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The Use of Aboriginal Culture in Development

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Résumé de l'article

Pendant l'été 1987, les Tsimshians du village de Kitsumkalum, dans le nord-ouest de la Colombie-Britannique, ont érigé trois totems. Cette entreprise colossale a pleinement révélé la vigueur de leur communauté et l'influence qu'exercent les chefs pour mobiliser l'appui nécessaire à la réalisation de buts collectifs. A l'heure actuelle, la culture autochtone est utilisée comme un moyen permettant d'établir des stratégies visant à consolider ou à négocier un statu quo socio-politique. L'élévation des mâts totémiques a donc fourni aux Tsimshians l'occasion de restructurer leur mode d'expression politique et d'importants aspects de leur organisation sociale, conformément à leurs traditions. Cette étude explore comment la culture des autochtones a été employée pour négocier, dans le contexte approprié, des questions d'une importance vitale pour la communauté, telles que les revendications territoriales, l'autonomie gouvernementale et le développement économique.

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In the summer of 1987 the Tsimshians of the village of Kitsumkalum in northwestern British Columbia raised three totem poles, a massive undertaking that enabled them to demonstrate the strength of their community and the political potency of their leaders to mobilize support for their goals. Today, aboriginal culture is being used as a resource to devise creative strategies for asserting or negotiating a social and political *status quo*. The pole raising was a means for these Tsimshians to restructure their mode of political expression and important aspects of their social organization along tradition lines. This paper examines how aboriginal culture was used to contextualize and negotiate policy issues critical to the community: land claims, self-government, and economic development.

Pendant l'été 1987, les Tsimshians du village de Kitsumkalum, dans le nord-ouest de la Colombie-Britannique, ont érigé trois totems. Cette entreprise colossale a pleinement révélé la vigueur de leur communauté et l'influence qu'exercent les chefs pour mobiliser l'appui nécessaire à la réalisation de buts collectifs. À l'heure actuelle, la culture autochtone est utilisée comme un moyen permettant d'établir des stratégies visant à consolider ou à négocier un statu quo socio-politique. L'élévation des mâts totémiques a donc fourni aux Tsimshians l'occasion de restructurer leur mode d'expression politique et d'importants aspects de leur organisation sociale, conformément à leurs traditions. Cette étude explore comment la culture des autochtones a été employée pour négocier, dans le contexte approprié, des questions d'une importance vitale pour la communauté, telles que les revendications territoriales, l'autonomie gouvernementale et le développement économique.

INTRODUCTION: Aboriginal culture and public policy in Canada

One of the great questions underlying policy in Canadian Indian affairs is the role that aboriginal cultures will play in reforming the relationship between aboriginal communities and the Canadian state. On one hand, there are many pressures emanating from the dominant Canadian society that undermine aboriginal cultures, creating problems that prevent the cultures from assuming a more positive role. On the other hand, aboriginal cultures continue to give meaning to peoples' lives and to remain relevant to the affairs of contemporary Indian communities.

There is a widely held perception that Canadian political practices and ideology, which have dominated Indian life and development since Confederation, are oppressive failures in resolving the problems aboriginal people face. Certainly, numerous studies show that Indians in Canada experienced serious difficulties with economic and social development during the 20th century (e.g. Hawthorn et al 1966; Canada 1980). These studies document the reasons why many Indian leaders perceive the legacy of Canadian Indian policies to be little more than the mar-

ginalization and underdevelopment of Indian communities.

As alternatives to existing official and unofficial attitudes, prevalent in Canadian society, that dismiss the relevancy of Indian culture for modern times, aboriginal leaders are struggling to gain greater legal and social recognition for the unique and diverse cultural identities of their people. There is a determination, on the part of aboriginal leaders throughout the country to use their own cultures for new ideas and solutions, and for policy initiatives that reflect indigenous cultural values. Expressions of this thrust are apparent in the efforts of various aboriginal organizations, from the grassroots level of the bands up to the national organizations, to actively maintain or experiment with aboriginal institutions and otherwise to promote an assortment of aboriginal concepts that they see as alternatives to the existing, imposed colonial forms of social organization (e.g. Cassidy and Bish 1989; Cassidy and Dale 1988; Richardson 1989). From British Columbia, particularly relevant examples include the use of feasting to establish land rights in the early 1980s by the neighbouring Nisga'a and Gitksan (see Gisday Wa and Delgam Uukw 1989), and the use of material culture to support and stimulate ceremonial practices, including the feast system. Pole raisings are particularly pertinent examples of this phenomenon and have recently occurred at Masset in 1969, Alert Bay in 1970, Kispiox in 1971, Port Edward in 1973, Nitinat in 1977, Skidegate in 1978, Neah Bay in 1980, Metlakatla in 1982 (Blackman 1985). This list of village pole raisings is not complete, but does indicate the widespread interest in using aboriginal culture as part of the process of decolonization.

The promotion of aboriginal culture in the context of relations between highly developed modern nation states and underdeveloped regional social formations raises an important question. The role indigenous culture, often identified as belonging to the traditional sector, can play has long been a contentious issue in development theory. Although we have travelled a long distance from the extreme academic attitudes even in the 1960s when culture was stereotyped as tradition and blamed for retarding development of aboriginal societies by inhibiting the emergence of new social forms adapted to modern contingencies (e.g. Rostow 1962; or Hoselitz 1960) the prejudice persists not only in some versions of modernization theory but also in much theory and practice (e.g. Taylor 1979). We have also gone beyond the correctives of the 1970s and 1980s that emphasized the impact of the global capitalist system in creating problems of development (e.g. Foster-

Carter 1978) and thereby were able to rehabilitate indigenous culture, restoring its place as a context for development. While this latter perspective allows indigenous culture somewhat of a reprieve, the tendency has been to focus on economic factors and social structures. Accordingly, criticism has emphasized how culture is articulated (or not articulated) into the theory (e.g. Worsley 1984).

These theoretical shortcomings surrounding our conceptualization of the capacity of culture are unfortunate. Ultimately, culture provides the important source for answers to the fundamental question of "what is to be done?". As Worsley noted, culture "supplies a project, a design for living" (1984:43) and, at some point, the definition of the future must become a cultural question. When this point is reached, as in Canada, cultural practices become the object and instrument of political struggle (Bourdieu 1977:169), and customs and traditions (in the two senses differentiated by Hobsbawm 1983:4) spring forward to constitute a framework of opportunities, rather than constraints, that enable people to resist and reshape their social world.

A growing body of literature explores how these opportunities are generated. The chief emphasis is on the invention or re-invention of traditions for political purposes (e.g. Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983), but the inquiry follows two directions. In one, "traditionalism" is seen to generate social solidarity and cohesion (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983:2) by drawing on perceptions of the past as a resource for the present (Spiegel 1989:66). When the process involves the development of civil consciousness, the focus is on the use of "old, unchanging traditions" (Philibert 1990:252) and the extent to which these new traditions are "invented" or "spontaneously generated" becomes a difficult question for traditionalist theory to handle (Hobsbawm 1983:307).

The second approach, sometimes characterized as "practice theory" (e.g. Collier and Yanagiasko 1989), takes us further with an emphasis on the dynamic instability of the system and on the generation of cultural practices. In the work of Pierre Bourdieu, the past, "which survives in the present and tends to perpetuate itself into the future by making itself present in practices structured according to its principles" (1977:82), combined with the "sense of the game" (1986), is the basis for understanding how culture both structures behaviour and is structured by behaviour. While both approaches take "tradition", itself a dynamic cultural construct, as a baseline from which, or against which, people

construct strategies of cultural practice, the second approach emphasizes the re-contextualization of practices as shifts in a cultural matrix (the *habitus*) rather than as inventions. The practices become conscious and objectified in the hegemonic process of establishing or maintaining a social order. With this latter approach, we can interpret the emergence of contemporary political expressions of aboriginal culture in Canada in terms of the political relations between aboriginal society and the Canadian social formation, and thereby gain greater insight into the significance that the revival of traditions has for the de-colonization of aboriginal people.

