

Culture



Robert BOYD, *People of The Dalles. The Indians of Wascopam Mission, Lincoln, Nebraska*: University of Nebraska Press, 1996, 396 pages

Toby Morantz

Volume 16, Number 2, 1996

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1083961ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1083961ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Canadian Anthropology Society / Société Canadienne d'Anthropologie (CASCA), formerly/anciennement Canadian Ethnology Society / Société Canadienne d'Ethnologie

ISSN

0229-009X (print)

2563-710X (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Morantz, T. (1996). Review of [Robert BOYD, *People of The Dalles. The Indians of Wascopam Mission*, Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1996, 396 pages]. *Culture*, 16(2), 100–102. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1083961ar>

Tous droits réservés © Canadian Anthropology Society / Société Canadienne d'Anthropologie (CASCA), formerly/anciennement Canadian Ethnology Society / Société Canadienne d'Ethnologie, 1996

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

Érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

ship with performance-generated meaning. The main body of the text examines the components and applications of flexible systems of knowledge representation. Part I, "Habitus," highlights the text of the *Bhairavi Varnam* as cultural action, exploring the synergy of text, world, and performer in the creation of generative flows of lived knowledge. Part II, "Praxis," locates the foundations of the Tamil knowledge system in the speech artefact, where grammar, semantics and application become united in the communicative effort. Finally, in Part III, "Representation," the embodiment, transmission, and performance of knowledge are contrasted with abstraction, custody, and enduring objectification. Of primary concern here is the development of strategies aimed toward expressive adequacy and interaction in the configuration of flexible systems of representation.

Kersenboom's application of the Tamil text, which emphasizes both practice and interaction as conditions for human knowledge, to her vision of a "radical hermeneutics" situates her work at the epicenter of current debates on the crisis of knowing – the tension between the word and the world, between textualized representation, and the production and organization of life-worlds. Her challenge to the dominant Western paradigm of static textual representation is one that builds on a strong foundation in sub-altern and post-colonial streams of thought. To these voices, *Word, Sound, Image* adds powerful illustrations of the full force of textual entropy in Western scholarship and opens up a vibrant space for dialogue among the traditions of Tamil and Western ways of knowing. In the process, however, spaces are also closed. Those Tamil texts which draw their force from the traditions of Western scholarship – translations, interpretations, and investigations of interior landscapes of devotion – are banished to the margins under Kersenboom's mandate for dialogue and contextuality. The most eloquent efforts of Western philological, hermeneutic, or structuralist analyses are held as presenting pale and lifeless representations of the Tamil textual event.

What is striking about Kersenboom's efforts is not so much a newness of concerns, but the depth and breadth to which they are extended. Not only does *Word, Sound, Image* present a mandate for human knowledge to be represented as an interactive event - it is the event itself. "Rendering the text into meaningful action" (p. 227), has meant posing fundamental questions about media of representa-

tion, and searching for ways to accommodate a paradigm rooted in practice. Extending beyond traditional Western conceptions of the text as a fixed, two-dimensional medium, Kersenboom's work may more aptly be described as a vehicle for meaning. It expands the parameters of textual representation through the use of a Compact Disc-interactive demo, which presents a five-minute excerpt of the Tamil text discussed in the monograph. Through the CD-i, the user may enter the world of the Tamil text either at the descriptive, analytical, or interpretive levels, investigating any combination of sound, word, and image, the grammars of music, prosody and dance, or the semantic networks that connect the text with the wider Tamil universe. The CD-i radically alters the relationship between reader and text, interweaving the user and the interpretive moment into the nexus of form and meaning of the text. While the text of *Word, Sound, Image* proffers an epistemology that returns to the world, the CD-i is its application, embodying an organic, simultaneous representation of the orality and performance of the Tamil text, and drawing the reader/audience into new relationships with knowledge, time and space.

Robert BOYD, *People of The Dalles. The Indians of Wascopam Mission*, Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1996, 396 pages.

