge to geographic understandings of place, they are part of a spiritual and storied landscape - they create place.

Visualizing Through Mapping⁹³:

If we accept the idea that all landscapes are maps of the imagination created by the stories that give them meaning, how do we reconcile this idea with the visual medium of maps themselves – supposedly scientific images of a place? Landscapes are visually

⁹⁰ Cosgrove, “Landscapes and Myths, Gods and Humans,” 282.

⁹¹ Yi-Fu Tuan, “Thought and Landscape: The Eye and the Mind’s Eye,” in D.W Meinig, ed., *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979):90.

⁹² Ryden, *Mapping the Invisible Landscape*, 46.

⁹³ See Attached Map 1: All Tunnels, and First Tunnel Map.

appealing and the power of place is essentially a visually emotive experience. S'olh Téméxw is inscribed with a physically represented historical consciousness and therefore connected to ideas of maps and the images they produced.⁹⁴ Maps historically have served Western purposes of conquering and claiming Indigenous space. Even when scientifically inaccurate, they were powerful tools. They superimposed European understandings of space onto both the physical and supernatural landscape. Maps are symbolic of colonization through a re-imagination of space. They are not, and have never been, unemotional and sterile images of a physical environment. They are the visualizations of a cultural space, a way of organizing and representing environment combining memory, imagination and physical place.⁹⁵

The challenge the tunnel stories pose to traditional maps is their spiritual nature. Unlike mapping mountain chains or river systems, mapping this landscape requires a cognitive leap into the Stó:lō worldview. Hugh Brody, creating land biographies with Indigenous peoples in British Columbia, states “Dreams collide; new kinds of maps are made.”⁹⁶ That is how the maps for this project were conceived. It is at the nexus of a European art form, mapping, and a Stó:lō way of seeing landscape that the visualization of a spiritual landscape takes place. It is concurrently a challenge to and an extension of a European “cartographic imagination.”⁹⁷

Making maps of the tunnel stories is an exercise in reclamation of physical and mental space in the Fraser Valley. It both occupies a foreign medium and makes it

⁹⁴ Susanne Kuchler, “Landscape as Memory: The Mapping of Process and its Representation in a Melanesian Society,” in Barbara Bender, ed. *Landscape: Politics and Perspectives* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1993): 85.

⁹⁵ Ryden, *Mapping the Invisible Landscape*, 25.

⁹⁶ Hugh Brody, *Maps and Dreams: Indians and the British Columbia Frontier*, (London: Jill Norman & Hobhouse Ltd., 1981): xvii.

⁹⁷ Ryden, *Mapping the Invisible Landscape*, 42.

Indigenous by re-imagining the landscape and visually displaying the social and geographic understandings of place. Visuals are evocative and powerful, and the maps of the tunnels not only show the geographic connections created by the channels, they reclaim the social, physical and visual landscape. The spiritual landscape is represented in a medium assumed to display only physical realities.

Drawing Conclusions:

It is difficult to draw any definitive conclusions about the role of tunnels, their importance and their meaning. They are a part of the metaphysical and physical geography that inform Stó:l̓ō collective identity, spirituality, and history. They are unique in the landscape of S'olh Téméxw because they are hidden from sight. Transformed rocks lack meaning without stories but remain visible to passersby, but tunnels do not. They are completely dependent on stories told about them and therefore provide a link between stories, storytellers and place. Ryden argues that storytellers, such as McHalsie, are “literary cartographers . . . trying to portray both the exterior, visible landscape . . . and, more important, the interior, invisible landscape that lies atop it – a world of deep and subtle meaning for the people who live there, one that can be mapped only with words.”⁹⁸ It is at the nexus of storyteller, story and place that the tunnels create their connections – providing another way of thinking about social and physical space and creating bonds between physically separate locations. The tunnel stories have changed over time, and will continue to undergo alterations as new stories are added to the list as needed and others are removed after serving their purpose and as new storytellers engage with the spiritual geography of S'olh Téméxw. The relationships they create between these “strong places” continue to influence the way people inscribe meaning onto the

⁹⁸ Ryden, *Mapping the Invisible Landscape*, 52.

landscape and understand their place within it.

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