A CASE

I observed an example of the generation of cultural practices, some new and some old, in August, 1987, when the Tsimshian community of Kitsumkalum ceremonially raised two new crest (or totem) poles. One of the most general intentions for the ceremony was to give expression to the meaning of being Tsimshian, and this was accomplished with a dramatic display of Tsimshian ceremony. Yet, the pole raising was more than a celebration of Tsimshian pageantry. Important interests were involved, both Tsimshian and Canadian, that were associated with rights to resources and with the control of economic and social development. The content and context of these interests were made explicit, during the ceremonial process, with statements describing the impact of one hundred years of Canadian rule, which has pushed Kitsumkalum into a state of cultural and economic depression and dependency. In struggling to overcome these adverse conditions, the community has focused on issues surrounding land reform (land claims), political reform (self government), and economic and cultural development. These concerns were of particular importance to the ceremony (McDonald n.d.).

In this article, I look at how the ceremony was used to relocate these issues in a context structured by Tsimshian values. I am particularly interested in the ceremony as a symbol of Kitsumkalum's cultural vitality, social solidarity, and political determination, and as a symbol of how Tsimshian culture could be marshalled to overcome social problems in a Tsimshian way. In the intentions of the organizers, the meaning of each of these issues was succinctly conveyed by naming the event: "*Su-Sit' Aatk*", which means, in the *sm'algyax* language of the Tsimshian, "a new beginning".

Tsimshian Potlatches and Public Issues

Su-Sit' Aatk was organized along the lines of a potlatch, the aboriginal Tsimshian way of handling complex public issues (see Barnett's classic 1938 definition of the Northwest Coast potlatch). Aboriginally, any important changes in social statuses and relationships, such as were claimed at *Su-Sit' Aatk*, should be marked with a ceremonial feast (Boas 1916:537; Garfield 1939:217). Feasts are the forum on the Northwest Coast "where political goals are tested and sanctioned" (Boelscher 1988:90).

The English use of the chinook jargon term "potlatch" for Tsimshian feasts conflates into one concept several different types of feast events (e.g. Miller 1984:28). What we commonly refer to as a "potlatch" most closely resembles a special type of feast called a *yaakw* (Boas 1916:537; Miller 1984:28. My spelling is standardized to Dunn 1978:word 2203). *Yaakw* were the most important Tsimshian feasts, hosted by the entire, unified community. There were other feast types that had an inward focus concentrating on the community itself but *yaakw* were a type that involved outsiders as witnesses. *Su-Sit' Aatk*, in its general organization and purpose, very closely fits Miller's description of the aboriginal Tsimshian *yaakw* (Miller 1984:28), and I will refer to it as such.[1]

Miller states that the Tsimshian *yaawk* was suppressed by missionaries and government agents over a century ago (1984:28). There is no date for when the last full potlatch was held, but as early as the 1930s, Viola Garfield observed that "no large potlatches are being given at the present time, the skeleton of the old procedure being followed only in the death and name taking" (1939:194). At Kitsumkalum, in particular, the universal response to my early (circa 1980) questioning about their own potlatching or feasting was that they had not done anything like that at least since the 1920s or 1930s. The closest events to a potlatch that I could identify were generally referred to as "suppers", "little suppers", "do's", or, more recently, as "little feasts", yet people at Kitsumkalum did not think them to have enough traditional organization or meaning to associate them with potlatching when I asked.

Ostensibly, the practice seems to have disappeared early in the twentieth century. Yet it did not die. The skeleton Garfield observed was much meatier than her statement implied and potlatching actually found sanctuary in the types of procedures she witnessed (see Tennant 1990:78). Fifty years after Garfield's research, Seguin reported that there were persistent and identifiable elements of the Tsim-

shian potlatch still to be witnessed in Hartley Bay (1984:87). Her studies demonstrated that during the intervening years, although the potlatch had undergone many changes, it had retained its essential nature. Partially adapted to the repressive anti-potlatch laws of the dominant society, which often really only caused the Northwest Coast potlatch to change into an underground (e.g. Drucker and Heizer 1967) or otherwise camouflaged (e.g. Tennant 1990) celebration, and partially adapted to the many changes that affected the meaning system of the Northwest Coast potlatch in the twentieth century (Seguin 1984), Tsimshian potlatching continued in a modified way as feasting, observable as residual elements incorporated into other of the Tsimshian feast types codified by Miller (e.g. Seguin 1985:87). Thus, when several older Tsimshian people living at Kitsumkalum told me that *Su-Sit' Aatk* was the first major Coast Tsimshian potlatch in several generations, I interpreted their claim to mean that a full ceremonial potlatch, or *yaawk* (as opposed to other, lesser types of feasts), had not been held for many years. For this reason, they felt the pole raising had a special importance.

The potlatch tradition guided the planning for the pole raising, but the organizers were very aware that they were making modifications and adaptations. They knew they were searching for direction and never claimed to have reconstructed all the procedures fully or "correctly". Perhaps such changes and adaptations are also part of the potlatch tradition. Full scale potlatches were never regular events, and in the past, other organizers must have consulted widely to ensure that they followed proper procedures and etiquette even as they adapted the ceremony to their specific needs. Clifton's feast in Hartley Bay is an example (Seguin 1985).

There are surprisingly few descriptions of (Coast) Tsimshian feasts in the ethnological literature and fewer still that describe contemporary feasts. The reconstructions of aboriginal culture by Boas (1916:537-542) and Halpin (1984) include feasts, but leave the Tsimshian isolated from the contemporary world that recorded the traditions. Garfield's investigation of Tsimshian clans and social organization (1939) brought the anthropological study of Tsimshian feasts into the twentieth century, however, like others after her (e.g. Adams 1973; Barnett 1941, 1942; Grumet 1975), she concentrated on the use of feasts to resolve issues within Tsimshian society.

One can discern a subtle distinction permeating the Tsimshian literature in which acknowledgement is made that the Indians live in a contemporary world of "jobs and education", but which conceptually restricts aboriginal culture "to situations on the reserves" (Adams 1973:20). In effect, the assumptions of modernization theory are implicitly replicated in Tsimshian ethnography so that, in reading the literature with a view on development, aboriginal culture would not be easily identified as a positive factor for the "modernization" of the Tsimshian population. (Public documents issued by leaders of aboriginal organizations often provide useful counterbalances, for example Gisday Wa and Delgam Uukw 1989; Sterritt in Richardson 1989).

A notable exception in the anthropological literature is the direction taken by Seguin's exegeses of feasting in the coastal village of Hartley Bay (1985). Her interpretive contextualizations of the continuity of Tsimshian culture revealed the cohesiveness of contemporary cultural practices and did so within an historical context. Nonetheless, the events she described were structured to a far more exclusive extent by the internal affairs of Tsimshian society than was the case with the 1987 Kitsumkalum pole raising which pointedly addressed issues of development and external affairs.

For the Tsimshians, *Su-Sit' Aatk* was a remarkable cultural event, not only because it was the first *yaawk* the people of Kitsumkalum had held in many years, but also because of what it attempted to accomplish. To give a sense of it, I present a lengthy account of the ceremonial process. I have inserted into the following description some comparative comments concerning adaptations to the potlatch format, but my analysis of the strategy of using Tsimshian customs to structure the contemporary affairs of the community is reserved for the concluding discussion. After describing the celebration itself, I will return to the political nature of the event and discuss how the community preparations for *Su-Sit' Aatk* helped not only in making the event a success but also in unifying the community and inculcating Tsimshian values.