Toby Morantz

McGill University

A secondary title to this volume describes it as "a historical ethnography based on the papers of the Methodist missionaries." Boyd's discovery of the papers of H.K.W. Perkins, dating back to the mid-1800s, led to this volume in which he reconstructs ethnographic details about the lives of the Chinookan and Sahaptin speaking peoples of The Dalles area, on the lower Columbia River, in Oregon Territory. It was a time, the author tells us, that was a crucial period in terms of change, much of it due to the devastating epidemics. This reconstruction makes up the first half of the book. Two other sections follow, one which reproduces the writings of Perkins and a smaller third section in which Boyd provides biographical sketches of the main individuals, Indian and white, who appear in Perkins' writings.

A student of the peoples of the North West Coast and Plateau areas would learn much about these peoples who bordered these two culture areas for Boyd provides much more than Perkins' observations. He first begins with a history of the area dating somewhat earlier than the first "direct White influence" (p. 12), initiated by the Lewis and Clark expedition of 1805, so that the arrival of the missionaries in the mid-1800s are given their historical context. The major changes that preceded them were the acquisition of the horse, the devastation of epidemics and the establishment of fur trade posts. The missionaries arrived a third of a century after these events and Boyd's analysis of the Wascopam Mission draws on these earlier times.

The Peoples of the Wascopam Mission circuit identified themselves most strongly with winter villages, rather than larger tribal organizations, and were of the two linguistic affiliations noted above. Perkins' writings includes peoples of both languages but he mastered the Sahaptin language, that of the collectivity known as "Walla Walla." On the whole, these Columbia Plateau peoples are often discussed generally by Boyd but where he can he distinguishes them by name. A linguistic map (pp. 34-35) makes following the names of the various bands, along with their general location and relationship to each other, much easier.

The historical ethnographic reconstruction is accomplished in several ways. Boyd extracts each of the ethnographic details he found in Perkins' writings and those of other missionaries of the time (including his wife) and organizes them according to subject matter, such as "subsistence," "social structure," "ritual behavior." Knowing very well the biases in writings of missionaries (although Boyd allows that Perkins was more "remarkably tolerant and open-minded" than most of his time, p. 3), he does not merely reproduce the socio-cultural details but holds them up to scrutiny in terms of consistency with the later historical and ethnographic record, employing what he calls a "dialectic approach" (p. 2). He also employs the technique of up-streaming from the twentieth century ethnographic records to fill in details of institutions or subsistence strategies which Perkins and his contemporaries missed or ignored. The end-product is a very comprehensive reconstructed account of the ethnographic particulars, although punctuated with a myriad of references, comparing the differences in the sources,

which makes it difficult to follow. Nevertheless, it is most credible, given the close and careful substantiation he has done for each institution. Unfortunately, Boyd does not provide us with a concluding overview that draws together his findings and, in fact, he ends the ethnographic reconstruction abruptly with an account of the Methodists' strategies for drawing the Sahaptins and Chinookans into the sphere of Christianity.

However, the second part, the writings of Perkins, suggests there is more that could be offered us. Boyd's ethnographic reconstruction for the mid-1800s is soulless. It reads like an up-dated trait list with the natives seemingly passively accepting the changes that befell them. Yet, in Perkins' narrative there are lively accounts of their resistance or their objections. If one compares Boyd's relatively humdrum account of Perkins' confrontation with the slave owners, "'Slaves are our money, as dollars are yours,' said Bear-Cap, threatening Perkins with his whip" (p. 90) with Perkins' own narrative account one sees a much more vigorous opposition and challenge to the meddling missionaries. In the original, Perkins is rushed with a whip, tied with a rope and told that should Bear-Cap be shot at or cut-up in small pieces he would never relinquish his practice of slavery and furthermore "it is *bad* for you to talk to us. It is your duty to keep *still*....All of you Americans are *liars* - we wish to be *left alone*" (p. 277).

