LINKS TO THE PAST:

AN ANALYSIS OF RECOLLECTIONS FROM THE COMMUNITY OF GOLD RIVER, B.C.

by

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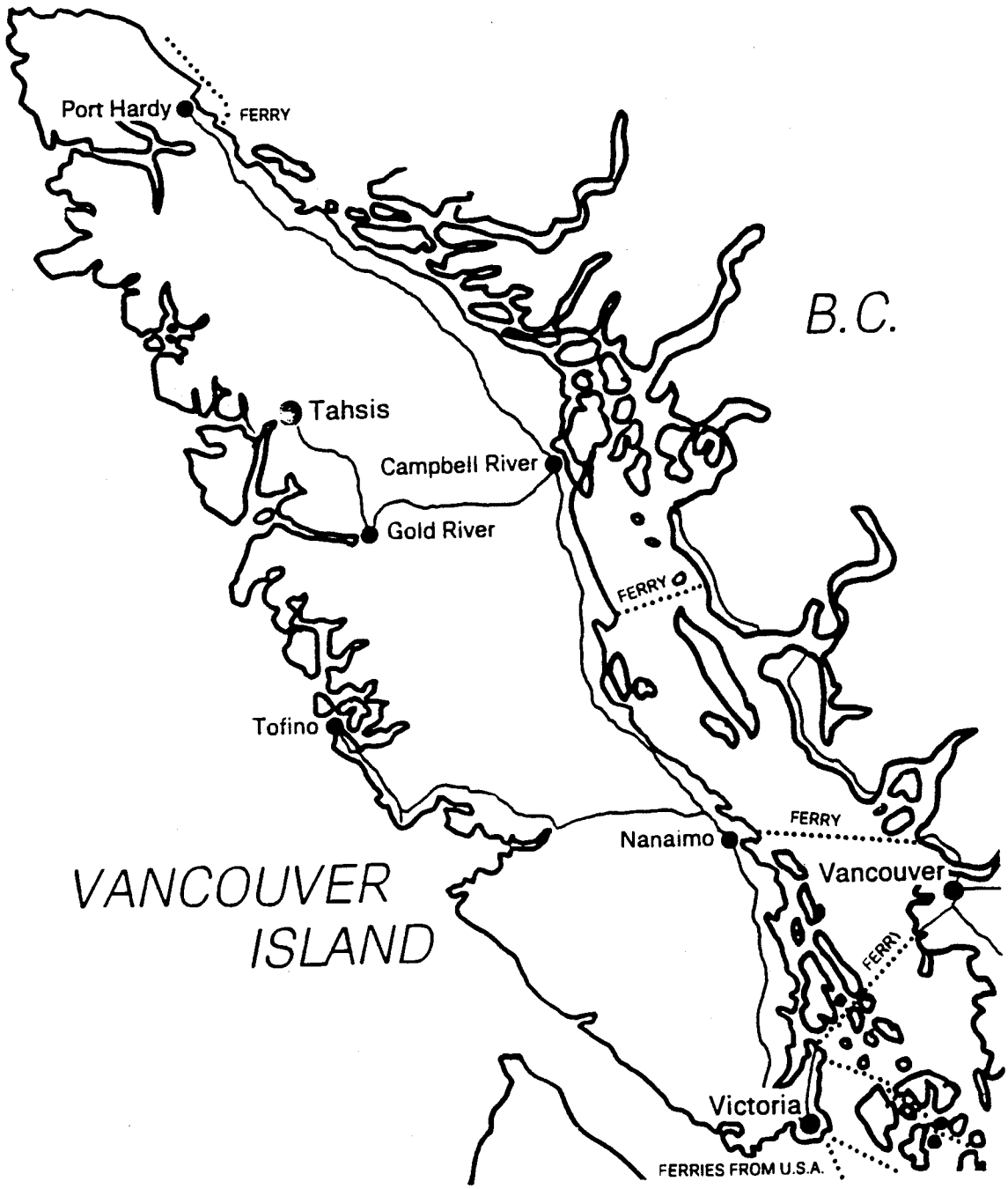
ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the role of first person oral narratives in contemporary industrial society as integral to a communicational perspective on cultural, historical, and social processes. Until recently, empirical science has been the dominant paradigm by which culture and history have been examined. This thesis argues that oral narratives as the expressive voice, rooted in the subjective, concrete experience of the oral domain, are fundamental to the analysis of culture. It further argues that first person oral accounts reveal certain aspects of the historical process that cannot be measured by any other means.