What Kitsumkalum did fits into a broader pattern. In recent years, feasts have again had a highly visible and public role in the political consciousness of various aboriginal communities and First Nations in British Columbia. Besides those previously mentioned, other examples with special relevance to this discussion include the efforts of the Stalo (Salish) people, with whom there are many marriage ties in Kitsumkalum, to use their feast (and spirit dancing) system to organize themselves (M. Point, pers. comm., 1987, see Suttles 1987), and those of the Nuu Chal Nulth on Vancouver Island, where the Kit-

sumkalum Chief's nephew works as an administrator for the tribal council, to use the feast (J. Wesley, pers. comm. 1987). Guests from these groups spoke at the Kitsumkalum feast. Further afield (socially), good examples of the use of the feast traditions as an active ingredient in contemporary political issues come from the Kwakiutl speaking peoples (e.g. Drucker and Heizer 1967), including the communities of Alert Bay and Cape Mudge, and the Haida (e.g. Steltzer 1984; Boelscher 1988). Few of these recent events have appeared in the literature. This paper should contribute to understanding the broader pattern and how such activities are an important ingredient of life in the First Nations.

The hosts: the Kitsumkalum People

The people of Kitsumkalum claim that, since time immemorial, their ancestors have held aboriginal title to major tracts of property in the Kitsumkalum Valley, along the Skeena River, and on the Pacific coast (McDonald 1985:50ff). In addition to these broad areas, they hold a variety of narrowly defined aboriginal property rights affecting very localized resources in the aboriginal territories of other Tsimshian groups (McDonald 1985:51), and a special claim to the watershed of the Zimacord River which is adjacent to the Kitsumkalum Valley (McDonald 1983).

The name Kitsumkalum has several referents, including the community ("Kitsumkalum", "Kitsumkalum Band", or "the Kitsumkalum tribe"), the principal residence (Kitsumkalum Village), and geographic features in the aboriginal district where the residence is located. The etymology of the name is uncertain (McDonald n.d.).

For the purposes of Su Sit' Aatk, the community publicized another of its names and identified itself as the "People of Gila Quoex" or the "People of the Robin", in reference to their Robin Story[2]. The Robin story is an important tradition explaining how one of the pioneering ancestors, Niiyas Gael[3], came to the Canyon of the Kitsumkalum River and discovered the old home town of Dalk Ka Gila Quoeux [4], the Village of the Robins or Robin Town (McDonald n.d.).

Robin Town was abandoned in the 1880s in favour of the site of Kitsumkalum Village (McDonald 1985:54). This residence is situated on an Indian reserve adjacent to the City of Terrace and is now the residential focal point for a community which, in 1987, consisted of approximately five hundred individuals. At that time, only one hundred and fifty of these people had official status with the Canadian government as Indians and as members of the Kitsumkalum Indian Band with all the legal, political, and economic rights directly associated with that status.

The aboriginal social organization of Kitsumkalum was drastically altered by severe assimilation pressures during the past century (McDonald 1985:64ff). The basic social unit is no longer the matrilineal corporate group collectively recognized as the waap, but instead the nuclear family residing in private family homes. Only sometimes are these nuclear families extended to incorporate closely related kin, such as a grandmother, married child, or brother. The aboriginal matri-clans have also changed. Families still recognize their interrelatedness according to descent from some recent and well known common ancestor, but the genealogies are shallow, with a tendency to emphasize the sibship of the generation immediately descended from the ancestor. Since the matrilineal principle is weak, the ancestral focus can be on a grandparent from either the paternal or the maternal side. These modern clans can be important in community life, but they only function informally.

The four traditional matrilineal phratric divisions are still present, physically and socially, in Kitsumkalum - the ganhada (Raven), laxskiik (Eagle), gispudwada (Killerwhale), and lagybu (Wolf). Phratries continue to be symbolically meaningful to the identity of the community as Tsimshian, but assimilation has all but eliminated their functional role among the Kitsumkalum (McDonald 1985:65-66). Before Su-Sit' Aatk was organized, ceremonial obligations, phratry exogamy, and so on were not carefully observed. Su-Sit' Aatk made deliberate use of the ideology of the phratry system as a way to rejuvenate some of the operational importance of the phratries with regard to community actions. In this and other ways that will be discussed, Su-Sit' Aatk reinforced several features of Kitsumkalum's aboriginal social organization that were identified as meaningful for strengthening and building the community's cultural identity. These are elements of the Tsimshian value system that helped structure the context into which they wished to situate the development issues.

Preparations

Su-Sit' Aatk was initiated by Kitsumkalum's Chief Cliff Bolton, a respected leader among the Tsimshian. He is descended from important title-holders who decided to abandon the formalities of the potlatch system early in the twentieth century. In

keeping with that background, he acts as a leader, but he does not have a traditional chief's title himself, a circumstance which also reflects the relatively extreme political assimilation of Kitsumkalum's institutions. One of the ways Bolton has expressed his role as a leader has been by serving several terms as the elected Chief Councillor for the Band Administration under the stipulations of the Indian Act. His current tenure has run since 1981.

In this multivalent capacity as chief, Bolton has developed many plans for the economic improvement of the community, some of which explicitly promoted their heritage. When one of the Band's cultural grant applications to the Canada Manpower Programme of the Federal Government was accepted in the winter of 1986, the focus of Bolton's efforts became an advanced carving class studying the application of crest art to poles. This grant funded a programme designed to promote the employability of Band members by developing heritage related skills. The well known artist Freda Diesing was hired as the master carver and instructor, and six students/apprentices were selected for training. Under Diesing's guidance, the trainees completed three poles, two of which were raised at Su-Sit' Aatk. (Those two poles were described in McDonald 1988). The third was raised in a separate ceremony in Terrace.

Bolton's intentions, however, went beyond the bounds of the Manpower programme. A major part of the personal, visionary mandate of his administration has been to stimulate and encourage respect for Kitsumkalum's heritage, especially in the community. To this end, he has relied on the Band Administration to support the community's culture and to obtain sponsorship for such programmes as arts and crafts courses, a craft store, and language classes. In some ways, the carving programme was just another one of these projects, but Bolton and his Council also wanted it to become a means by which all the pieces of their cultural policy could be pulled together so that the strength of the culture could be evident in the community. Somehow, the carving project would have to be transformed into a great community event, into Su-Sit' Aatk, a new beginning for the Tsimshian culture in Kitsumkalum. To accomplish this goal, the community, not the bureaucracy, had to be responsible for the event. Otherwise, Su-Sit' Aatk would pass into Kitsumkalum's history simply as a special administrative function.

The simple fact that the poles had to be raised provided the chief with the basis for this transformation. Instead of concluding the project with a simple

dedication ceremony, as he did for a pole raised in Terrace, he turned to the idea of a traditional, ceremonial pole raising and used the organizational procedures of Tsimshian feasting as the way to activate the community and to ensure that the individual members would be directly involved.

The Pole Raising

As the carving project progressed and the idea of a celebration developed, the planning function was given to a central committee to organize. (The committee structure will be discussed later). Well aware that this was the first time in recorded memory for poles to be raised in Kitsumkalum, the organizers wanted Su-Sit' Aatk to be remembered as an important historic event. They decided to make the pole raising as spectacular as possible by raising both poles simultaneously and having a large feast. The media, a local audio-visual company, and an ethnologist were invited to record the event, and a large guest list was prepared.

Guests at celebrations such as Su-Sit' Aatk perform a special and critical role as a "convention of witnesses" (Barnett 1938:353) who, if they do not dispute the claim, sanctify it. To invoke this function, invitations are characteristically given to guests in a formal and ceremonial manner, including the people who must recognize the changes that the potlatch celebrates (Barnett 1938:349). Two weeks before Su-Sit' Aatk was staged, two representatives of the planning committee (the event coordinator and the pole captain) began to carry invitations to chiefs living in villages of the neighboring first nations (those of the Gitksan, Haida, Haisla, and Nisga'a), as well as to those in other Tsimshian villages. Chiefs who could not be reached personally were given invitations through intermediaries. Since the goals of Su-Sit' Aatk affected the entire regional population, the invitations included non-aboriginal people in the region. Non-aboriginal leaders from the civic, provincial, and federal governments were directly issued invitations.