This work falls squarely into the domain of ethnohistory that is preoccupied with social change. Much of the change is relatively understandable but there are least two types of change in the literature that are not, the resulting effects of epidemics and why people converted. On each of these issues, Boyd had an opportunity to explore further the particular dimensions for this case study that would have contributed to a greater comparative understanding but he did not. For example, under a heading "Culture Change at Wascopam" Boyd documents the great depopulation that occurred in a series of epidemics, only alerting us to this being "the most fundamental of all changes" (p. 141) without suggesting in what directions to channel our thinking on this important subject. As for conversion, the depopulation is advanced as a reason for the Wascopam peoples' receptivity (p. 172) but without explanation. His one foray into analysis is a listing of the elements in Aberle's "deprivation theory" on the origins of

contact-period nativistic cults (p. 173) but this theory is not tested with Boyd's knowledge of the mission.

Although this volume does not address issues in social change that would be of benefit to a wider audience, it is an excellent source book for students of this region for it comprises a wealth of useful data and analyses of change of regional interest. The novel addition of original writings and biographical sketches adds to its value to historians and anthropologists and, of course, the *People of The Dalles*.

Victor and Edith L. B. TURNER, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1995, 281 pages.

By Christopher G. Trott

Concordia University

This is a very Catholic book.

Wait. Did reading the opening sentence make you want to flip to the next review? Do you object to a position in anthropology that is so evidently sectarian?

It is for precisely this reason that anthropologists need to reread and reconsider some of the later positions articulated by the late Victor Turner and his wife Edith. This volume is a paperback edition of a book originally published in 1978, which Columbia University Press feels is significant enough to republish. As the book has already been reviewed and now subsists as part of the anthropological literature it is not necessary to review the contents but to suggest why it would be useful to read this book in the 1990s. A comprehensive critical evaluation of the Turners' position with respect to medieval Christianity has already been provided by Bynum (1984).

In the current post-modern atmosphere that insists on exposing the authors' predispositions and cultural biases, this book can be read as an important early contribution. The Turners state that they are intrigued by the symbolic processes of Christian pilgrimages because of their own personal Roman Catholic commitment and devotion. It is not entirely clear in the text whether the Turners have undertaken these pilgrimages because of their faith and then written an analytical reflection on them, or whether they appreciated the analytical questions and then sought to test

their ideas against existing pilgrimage events. In some ways it does not really matter: The Turners' own Catholicism shines through every page of the book.

This raises a far more difficult problem for contemporary anthropology: to what extent do the faith and beliefs of the authors affect the way that anthropologists conduct their field research? In this case it is made explicit and one is obliged to take the authors' religion into account. On the other hand, how would such a revelation have influenced our readings of Victor Turner's earlier works on Ndembu ritual when the anthropologist's stance is supposed to be disinterested and distanced? I suspect that many readers would have dismissed the careful analysis of much Ndembu ritual had this been taken into account, while at the same time Turner's own faith probably allowed him to take what the Ndembu were telling him much more seriously.

Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture also provides an example of turning the anthropological gaze back onto our own society. The Turners assume that the reader is largely familiar with the elaborate conceptual apparatus that Victor had developed in his earlier work (and for those who may be unfamiliar, there is a very useful appendix providing definitions for the technical terms used in the analysis). This move shows that the methods of processual symbolic analysis are as productive in examining complex societies where we have access to historical developments as they are in examining ritual in societies more often studied by anthropologists. The Turners outline the texture of the similarities and differences between the types of analysis, but are not obliged to change the basic terms of the process.

The Turners raise some important questions concerning the suppression of existing religious systems and the imposition of Christian practice. Their typology of four different kinds of pilgrimage (prototypical, archaic, medieval, and modern) is not particularly helpful but in the case studies of Mexico and Ireland it does raise questions concerning the ongoing influence of earlier religions and the reappropriation of particular symbolic vehicles into Christian practice. While in some cases the church authorized the "baptizing" of existing sites and pilgrimages, in others they were totally destroyed and replaced by Christian buildings. What emerges is a complex dynamic interaction of symbolic systems that cannot be classified