Using as a case study the Nootka Sound region on the west coast of Vancouver Island, and specifically, the community of Gold River, this thesis analyzes a corpus of oral accounts to determine the meaning people make of their life experiences. The study shows that first person narratives in their various manifestations as life story, autobiography, social and community-based history, and personal reminiscence, are not merely a record of past events, but are a meaningful re-interpretation of those events.

It considers first person oral accounts in the light of contemporary approaches to cultural studies theories of political practice, popular culture, and meaning. Analysis draws on Clifford Geertz' interpretive theories of culture; Jan Vansina and L.L. Langness and Gelya Frank on the methodological use of first person oral accounts; Walter Ong and Jack Goody on the orality-literacy debate; Stuart Hall, Raymond Williams, and Richard Johnson on the social production of meaning; and on Ferdinand Tonnies' concept of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft.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PREFACE

Most of what we know about historical events is obtained through the written record. To a large extent, what has been recorded in writing relies on empirical fact and data: names, dates, places, events. Before that information even reaches us, a certain process of selection has already determined which events are "worthy" of being recorded while other, less "worthy," events are ignored, left out of the record. Social, political, and economic factors, always present in shaping current developments, also serve to influence the knowledge and information we receive about the past. Still other kinds of information don't make it to the writing table because they do not fit the canons of scientific objectivity. That is, they are not easily quantified and measured.

In many cases, all that remains as evidence of the past are those elements which have been recorded in writing and preserved over the years. We tend to privilege those elements, give them preeminence in defining history. Our understanding of the past, then, is shaped by the existing records. History becomes only that which gets recorded and is deemed "legitimate" only because it appears in writing.

Selectivity of information, based on the written record, disregards a whole area of the historical process - the human subjective experience, the "lived culture" of ordinary and not-so-ordinary citizens. Other, less tangible forms of communication - the spoken word, for example - and the intangibles of human feelings and subjectivities, are rarely preserved and thus are frequently neglected. Because these aspects of history are not recorded in writing, they are unable to participate in the historical debate - a debate which, in most cases, must unhappily remain one-sided.

We are fortunate in British Columbia, however, and at this time in Canada's history, to have access to an element that reaches beyond the written record to encompass subjective experiences. Given its relatively recent history, B.C. has access to the living memories of people who have been intimately involved in the development of the province. By tapping into those memories we are provided with a perspective not otherwise found in the more conventional approaches to history.

This thesis argues that when research takes advantage of material which extends beyond the written mode, a different history is discovered, one that is rich in meaning. It examines the importance of including first person oral narratives in recreating a sense of the past and in attaching meaning to historical events. From a communicational perspective, including first person oral accounts as a legitimate analytic tool represents a fusion of the objective and subjective aspects of life in order to fully understand the human condition.

This thesis grew out of my work with the West Coast Committee of the Regional District of Comox-Strathcona on Vancouver Island, a group representing the communities of Gold River, Tahsis, and Zeballos, and the outlying unincorporated areas of Esperanza, Nuchatlitz, and Kyuquot.[1] They felt that their history, the story of who they are and how they developed, was important and worth preserving. They undertook not only to record that history, but to make it available to the public in the form of a 90-minute video, completed in May, 1988, and a full-length book to be published in March, 1991.