These chiefs (including their non-aboriginal counterparts) were invited to Su-Sit' Aatk as important guests, in accordance with tradition, but unlike the aboriginal yaakw described by Seguin (1985:88), these leaders were not the only guests. In fact, the majority of the guests were not official community leaders at all but "commoners"[5]. Some non-titled people from the aboriginal communities were given individual invitations; others were informed through the invitation to the chiefs; and the general non-aboriginal public was notified with advertise-

ments in the newspapers, on posters, and media news coverage. Two reasons, implicit in commentary made by the organizers, can be suggested for this "democratization" of Kitsumkalum's guest list. First, contemporary Tsimshian politics rely on commoners for approval and validation of policy changes. The direct importance of commoners is partly due to the change inflicted on the aboriginal political organization, partly due to the provisions of the Indian Act, and partly due to the impact of Canadian political ideology and organization. Second, outside of Kitsumkalum, the store keepers, office clerks, and voters of the region also needed to understand and accept Kitsumkalum's "new beginning" if the community was to achieve its external goals.

The result was that on the day of *Su-Sit' Aatk* a crowd estimated at two thousand people, including officials, local people, and tourists, gathered in front of the Kitsumkalum Band Administration to watch the proceedings.

Preliminary to the actual raising, the poles had to be moved through the village to the area where they would be raised. At noon, after most guests had arrived, a request was announced over the loudspeakers for volunteers to carry the poles. They were told this was a gesture of respect for what Kitsumkalum was doing. Ideally, members of the hosting group would not participate in this tribute, but like many of the people who were eager to be a part of the moment, the excitement of the day drew some of the Kitsumkalum people into the effort. All the volunteers were identified with strips of red cloth that the pole captain distributed as bandanas to tie around their heads and their names were recorded on paper by the event co-ordinator in order to thank them later.

The carriers were formed into two rows and were led to where the poles were stored. Here, the pole captain instructed them on the proper procedures, emphasizing that the poles had to be handled with as much dignity as possible. He described the respect that had to be shown the poles as a spiritual concern, and explained that there could not be any laughter or fooling around. Any bad behaviour would be offensive. Anyone who had been drinking or using drugs would not be allowed to carry the poles. While this occurred, other members of the formal procession gathered near the poles.

The procession back to the site of the ceremony was formal. At the head were the majorettes and concert band, who had been invited from the Tsimshian village of Port Simpson. They marched in front of the pole captain as he brought the procession down Kitsumkalum's main street. Next came the carriers with the poles, an RCMP honour guard, and the community. The people of Kitsumkalum marched in a specific order that presented its social and political structure to the audience. At the head of the community walked the elected and hereditary chiefs, wearing button blankets and other ceremonial crest symbols. Immediately behind them were the most important village elders. Both of these groups represented the central authority of the ceremony and a nascent governmental form for the community. For this, they were being recognized and honoured. Behind the leaders marched the carvers, honoured for their skills and talents which had made the day's celebration possible. Finally, the rest of the elders and the people of Kitsumkalum walked in informal groupings of friends and families.

Symbolically, this procession expressed Kitsumkalum's desire to work together. The community was presented as a single civic body that ignored the divisions of the Indian Act and that lacked any formal demarcation of the various internal social divisions that usually characterized the community. Those who walked with the community included people with and without legal Indian status, and people who were born into the community as well as those who were married into or were adopted into the community. Less formally, other aspects of the internal structure of Kitsumkalum were apparent by the display of various traditional crests on clothing and by the way people walked in groups with spouses or siblings or parents, but the dominant image of the community, the one that formed the basis for the organization of the procession, emphasized the political and social unification. Implicitly, the procession celebrated the political accomplishments of *Su-Sit' Aatk*.

At the site, the poles were laid face up on two rows of saw horses butted against support posts that had been cemented into the ground four weeks earlier. Upon instruction, the volunteers carefully rotated the poles on the saw horses, positioning them to be raised facing the highway and river.

The *Su-Sit' Aatk* agenda then started as the pole captain, now acting as master of ceremonies, announced a tribute to "another culture, our culture" and signaled the band to play "O Canada". He then briefly described the ceremony to the audience.

Next, under his direction, the poles were raised part way and rested. The rest was explained as a traditional pause to allow the guests to hear the history of the community and of the poles, to under-

stand the significance of the pole raising, and to voice any objections.

After a moment of silence for the deceased members of Kitsumkalum, the audience was welcomed. Chief Bolton explained the meaning of *Su-Sit' Aatk*. Beginning with the observation that Canadian laws had made it hard for the Tsimshian to hold onto their culture, he said *Su-Sit' Aatk* was his generation's way of telling the children to be prepared to fight for their culture, if it was not to die.

> Culture is important to the Kitsumkalum people just as the culture is important to all the other tribes and all the other nations in the country, and in the world. People work very hard to keep their culture, and keep their identity - whether they be Indian or non-Indian people... We as Indian people, through the laws of the land in the early parts of the century, had lost our culture - or were forced to stop practicing some segments of our culture. [Since] the law that banned us from practicing our culture was lifted... efforts have been made to carry these things on again. (Bolton n.d.)

The chief then explained the symbolic meanings of the two poles. The modern style pole had all the major village crests on it so that it would represent the whole community. Dedicated to the children, this pole signified the future. The other pole was a replica of an old pole, with crests that belong to one of the ancient families of Kitsumkalum. This pole showed respect for the past, for the cultural heritage of the ancestors, for the generations that suffered during the period that Canada tried to destroy the culture, and for the old people who had died (McDonald 1988; n.d.).

The next stage in the proceedings was perceived to be politically critical. Kitsumkalum had made many claims in its speeches and in the way the ceremony was structured. Now the polite veil of ceremony could drop and the guests could have their say. They could openly dispute the right of the host to use any of the crests, to raise either or both poles, or to use the histories. Even the community's right to hold the ceremony, or to use some part of the traditional ritual and symbolic structure, or to claim the territories mentioned with the stories of the poles could be disputed. Any legitimate objections could end the ceremony and would disgrace the hosts. If that happened, much of what *Su-Sit' Aatk* had accomplished for the community's political and social development could suddenly come undone.

At this point, a high ranking titleholder from a neighboring Gitksan village, who was considered to be knowledgeable in cultural affairs, took the micro-

phone to respond. As he spoke, he made clear his intention was to add the voice of a titleholder to the ceremony, as is proper, and to sing an important song as a tribute to Kitsumkalum. His response was considered a significant acknowledgement of Kitsumkalum's actions.

With the conclusion of the speeches, Kitsumkalum's right to raise the poles had not been questioned. The pullers were asked to finish their work and to raise both crest poles simultaneously.

> Today's your day . .. to experience History in the making. Today you'll be seeing, for the first time, two poles being raised simultaneously - a tribute to a great culture, a tribute to an idea that... we can still retain what was once so beautiful and so proud. (Victor Reece, Pole Captain)

While the poles were secured with temporary bindings, the carvers came forward and performed the Robin Dance and the Robin Song. This was in accordance with the traditional privilege exercised by the carvers of the "People of the Robin", although because this performance had not been done for many years, its content incorporated certain modifications such as the adaptation of the tune to the English song "Cock Robin".

Finally, the children of Kitsumkalum danced to show their happiness and the ceremony ended. As the guests drove away, the news media photographed the organizers and the carvers amongst the poles, and conducted interviews for that week's news.

The Feast

The invited guests drove away to attend the pole raising feast. Too many guests were anticipated at the banquet for the size of either of the community buildings on the reserve, so the organizing committee rented the Terrace hockey arena, where they set out tables and built a stage for the evening's programme.

