

Coming to Shore

Northwest Coast Ethnology, Traditions and Visions

Edited by
Marie Mauzé, Michael Harkin, and Sergei Kan.
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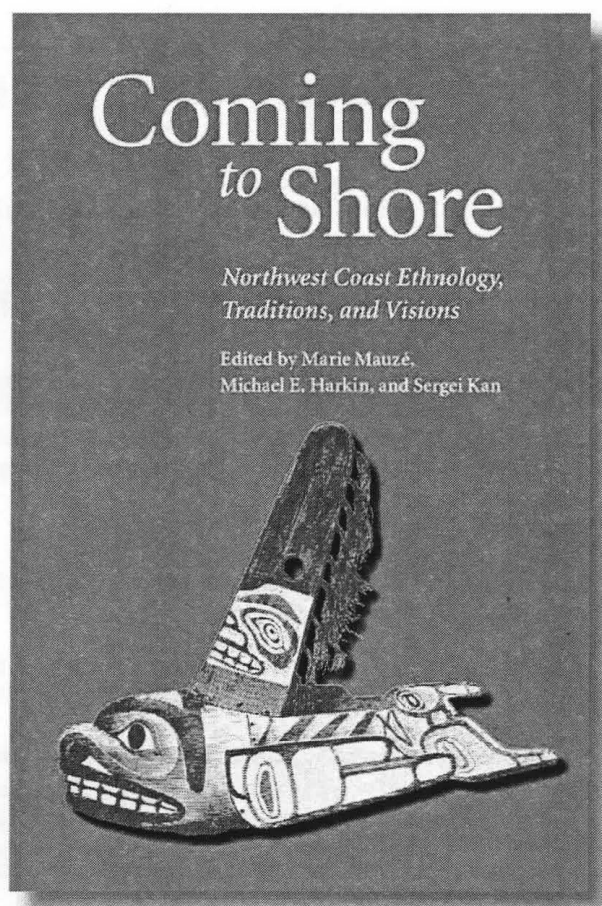
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Coming to Shore is a volume of papers presented at the 2000 conference in France in honour of Levi-Strauss. There are two stated purposes to this volume: (1) to honour the legacy of Levi-Strauss in Northwest Coast ethnography and (2) to bring together current ethnographers working on diverse issues in Northwest Coast communities for the first time in a generation. The editors see three strands of ethnographic traditions represented in this volume: French, American and Canadian. This holds true throughout the volume, but it becomes clear that these traditions do not always engage with Northwest Coast cultures and communities in the same way.

The volume is divided into four separate sections, each containing a number of papers, but thematically, it falls into two parts. The first part includes two sections: "The Legacy of Northwest Coast Research" and "Texts and Narratives", and focuses on ethnographers and methods from the past. The second includes: "History and Representation" and "Politics and Cultural Heritage" and focuses on the present and future of Northwest Coast research. Claude Levi-Strauss begins the volume with a short paper, in which he discusses the importance and significance of the Pacific Northwest in the anthropological imagination and sets up the first part of the volume. This first section, appropriately, deals with the history of Northwest Coast research. Several of the authors attempt to place Levi-Strauss in the pantheon of foundational ethnographers in the region, but fall short due to Levi-Strauss' limited influence on Northwest Coast anthropology. Regina Darnell draws comparisons between the approaches of Levi-Strauss and Franz Boas, connecting the Levi-Straussian approach to the Americanist framework and pointing out important areas of convergence and divergence. The next set of chapters are retrospective in nature, from Fredrica de Laguna's fascinating personal account of her career as a holistic anthropologist working in Alaska to Marie Mauzé's analysis of how the Northwest Coast has "haunted" the imagination of French anthropology. Peter Maranda, Marjorie Halpin and Margaret Anderson, in their respective papers, address structuralism in its various guises, from its role at the University of British Columbia to its application as a methodology in the ethnography on the Northwest Coast.

In the section entitled "Texts and Narratives", three scholars engage with oral traditions and life histories from the region. In Judith Berman's article, she contextualizes encounter stories as



social and cultural commentaries on contact, and argues that narratives "address contemporary Native relationships both to traditional cultural values and the dominant society" (157, emphasis in original). Robert Bringhurst analyzes Haida texts recorded by Swanton, emphasizing their poetic, literary and performance value. In their paper, Martine Reid and Daisy Sewid-Smith reflect on their experience facilitating the autobiography of Kwakwakawakw elder and noblewoman Agnes Alfred, a life history which strives to present life as seen and lived by Agnes Alfred herself.

While the first half of the book looks to the past, the last half of the book looks forward. It contains a series of important articles written by ethnographers and anthropologists who are currently engaged in active research in First Nations and Native American communities. It is this portion of the book that effectively demonstrates the continuing vitality and importance of Northwest Coast anthropological research to both the broader discipline and, most significantly, to the current socio-political struggles of First Nations and Native American communities.

The section "History and Representation" begins with Sergei Kan's article, in which he explores how Southeastern Alaska Natives were represented to early American tourists, and how they were portrayed as somehow more advanced, less noble, and cleverer than their counterparts in the lower United States. Tourists in the late nineteenth century were entranced by the natural landscape of Alaska, but were often disappointed with the "natives" and regarded them as "crafty and unclean" (211). The complex history of the Northwest Coast exhibit in the American Museum of Natural History is the focus of Ira

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Jacknis' article, in which she argues that these displays have "played a critical role in forming our image of Northwest Coast Indian cultures" (222). Richard and Nora Marks Dauenhauer, in their paper, continue their long tradition of insightful research by exploring the dynamic and changing nature of Tlingit identity, particularly how the notion of clan has shifted through the creation or re-imagining of different songs, symbols and patterns of inheritance in contemporary Tlingit communities.

The next three articles, by Aaron Glass, Bruce Miller and Daniel Boxberger, are interconnected in that they focus on current socio-political issues in First Nation communities, challenging the way that anthropologists and others have constructed ideas of "tradition" and providing the highlight of the volume. One of the most interesting and relevant points to come out of these discussions is how concepts of tradition, often constructed through earlier ethnographies, are adopted, modified and maintained in contemporary communities. These authors move beyond and redefine what much of the rest of the book honours and upholds as Northwest Coast ethnography.

Patricia Erikson, coming from a museum perspective, uses the model of "autoethnography" to explore the contribution of cultural centres and tribal museums to Native communities on the Northwest Coast, specifically the Makah. She points to the role of tribal museums and cultural centres as focal points for undermining traditional museum representations and creating

new methods of presentation and interpretation of Native history. Cultural geographies are increasingly discussed in the context of non-literate societies, and are the focus of Thomas Thornton's article. He explores the role of place among the Tlingit; particularly how place represents and informs the Tlingit ideal of living and being in the world. Harkin continues in this thread, unpacking how different narratives and experiences have constructed the past, present and future place of Clayquot Sound. His analysis of the changing political, environmental and historical context of Clayquot Sound illustrates the tension between local traditions and global discourses about environment, wilderness and the meaning of place.

The final chapter in the volume is an account of the process leading up to the Makah whaling hunt, told by Janine Bowe chop, a woman from the Makah Nation. She is one of the few anthropologists to discuss the connection between archaeological material and contemporary practice as she recognizes the role of material from Ozette in teaching the younger generation of people about traditional whaling.

In general, this volume fulfills its two stated goals, as it both pays tribute to and moves beyond the ethnographic approaches of Lévi-Strauss and Boas. The subtitle of the volume, Northwest Coast Ethnology, Traditions and Visions neatly summarizes the accomplishments of this collection of papers.

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