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1 Regional districts are a level of the provincial government which represent the unincorporated areas in a particular region. On August 19, 1965, the Regional District of Comox-Strathcona became the first regional district to be incorporated in B.C. It includes two mid-sized urban centers on the east coast of Vancouver Island, Campbell River and Courtenay, as well as several smaller communities, including Tahsis, Gold River, and Zeballos on the west coast of the island.

I was hired by the Regional District in 1987 to document and record the historical development of the Nootka Sound region on the west coast of Vancouver Island. It was not my first association with the region. I had worked for the village of Tahsis in the summer of 1985 and again in 1986 to establish a community archives and to research the local history. The Tahsis project required organizing written and photographic material donated to the village by the town's largest employer, Canadian International Paper Company Ltd. (now Canadian Pacific Forest Products Ltd.), and interviewing early residents.

During the process of researching the regional history of the area, I became aware of a large gap between the recorded knowledge about the past, and the past as seen through the eyes of the people who were there at the time. No matter how many times I sifted through the written records and documents and newspapers, I couldn't seem to get beyond the empirical data to the "meat" of human existence. In any given period, the historical record is dominated by the controlling economic interests of the day. For the period of European contact, historical events are defined primarily by the written journals kept by Spanish, British, and American explorers and fur traders. Until recently, the oral traditions of the Native Indians have been less widely accessible, thus restricting their interpretation of history to a smaller, more specialized audience. During the 20th century, the region's development is marked by resource-based industries: fish processing, logging, mining, sawmilling, and pulp. The historical records rely mainly on empirical facts, based on economic initiatives and events, to chart the area's development.

In many cases, the written history was sketchy or nonexistent. I turned to first person oral accounts to fill in the gaps. In the literature, oral histories are used as a methodological tool to verify and support written accounts, or to provide anecdotal material. Their validity is subordinated to the written record. What I discovered, however, was that first person oral narratives provide something more than empirical data. They offer access to another dimension of our historical

understanding, one that adds a deeper and richer interpretation to information contained in the written record.

As a result of my work on the west coast of Vancouver Island, I felt there was a need to examine the role of oral narratives as a form of popular expression. I have chosen to do a case study in order to demonstrate the importance, from a communicational perspective, of using personal accounts in recreating a sense of the past.

The Nootka Sound region and specifically, the community of Gold River, provided an ideal setting for the study. The area has not been written about to any great extent, other than during the initial period of European contact, 1784-1795, and through various archaeological and ethnographic studies of the area's indigenous people (formerly known as the Nootka Indians and now known as the Nuu-chah-nulth). It is also an area that has a very recent non-Native Indian history. Early Euro-Canadian settlement occurred during the 1930s, and the town of Gold River was built in 1965. These events are within living memory, and participants were readily accessible, living either in the region itself or in nearby communities on Vancouver Island and the lower mainland of the province.

The region itself represents a microcosm of western Canadian development with its resource-based economy, single industry towns, and geographical isolation. Physically as well as socially, Gold River was easily defined. Until recently, access was restricted and the town was, to all intents and purposes, a 'closed' community, a company-owned town.

This thesis is divided into two parts. Part I looks at qualitative and quantitative methods of research, interpretive approaches to the study of culture, the theory related to orality and literacy, and popular culture as a class-based communicational process. Part II considers the fieldwork and methodology used in examining the history of Gold River and the way in which people interpret and make sense of their past. A corpus of first person oral accounts is considered in relation to the history of the region as documented in the written record. Finally, an

assessment of the role of first person oral narratives in understanding historical events is made in an attempt to fuse the objective and subjective aspects of knowledge.

PART I: AN EXPLANATION

CHAPTER 1: Introduction - Making Cultural Sense

> Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law, but an interpretive one in search of meaning. [Geertz, 1973:5]

This thesis begins with an examination of quantitative and qualitative approaches to historical research. In an age where information has become increasingly important, we are inundated with facts and raw data. We are also obsessed with the scientific approach to life: recording, measuring, quantifying, and classifying has become the driving force behind our attempts to explain the world. The method we use to order raw data, the ways we go about measuring the world and classifying information, ultimately shapes our perception and interpretation of that world.