Men from neighboring villages who could identify the chiefs were recruited as ushers at the doors. They seated guests in one of four areas according to phratry membership. A fifth area was reserved for people, mostly from the non-aboriginal population, who did not belong to any phratry or who did not know their proper phratry. Seating people according to their phratry deviated from older traditions which paid more attention to the rank of the guests and to their village membership (Seguin 1985:88-89), but the arrangement was suitable for such a large heterogeneous crowd with a very uneven exposure

to Tsimshian culture; similar accomodations were noted by Seguin in Hartley Bay (n.d.).

After the guests were seated, a grand procession opened the evening. The carvers and the hosts assembled in the front foyer of the arena and, when the Port Simpson Concert Band struck the music, the procession began its entrance onto the arena floor. The carvers came first, dancing at the front and displaying their tools and crest blankets. Next, the hosts entered, circled the arena floor twice to a standing ovation from the guests, and then separated from the procession to sit at their appropriate crest tables. Kitsumkalum invited the Kitselas people to march in the procession as a way of recognizing the assistance Kitselas had given preparing the feast. These neighbouring communities consider themselves to be sister villages and help each other at weddings and funerals.

In the arena, the pole captain resumed his role as master of ceremonies. The agenda started with a welcome and a grace. Then he explained that each of the designated phratry areas had their own buffet tables and that all the guests except the elders would serve themselves. Throughout *Su-Sit' Aatk*, the elders were given this type of deference, which traditionally was reserved for the nobles and other title-holders. Miller reports a similar shift in the etiquette of recent feasts at the coastal village of Klemtu (1984:33).

The food was arranged by a sub-committee of the central planning committee, and prepared by volunteers from Kitsumkalum and Kitselas. Most of the cooking was done communally in the large kitchen of the Kermode Indian Friendship Centre in Terrace and transported to the arena by the transportation sub-committee in time for the dinner. The buffet consisted of "traditional, modern-day, feast food": salmon prepared in various ways (baked, smoked, dried, canned), herring eggs, roast beef, turkey, smoked seal, beaver, oolachan, various salads, and seaweed dishes. In addition, the tables were set with bannock, buns, and fruit cups, and helpers served coffee, tea, and juice.

Allaire (1984), Boas (1916) and Seguin (1985) discuss the traditional symbolism of food served at feasts, but the food at *Su-Sit' Aatk* had a different symbolism. The emphasis was on representing an "Indian" feast rather than a "whiteman's" supper. Beyond that, individual dishes carried some symbolic weight as Gitksan food or Tsimshian food, which was pointed out through casual comments at my table. The origin of particular dishes revealed Kitsumkalum's diverse social network.

The size of the crowd was extraordinary. At the end of the night, the plate count indicated 1500 people had been fed, and an additional five hundred were reported to have attended only to watch the after dinner programme. Generally along the coast, a potlatch with 300-400 guests would be considered a large feast and a strain on the social organization and resources of the hosting group. Kitsumkalum's ability to accommodate so many people again demonstrated the strength and remarkable effectiveness of the new community structure.

Formalities resumed after dinner with a tribute to the children. The emphasis given the children was in keeping with the name and intent of the celebration. The master of ceremonies gathered the children together in front of the stage, gave them candy, gifts, and sparklers that were lit to symbolize the new generation. He then told a Tsimshian story about sharing. Assuming the role of teacher, he was preparing the children for their future, involving them in this great expression of their culture, and exhorting them to carry the light. Later, in a more subtle way, he repeated the message again and again to the adults at the feast.

Next, Kitsumkalum made another demonstration of self government by incorporating into the feast a ceremony to install a young leader with an important title. Since the naming was a special ceremony, and structured somewhat differently than the rest of the agenda for *Su-Sit' Aatk*, I will return to it later.

After the naming, the master of ceremonies drew attention to the large pile of gifts that had been placed in one section of the arena. He explained that Kitsumkalum was going to distribute these gifts to the guests as a way of "paying" the audience for witnessing the ceremonies and, thereby, for validating the themes of *Su-Sit' Aatk*. Afterwards, several major contributors told me they thought it important that outsiders understand this specific interpretation of these gifts. "Breaking even" in potlatch terms was not a consideration to these people and obviously could not be since few of the contributors had potlatched before and most only had vague expectations to attend another one where they might receive gifts in return. To them the contributions were made very much along the lines of what Adams called "investments in community relationships" (Adams 1973:4)[6].

The gifts were assembled by phratries of Kitsumkalum and originally were to be given out according to rules of phratry distribution (e.g. gifts from the *ganhada* hosts would only go to visiting

lagybu, lakskiik, gispudwada; those from the *gispud-wada* hosts would to guests from the other three phratries, etc.). This procedure was changed, however, when it became apparent that the *gispudwada,* who are numerically the largest phratry group, were donating most of the gifts. To avoid embarrassment to the other smaller phratries in Kitsumkalum, which is to say, to establish a symbolic equality between the phratries, the planning committee decided to identify the gifts as coming from the whole village and to distribute them to the guests without attention to phratric membership.

The gift giving recognized certain social categories. During the first set of distributions, special commemorative gifts (framed "People of Gila-Quo-ex" posters) were given to each of the village communities that attended, and to certain invited organizations. At this time, special congratulations with monetary donations were formally received from the Lax'kwa'alaams (Port Simpson) Band Council, the Nisga'a Tribal Council, the neighboring Nisga'a village of New Aiyansh, and the Kermode Friendship Centre in Terrace. Congratulations were also received from the Native Brotherhood of British Columbia, the Haida Tribal Council, and the United Native Nations.

The rest of the gifts were given out in recognition of four social statuses: important people and others, men and women. Each status group received different types of gifts. Each chief, or spokesperson, and other highly respected people were to receive commercial blankets that had been designated as chief's gifts. All the men in attendance were to be given towels, hankies, socks, mugs. All the women were to receive tea towels, dish cloths, bath towels, kitchen gadgets, and such like. The ideal was for each guest to leave carrying an armful of gifts. Everyone was given a package of commercial soda crackers (described to me as a traditional food distributed to help the guests absorb what they ate) and as many apples and oranges as they wished.

The distribution of these gifts was directed from the floor by the responsible sub-committee of the organizing committee. Traditionally, the process could be expected to include some recognition of the rank of each important guest (Seguin 1985:91), but except for the special commemorative gifts mentioned above, no announcements were made from the stage to identify who was receiving a gift or what the gifts were. Nor was there an acknowledgement of contributions received (Seguin 1985:91), other than from the organizations listed above, even though all individual contributions had been carefully record-

ed. The only specific acknowledgements were made during the gift giving portion of the feast and these were made to individuals who had performed a special official service, such as the namers, and to organizations that had contributed to the potlatch.

Next on the agenda was entertainment from two young dance groups who performed a series of aboriginal Tsimshian and Haida dances. After this, a final set of "thank you's" and gift presentations were made to people who had worked in key positions on the preparations (chief, coordinator, pole captain, cultural advisor, main cooks), after which individual guests were given the opportunity to make comments, sing songs, or otherwise entertain.

The formal part of the potlatch ended with a traditional "blanket dance". A button blanket was placed on the floor and people rose to place donations of money onto it and to dance. Everyone in the auditorium was encouraged to participate so as to create a communion of dance and so they could display their family crests. The dances of individuals quickly turned into a long queue of dancers circling the arena floor that lasted until everyone had had a chance to donate and to join the dance.

Su-Sit' Aatk ended at 11:30 PM. Afterwards, some of the guests went to a dance with a rock and roll band that was sponsored by Kitsumkalum. Others went home or to private parties. Wherever they went, the guests left the arena with the important memory of how Kitsumkalum had re-created its social world.