By contrast, another approach to viewing the world is the one taken by interpretive anthropology. Through semiotics, it goes beyond empiricism and explanation to an examination of culture as systems in which meaning is derived from the subjective experience of participants. In exploring the interpretive approach, the work of three important writers is of note: Max Weber, the classic theorist and 'father' of sociology; Clifford Geertz, noted anthropologist and writer; and James Carey, theorist and practitioner in the field of communication studies.

The Empirical World

We live in what is commonly referred to as the information age. Every day we are bombarded with facts and figures on topics ranging from the latest political developments in the middle-East to the number of people dead in a South African riot. Twenty-four hour television news channels keep us informed of current issues and events around the world. Newspapers now treat us to various versions of the *Vancouver Sun*'s "Earthweek: A Diary of the Planet"[1] which contains short, snappy items on such topics as earthquakes: "A moderate earthquake in central Ecuador killed four people near Quito and damaged dozens of adobe homes." Drought: "The record breaking drought that has gripped much of Europe this year worsened. Almost 3,000 km of French rivers have already dried up." And the deteriorating environment: "About 500 Bolivian natives began a 500 km walk to protest the forced eviction from their traditional rainforest homes by loggers."

Four people killed in an earthquake. 3,000 km of dry riverbeds in France. The article on the "rainforest refugees" goes on to say that ten tribes will participate in a trek from the Amazon jungle to the capital city of La Pez, some 3,657 meters above sea level. All are quantifiable, measurable, observable phenomena. Somewhere, sometime in the future, these obscure news items will be found recorded as "events" in history, their immediate meaningfulness reduced to a series of names, dates, places, and numbers. Their implications will be noted in causal terms.

"This day in history..." certain events occurred, inventions were created, new information was discovered. Last year, ten years ago, twenty, fifty, a hundred years ago, a new company was formed, a building was destroyed by fire, a new mayor appointed. These "landmarks" are empirical facts by which the

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1 *The Vancouver Sun*, Section B, Saturday edition, August 18, 1990, p B7.

progress of society is charted. They represent the tangible development of history.

Our lives too are measured in concrete terms. Birthdays, anniversaries, Christmas and New Year's Eve order the passing of the years. Again, more landmarks: not just elementary school but that particular school in that particular building and classroom. Elementary school, then high school, or a job: What grade did you complete? Who was your teacher? What year did you graduate? University. First job, second job. Marriage, or not. Children? How many? What gender? How old are they? Not: how did having children affect your job, your marriage, your life. Not: what did it mean to finish school/graduate from university/get your first pay cheque.

Obituaries are one form of recording and reviewing past lives. Just as what remains after death is but the flesh and blood shell of what it means to be human, so too obituaries reduce a person's life to outward structures. Elwood George James Carruthers died on August 12, 1990, at the age of 83. His obituary appeared in *The Vancouver Sun* newspaper a few days later. Mr. Carruthers is survived by his wife, Helen, his son, James Colin, his daughter, Joan Carruthers, a daughter-in-law, Freda Pagani, and two granddaughters, Jet and Helen.

Reginald Stanley Anderson, who "passed away peacefully at home on August 15, 1990, at the age of 64 years," was born in Vancouver on October 13, 1925. Mr. Anderson had a wife, Elizabeth, a daughter Arleen, a son Ernie, and two grandchildren. He was a Past Master and active member of West Point Lodge #155 A.F. & A.M. He also belonged to the Scottish Rite Bodies, the Gizeh Temple, and the Marine Drive Golf Club. Lost in translation is the essence of their lives, the substance of their dreams and aspirations, their failed hopes, their joys and their regrets. What did it mean to Reginald Stanley Anderson to be a Past Master of West Point Lodge? How did he get to be one

in the first place? What was his involvement in the Gizeh Temple? What role did the Marine Drive Golf Club play in his life?