Other Events in the Celebration

Su-Sit' Aatk was the main ceremony culminating a series of festivities during the week of July 25. Here, I want to describe other public components in the series. These involved people outside of the community and were seen as integral parts of *Su-Sit' Aatk.* One, a naming, was incorporated into the *Su-Sit' Aatk* agenda. The other two, the entry of a float in Terrace's Riverboat Days parade and the unveiling of a crest pole in the city, were separate events, preliminary to *Su-Sit' Aatk.* While these two activities may not normally be considered typical aboriginal ceremonial activities, they were a part of the staging of *Su-Sit' Aatk.*

Two other public components that were not considered to be integral to the pole raising and feast, yet contributed to it also should be mentioned: the salmon barbecue and the dance. Each summer, Kitsumkalum holds a salmon barbecue as part of its contribution to the local summer tourist attraction

and heritage celebration called Riverboat Days. Other organizations also hold events, such as the Kinsmen pancake breakfast. The 1987 barbecue was used to advertise *Su-Sit' Aatk* and to raise funds for it.

The dance after the banquet has been mentioned. It became a controversial event for the organizing committee because, some argued, the liquor that would be sold would interfere with the spiritualism of *Su-Sit' Aatk*. For this reason, the dance, which was held in a downtown hotel, was kept conceptually separate from *Su-Sit' Aatk* and was not attended by many of the organizers. It was not treated as part of the pole raising celebration but as a hospitality service for out of town guests with nothing else to do. Nonetheless, the money it generated helped offset *Su-Sit' Aatk* expenses.

Other Events:

1. THE RIVERBOAT DAYS PARADE

To build community spirit for the effort that would be required in the last week of preparations for *Su-Sit' Aatk*, Kitsumkalum entered a float in the "Riverboat Days" parade, an annual tourist attraction in Terrace. The theme of the float, "a new beginning", featured a crest pole, the carvers, and the children of Kitsumkalum. The intentions were to advertise the pole raising, to ensure Tsimshian culture had a place in the parade, and (like the entire series of events) to have fun. Community spirit, which had been flagging, soared when they won first prize for their entry, and enthusiasm for *Su-sit Aatk* was re-charged.

2. THE CITY POLE DEDICATION

Three poles were completed during the carving project. One was given to the City of Terrace during Riverboat Days in commemoration of the city's anniversary and the opening of the new police (RCMP) building.

In his speech explaining the meanings of the phratry and village crests that appeared on the pole, Chief Bolton made important statements explaining Kitsumkalum's claims to aboriginal title, the community's historical importance in developing the area, and their expectations that they would not be ignored in the future development of the region. Mention was also made of the *Su-Sit' Aatk* ceremony which would register their right to these aboriginal claims in the formal Tsimshian way. The pole dedication was a dress rehearsal for *Su-Sit' Aatk* and its pageantry was a glimpse of the main ceremony.

3. THE NAMING CEREMONY

A very important ritual during the *Su-Sit' Aatk* feast was the installation of a titleholder of the *ganhada* phratry with the high ranking and royal title of *Xbiyee Laxa*[7]. The title had not been held since the death of previous holder, Charles Nelson, sr., in 1930 and was now to go to Jerry Wesley.

The giving and accepting of such a noble title is a solemn occasion that burdens the titleholder with a great responsibility to protect the name and to serve his people. A titleholder must be prepared to help his people and to provide them with leadership. Candidates are carefully chosen. I was told that this man was accepted for his leadership qualities of intelligence, generosity, and proven abilities as a competent administrator.

Aboriginally, aspiring leaders moved up through the ranks and developed their position by acquiring a series of titles of increasing importance. Since this title was the candidate's first title, the procedure obviously was not followed. In other ways, however, Chief Bolton had groomed the candidate, when he was younger, for a leadership position in the community, by teaching and training him as a leader and by supporting him in a series of administrative jobs, first with the Canadian government, then with a band council, and with a tribal council. Although these positions are not perceived as steps typifying a contemporary version of moving up through the ranks, people felt that the experience he had gained had prepared him. Thus, although Wesley was unusually young to take on such a high title, he already had widespread respect, and the expectation was that he would grow into the position and provide the type of leadership a real titleholder must provide.

No one expects a candidate to have all the qualities that might be desired in a leader but this man lacked an important prerequisite for the title. Traditional rules of succession follow a certain matrilineal channel that re-enforce the family structure (Garfield 1939:179). In this case, Wesley was related through his mother to the previous Xbiyee Laxa as a great grandson, but was not of the appropriate *ganhada* phratry. The genealogical connection provided the basis for the title holding family to accept his candidacy, but they wanted to ensure Wesley had a proper claim to the title by giving him membership in the *ganhada* phratry. Consequently, an adoption ceremony was included with the naming, in accordance with correct Tsimshian procedure, to bring the practical kinship relationships into better alignment with the official kinship rules. Such twists in

the usual line of succession are not unknown and adoption is a recognized solution when no other successors are available. This case may be another example of a modern trend towards managing the succession to titles through adoptions rather than by the more traditional mechanism of marriage (Halpin 1984).

With the adoption arranged, the title holding family could proceed with their preparations for the naming. Lacking experience with the ceremony, they asked two elders to help with procedural aspects. One elder, Vera Henry, was also the cultural advisor for the central committee of *Su-Sit' Aatk*. She acted as master of ceremonies during the naming portion of the agenda.

The ceremony started with a call for the adopting family, from whom the candidate was to receive his title, to stand in front of the stage as a demonstration of their support for the proceedings. The master of ceremonies explained the procedure to the audience and noted that permission for the adoption had been received from the candidate's *gispudwada* family, as required (Seguin 1985:47-48). The actual adoption and naming was performed by Amdolth (Addie Ryan), the highest ranking *ganhada* woman in the particular clan that owned the title. For her service, she received a button blanket from the candidate's biological mother. The adoption was accomplished by means of a short speech in which Amdolth accepted Wesley as her son in the *ganhada* phratry and "put the title on" him. Then the adopting mother placed a button blanket on the new title-holder to display his new *ganhada* crest and his new status.

After the adoption and the naming, important people from the Nisga'a and the Haida First Nations came on stage to call out the new title three times. This procedure was traditional (e.g. Seguin 1985:90) and was necessary to demonstrate that the naming was proper. It indicated that high ranking men in the other aboriginal First Nations would recognize the title and the young man's change in status. The callers received gifts for their service.

All those who had taken an active role in the performance of the rituals were also given gifts of blankets and money by the candidate's biological family. The biological mother, Myrtle Wesley, gave gifts to the new *ganhada* mother, and thanked Amdolth for adopting her son into the *ganhada* and for giving him an important name. The elders of the *ganhada* phratry in Kitsumkalum received special afghan knit blankets as presents [8]. Those members of the *ganhada* family who had stood in support at the front of the stage were also given gifts of money and blankets because the name had come from them. Later, another set of gifts for the audience, which had been mixed in with those given by the community, were distributed as part of Kitsumkalum's general gift distribution.

The events that I have described were the main public components of the overall celebration of *Su-Sit' Aatk*. The float and dedication ceremony were preliminary events that prepared people to understand the cultural premises for the pole raising, feast, and naming, and helped ensure that the political claims would be understood and accepted by the end of the day.

SU-SIT' AATK: A MODERN POTLATCH?

Su-Sit' Aatk was based on the potlatch way of dealing with public affairs, according to Tsimshian tradition. Yet, the form of the potlatch was modified and was oriented to very contemporary concerns. A few words would be in order to discuss the potlatch nature of *Su-Sit' Aatk* and to discuss its importance in the contemporary affairs of Kitsumkalum and the Tsimshian.

Su-Sit' Aatk was based on the aboriginal *yaawk*, but the effect of years of continual assimilative pressures against Kitsumkalum's cultural practices showed. Initially, even the organizers did not have the experience or the knowledge necessary to lay out all the correct procedures for such a festivity. Their solution was to rely heavily on the cultural expertise and advice of others, including that of an elder who had been living in Port Simpson and a carver from Hartley Bay, as well as whatever information the elders on the reserve had. They also made use of the experience of other communities which had raised poles or staged feasts; in particular the continuing traditions of feasting (although Miller would not identify this statement as applying to the *yaawk* type) in other Tsimshian communities, and a videotape of a pole raising at the Museum of Northern British Columbia in Prince Rupert that had occurred two years earlier, as well as written sources such as Boas (1916).

By relying on community expertise to synthesize the information, the organizers further involved the community in the process and, finally, staged a successful feast, albeit with many adaptations. Some of these adaptations were necessary because gaps existed in the collective knowledge of proper procedures. Other adaptations were necessary to accommodate current situations. For example, the rich

aboriginal symbolism described by Seguin (1985) was greatly modified at *Su-Sit' Aatk* and seemed oriented toward emphasizing two points: that the hosts were both "Indian" and that they were in possession of a culture relevant to today's society. The use of the aboriginal language, songs, crests, naming, and "Indian foods", were all clear manifestations of that statement. The selection of these symbols and the way they were used, often in a severely abbreviated form, can be interpreted as a reflection of Kitsumkalum's sensitivity to what they perceived to be limitations in the cultural knowledge of the guests. There was no point in overwhelming the non-aboriginal population with details that they would find meaningless and confusing. Similarly, the agenda, being organized in a Canadian way, provided the important non-aboriginal guests with reassuring points of familiarity that guided and enhanced their comprehension of the evening.

I have noted many adaptations throughout this paper. Together, they might suggest that *Su-Sit' Aatk* represented a radically different social phenomenon than the traditional potlatch but, as Seguin (1985) found, however great the contrast between aboriginal and modern feasts may seem, the differences are superficial. Beneath all the changes in the performance, "Tsimshian cultural premises still shape the meaning system in the feasts" (Seguin 1985:96) and remain important to conducting public affairs. Even the issues addressed by *Su-Sit' Aatk* (cultural survival, land claims, self government, and economic development) are simply the contemporary guise of perennial concerns. The most fundamental premise involved was the use of the feast as a political forum (Seguin n.d.).

Potlatches as Political Forums.

The potlatch has been described as the central integrative institution of Tsimshian society (Seguin 1985:58); as an investment in community relationships (Adams 1973:4); and as the knot "holding together the Tsimshian fabric" (Miller 1984:27-28). This knot is tied by the subtle and diplomatic negotiation and renegotiation that occurs according to the rules and ceremonies of the potlatch order.

The political nature of the potlatch is well known (e.g. Barnett 1939). Despite assimilation pressures (e.g. LaViolette 1973), potlatching has survived, albeit in modified forms, as a significant symbol of the distinctiveness of aboriginal cultures that offers a way of continuing the culture and a means of resisting aggressive acculturation from Canadian society (e.g. Drucker and Heizer 1967). During the recent

upswing in potlatching elsewhere in the northwest coast, more and more communities are creatively using this cultural device not only to govern themselves but also to govern their relations with other aboriginal first nations and with Canadian society.

The people of Kitsumkalum faced a number of pressing issues which were raised during the *Su-Sit' Aatk* celebrations. The most important involved disputes with the Canadian government over economic development, aboriginal rights, aboriginal title, and self-government, all of which affect the social, economic, and cultural health of the community. The stakes were high, and *Su-Sit' Aatk* was used to mobilize the community and to radically alter Kitsumkalum's abilities to meet the challenge of resolving these issues. *Su-Sit' Aatk* presented to the general public a new cultural and social order that redefined aspects of Kitsumkalum's internal operations and its external affairs within the broader regional society.

To understand how this occurred we first must examine why Kitsumkalum did not have a community government and how the planning committee for *Su-Sit' Aatk* was, essentially, an experiment in the development of a form of self government.

Divide and Rule

For two centuries Kitsumkalum has been under acculturative pressures from traders, missionaries, militaries, foreign laws (colonial or Canadian), a rapidly expanding industrial economy, and demographic changes (McDonald 1985). Since 1871 Canadian law has been sovereign and has interfered terribly with Kitsumkalum's indigenous social organization, in particular by creating and imposing legalistic, political and economic distinctions within the community (e.g. McDonald 1987). The distinction, for example, between those who have Indian status under the Indian Act (the "Band"), and those without this legal status (the "non-status people") is most disruptive to community life, dividing families in life and in death.

These factors have distorted Kitsumkalum's way of governing itself. As a result, in this century, the community has been unable to maintain any central political institution. The Band Administration and elected Council have tended to perform this central function but these are tied to the Indian Act and lack a mandate to act on behalf of the entire community. The jurisdiction of the Council and its Administration is restricted in many ways to matters relating to Canada's Indian legislation and Indian policies. Because the authority of the Band Admin-

istration is defined by the Indian Act, it is severely limited and does not extend to cover the many community members who are outside of the control of the Indian Act.

Su-Sit' Aatk was politically important as the first venture in recent decades which successfully re-united all the segments of the community, giving Kitsumkalum an effective means to express itself as a community. In the end, the undertaking germinated the seed of an all encompassing political organization that was expected to grow and to serve the entire community. This seed was the central planning committee and it was nurtured by the Chief as a way to structurally capture the social energy spent making *Su-Sit' Aatk* a successful Tsimshian cultural beginning.

The Central Committee

Members of the community were asked to participate on a planning committee that would take care of practical matters such as the food preparations, gathering of gifts, invitations and advertising, preparing the yard for the ceremony, preparing the arena for the feast, entertainment, billeting guests, transportation, cultural affairs, ethnographic reporting, and media coverage.

The chief took care to ensure that the volunteer committee members represented the major social sub-groups in Kitsumkalum (families, phratries, status and non-status people, special interest groups, elders, titleholders and elected representatives). In this way, he carefully integrated community support and was better able to minimize personal and factional differences that could arise during the stress of planning. By organizing the event in this way and by relying on the leadership of other family leaders and elders, he efficiently channelled the community's relationship to the potlatch and made it a community affair, even as he molded the event into a *yaakw*.

The committee looked to the traditions of pot-latching for directions and tried to arrange its work along the lines of family and phratry. Tasks were assigned to committee members and then delegated to members of their families. When extra help was required, these special task groups recruited closely related families so that, essentially, the modern clan groups were working together. Certain tasks were organized through the four phratries (the donation of gifts, the seating arrangements, and the preparation and serving of the food).

Slowly, the operation of this committee evolved a clear and workable political structure. Three features were identified as important: it incorporated elders and titleholders into the political process, it reinforced the aboriginal social organization of the community by channelling action through the phratries and families, and it established a central forum for all of the community at the regularly scheduled committee policy meetings. Everyone was represented, including those dis-enfranchised from the Band by Ottawa. As a result, the various social sub-groups of the community were working together and the traditional community leadership was united with that of the Band Administration. Meetings became forums to consult elders on their cultural expertise and to resolve differences between factions or individuals. People came to recognize that the experience gained from the success of the committee was an extremely important step towards reconstructing a form of community self government, based on traditional values, that went beyond the limitations of the government clauses in the Indian Act.

The community presented this new civic organization for the first time at the pole raising. The acceptance of everything on August 1 symbolically reinforced, in an appropriately traditional setting, the arrangement as a valid political formation for Kitsumkalum.

When I left the village that August, the organizers were hoping that the experience would provide a model for future community endeavours. Time will tell, but there were a number of problems that still had to be solved and that could work against the political integration of the community. Two examples: one of the most difficult problems is the mandate of the Band Council and Administration which, regardless of anyone's political goals, remains tied to the divisive Indian Act and Indian legislation. The non-status people and the traditional leadership will continue to have an ambivalent relationship to the money and programmes that are available only to the status people through their elected council. Another significant problem was the refusal by a small number of individuals to join the celebrations or to participate in the committee work. (Their behaviour was attributed to previous factional disputes.) This divided the support of some families, which presented a relatively minor problem before *Su-Sit' Aatk* because the numbers involved were not significant to the work that had to accomplished, but the families affected will be left that much weaker as future participants in the political structure. Over time, this

could develop into a problem of a more serious type, or dissipate.