The Quantification of History

The typical record of a town's history unfolds in a similar fashion to an obituary. The construction of buildings, the dates organizations are formed and businesses established, the patterns of decision-making, and the consequence of developments are all easily observed and recorded, often in chronological order. Historians, sociologists, and anthropologists, engaged in the similar activity of "making sense of" history, strive to understand and interpret phenomena according to their relationship to other phenomena.

Up to now, science, rational thought, "our logic" has been the dominant paradigm by which social scientists, biologists, even literary critics and the "general public" have measured the world and judged it to have meaning. By "science" I mean the methodological approach of systematically observing, recording, measuring, organizing, classifying, and testing empirical data in order to describe, explain, and predict. The intent being to ultimately control and understand the natural world by the predictability of things and events. Thus meaning, in this sense, is generally derived from an analysis of the political, social, religious, economic, and material conditions of existence.

Scientific methods and laws, however, are **ways of ordering** the physical world, and are not inherent to it; that is, the mind imposes its own structure on the objective, material conditions of life as a way of making sense of a myriad of sensory impressions. Richard Braithwaite, writing on causal and teleological explanation, says that the function of scientific law is:

> ...that of organizing our empirical knowledge so as to give both intellectual satisfaction and power to predict the unknown... the world is not made up of empirical facts with the addition of the laws of nature:

> what we call the laws of nature are conceptual devices by which we organize our empirical knowledge and predict the future.[2]

Meaning - A Different Kind of Explanation

As a paradigm science, as a system of rational thought or material determinism, is seen as self-justifying. Observation, measurement, description, and explanation of empirical data become ends in themselves. To achieve them is deemed sufficient in acquiring understanding and meaning. But that is not sufficient to **make meaningful** other people; interpretive anthropology seeks to go beyond description and explanation of phenomenon. Evans Pritchard, writing from the field, suggests there is more going on then external behavior:

> We feel like spectators at a shadow show... what the eye sees and the ear hears is not the same as what the mind sees.[3]

Unlike traditional historical methods, which deal with empirical "facts," qualitative analysis deals with the study of social phenomena which, while it may also include the study of 'facts', must also consider motivation, intent, and human emotion. As a methodology, it uses scientific techniques to come up with a systematic analysis of the various manifestations of social science. However, as a semiological science, the guiding principle of social research is meaning. As researchers, we can observe, collect, record, classify, describe, and organize information about "what's out there." But as semiologists of culture, we need to ask not only what's "out there," but what happens "in here," in the mind, that makes out there meaningful.

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2 "Causal and Teleological Explanation," *Purpose in Nature*, John Canfield ed. (New Jersey, 1966), p. 45.

3 Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*. (New York, 1983), pp. 149-150.

There is, nonetheless, a problem in subordinating social science to empirical science, in reducing it to physico-chemical terms and concepts. That problem has to do with the part-whole relationship. Claude Levi-Strauss, writing about anthropology:

> Social anthropology developed out of the discovery that all aspects of social life - economic, technical, political, legal, esthetic, and religious - make up a significant complex and that no one of these aspects can be understood unless it is considered together with all the others. It therefore tends to work from the whole to the parts.[4]

Inherent in an analysis of social development is the notion of teleological explanation - cultures themselves are, in fact, teleological systems to the extent that they are self-generating, self-regulating, self-replicating. While causal explanations of a physico-chemical type serve to explain certain aspects or parts of the system, they are not complete explanations. The study of culture, then, is irreducible; the contextualization of parts and of whole is paramount. Michael Polanyi says the parts of a system are meaningful only when considered in the context of the whole:

> When focusing on a whole, we are subsidiarily aware of its parts, while there is no difference in the intensity of the two kinds of awareness... Also when something is seen as subsidiary to a whole, this implies that it participates in sustaining the whole, and we may now regard this function as its meaning, within the whole.[5]

Meaning, then, requires the ability to comprehend the parts while at the same time comprehending the whole. The part contains the essence of the whole, and the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

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4 Claude Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (New York, 1967 (1963), p. 355.