Su-Sit' Aatk may or may not evolve directly into self government, but Kitsumkalum is a dynamic community, with growing political demands. These new public demonstrations of a once outlawed heritage are signs of the people's awareness that they want to exercise more of their aboriginal rights. Growing along with these political demands is a need for a more encompassing political forum to express the community's will. This need will become greater as Kitsumkalum incorporates and accommodates a new status population that is rapidly expanding as the result of recent changes in the membership clauses of the Indian Act. In the summer of 1987, these changes had not affected the Band, but the Kitsumkalum Administration anticipated that the status population of the Band would double within the year. Given these circumstances, *Su-Sit' Aatk* was staged at a critical time for the community to grow politically and to meet such challenges.

Discussion

Su-Sit' Aatk was an event with important political implications. For the first time in over a century crest poles now stand in Kitsumkalum territory, majestically proclaiming the heritage of the people and their determination to survive as a distinct society. The cultural statements associated with these symbols were made in the Tsimshian way, with a *yaakw*, and according to the meaning system of the potlatch. Part of the importance of *Su-Sit' Aatk* was its use as a strategy for creating alternatives to existing colonial-style forms of social organization. I wish to close with a final discussion of how *Su-Sit' Aatk* used tradition as a resource for that endeavour.

During the generations that Kitsumkalum's culture was suppressed and/or dismissed as irrelevant by the dominant elements in Canadian society, many Tsimshian practices fell into disuse. Consequently, its traditional culture required a great deal of mending before it could sustain the collective task of determining "what is to be done" and support the social and economic advancement of the community. *Su-Sit' Aatk* was an experiment to stimulate community affairs and to encourage respect for the Tsimshian heritage. It became instrumental in establishing in the community some of the structures, practices, knowledge, and agreement that would be needed to define future policies.

The ceremony was established out of past and current practices but because the potlatch had been banned the cultural rules and dispositions, which

are usually given, were problematic and the subject of a fundamental cultural discourse. Many of the ceremonial structures necessary for the ceremonies had to be re-invented before the feast could again become a vehicle of Kitsumkalum's cultural practices. In this way, *Su-Sit' Aatk* was a case, not only of people acting within structured situations, but of people structuring the situation in which to act.

Were these "invented traditions" in the sense examined by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983)? Insofar as they were emerging, the answer is yes. If we look at the ceremony as a moment in the genesis of a new tradition, then that approach is useful for understanding how the establishment and use of aboriginal structures served to inculcate Tsimshian norms and values. The contribution the project made to social cohesion within the community was structured along traditional lines. The project also channelled the political issues into the context of a Tsimshian social framework. However, there are significant limitations to thinking about *Su-Sit' Aatk* from the invented tradition perspective. Certainly the people of Kitsumkalum have not had a potlatch of this type (a *yaawk*) in recent times and a discontinuity can be documented, but even with all its adaptations the ceremony was not "factitious" in the sense of those described in Hobsbawm and Ranger where a key interest was how continuity was invented (1983:2). In that reader the new traditions such as the highland traditions from Scotland were portrayed as synthetic fabrications of old and fraudulent elements, re-arranged in novel patterns.

That perspective does not capture the significance of *Su-Sit' Aatk*, which it would be better to see in terms of a shift in a matrix of cultural perceptions (Bourdieu 1977). The aboriginal elements were either derived from the practical culture (which included other "types" of feasting behaviour) or, when that was not possible because of historical constraints imposed on the practice of Tsimshian culture, elements perceived to be necessary were identified and re-contextualized in the existing practical culture. These differences from "invented traditions" are viewed better from a perspective that regards culture as a set of "customary rules ... [which] are the product of a small batch of schemes enabling agents to generate an infinity of practices adapted to an infinity of changing situations" (Bourdieu 1977:16). The potlatch tradition (itself reconstructed by the organizers) served as a scheme of rules out of which to construct the ceremony. Accordingly, the variance and innovation apparent in the feast can be understood as existing within a range governed by customary rules that were implicitly negotiated with

the strategic goals of reconstructing the structures and meanings of the *yaawk* and of adapting these meanings and structures to the contemporary situation. This is but to say that people change and so do their institutions, and they will continue to do so as their contingencies change.

The organizational meetings and the various functions preliminary to *Su-Sit' Aatk* were formal means by which the community identified and reassembled the customary structures of the feast. The negotiation and re-negotiation of the principles and rules of feasting that occurred during the meetings enhanced the community's competency applying Tsimshian ways in a contemporary setting. The effort repaired some of the structural and cultural damage that had been inflicted on the community.

The cultural discourse generated by *Su-Sit'Aatk* regularized the community's cultural dispositions by shifting and harmonizing the cultural context of people's assumptions and practices, at least in so far as feasting was concerned, and by re-contextualizing social issues with Tsimshian values. As this process proceeded, meeting after meeting, the structure of the situation and of peoples' actions became more confidently "Tsimshian". Simultaneously, the discussions both shaped Kitsumkalum's social world and produced an immediate adherence to that world by those discussing it and, by extension, because of the structure of the central committee, the community.

The development of alternative cultural dispositions based on Tsimshian values continued throughout the summer as new applications were identified. This discussion maintained the values brought forward by *Su-Sit'Aatk* as objects of cultural and political discourse in the community. The correspondence between Tsimshian values and contemporary issues was not yet sufficiently "natural" for it to sink into the realm of the self-evident experiences that are taken for granted as assumptions that need not be discussed (Bourdieu 1977). A self consciousness remained even in the community's discussion of what it had achieved with the pole raising, as that event was recreated over and over in memory and conversation. The need for this discourse was symptomatic of the severity of the cultural damage Kitsumkalum had experienced and was an indication of the lack of fit between Tsimshian cultural practices and the social situations these were intended to address. To the extent that *Su-Sit' Aatk* created a correspondence, it could be considered a successful cultural strategy. To the extent the correspondence was left incomplete, the ceremony must be consid-

ered but another step in the continual process that reproduces Kitsumkalum's social and cultural world.

Regardless of how far they went, the important point for the people of Kitsumkalum was that by the end of this particular process that they called their new beginning, they had made a move away from the structures and values represented by the Indian Act and towards those they saw as being Tsimshian. This restructuring will be a baseline that will give Tsimshian form and content to their future responses to social issues. Like the governmental forum it is, the Tsimshian feast had been used, once again, to regulate the political relationships of a community.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1.   Not all Tsimshian elders would agree with Miller's classification, perhaps because he has overly formalized the distinctions between different types of Tsimshian feasts. Seguin has expressed caution in relying too much on classifications of types of feasts, saying that in Hartley Bay now people describe a feast as *luulgyit* (a term Miller reserves for a type of feast) and the feast plus the distribution of gifts as *yaawk* (pers. comm. 1990). Subsequent to the year of the pole raising, people in Kitsumkalum also articulated a similar conceptual distinction to me, but used the English terms feast and potlatch, respectively. This disagreement over terms reflects either a problem in the classification, or an adaptation of traditional terminology when applied to contemporary feasting. More research is required.

2.   "Gila Quoex" is the usual Kitsumkalum spelling for robin. The word is spelled "*gyilagyoo*" by Dunn (1978:word 608), who used a Kitsumkalum informant in Prince Rupert for the pronunciation of the word.

3.   Other versions include: *Neas-kaal* (in Pierce 1933:173ff); *ni.sg.E'.l* (in Halpin 1973:296).

4.   Again, this is the local spelling but an older one which renders *Quoeux* differently.

5.   The entire community also participates in contemporary feasts in Hartley Bay (Seguin 1985; pers. comm. 1990).

6. Although I could not find evidence of the redistributive implications Adams attached to that statement.

7. The translation of this name is "half way to heaven". My spelling is standardized to Dunn (1978) using word #2140 *xbiyee* and word #1102 *laha*.

8. This procedure departed from that in other communities, where the adopting family would pay the biological family for acquiring rights to the man (Seguin, pers. comm. 1990).

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