5 Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (London, 1958 (1962), pp. 57-58.

Polanyi rejects the "ideal of scientific detachment."[6] He then proceeds to argue in favor of the pursuit of "personal knowledge," the personal participation of the knower in all acts of understanding. The act of knowing, he explains, is "an intentional change of being: the pouring of ourselves into the subsidiary awareness of particulars."[7] The knower becomes the parts at the same time as being the whole. Objects are not separate and detached; rather, meaning is contained in the relationship of observer-observed, the knower and the known, and not just in the relationship of parts to each other.

This leads to a further sense of meaning, and that is the subjective meaning of events as interpreted by participants. In this sense, another dimension to the analysis and understanding of history is revealed through first hand experience. Max Weber refers to two kinds of meaning. One is the "actual existing meaning in the given concrete case of a particular actor." The other is a "pure type of subjective meaning."

> In no case does it refer to an objectively 'correct' meaning or one which is 'true' in some metaphysical sense. It is this which distinguishes the empirical sciences of action, such as sociology and history, from the dogmatic disciplines in that area, such as jurisprudence, logic, ethics, and esthetics, which seek to ascertain the 'true' and 'valid' meaning associated with the objects of their investigation.[8]

Weber goes on to say that many aspects of human action "often cannot be understood completely, though sometimes we are able to grasp them intellectually."[9] He says that actions can only be understood in terms of the emotional and intellectual interpretation available.

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6 Ibid., p. vii.

7 Ibid., p. 64.

8 Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*. Transl. and ed. by Talcott Parsons. (New York, 1947), pp. 89-90.

9 Ibid., p. 91.

An Interpretive Approach to Understanding Events

Clearly, what concerns us here is the debate between quantitative analysis and qualitative, the 'science' of empirical studies and the 'science' of meaning, a mechanistic versus humanistic approach to social and cultural analysis. From a communicational perspective, an interpretive approach to the study of social processes makes the most sense. It is an approach that is eloquently argued by Clifford Geertz in his two collections of essays, *The Interpretation of Cultures* and *Local Knowledge*. Geertz states at the outset that his concept of culture is a semiotic one: "Analysis, then, is sorting out the structures of signification... and determining their social ground and import."[10] He goes on to say that:

> As interworked systems of construable signs..., culture is not a power, something to which social events, behaviors, institutions, or processes can be causally attributed; it is a context, something within which they can be intelligibly - that is, thickly - described.[11]

Semiotics employs what is an essentially qualitative or interpretive approach to the study of communication and communication processes. It differs from the empiricist approach in that it proceeds on the basis of inductive rather than deductive reasoning, developing whatever general statements it is able to make from specific observations. In addition, the semiotic approach is not founded on the assumption that there does, in fact, exist a universal, objective reality which presents itself for study. The 'science of the sign' generally disregards attempts to prove or disprove its theories in any objective, scientific way.

Accordingly, as a research method in a field dominated by canons of objectivity, semiotics is vulnerable to criticism, particularly from those who

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10 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: 1973), p. 9.

11 Ibid., p. 14.

adhere to the empiricist traditions. Colin Sumner, for one, dismisses semiotic analysis as nothing more than an unscientific and subjective exercise. For him, semiotic interpretation simply reflects the semiologists own personal ideas and experiences. His criticism of semiotic readings centers on the assumption that they are based on undeveloped socio-historical knowledge, and therefore cannot meet scientific requirements.

Geertz, however, believes there are valid methods for analyzing cultural phenomena, other than the strictly empirical model. As stated at the opening of this chapter, he suggests the study of culture to be an interpretive science in search of meaning rather than an experimental one in search of law.[12] Thus, he is looking for a different type of information, one that cannot be "got at" solely through the traditional methods of observation and measurement, but nonetheless needs them to assist in the search for meaning. Geertz also warns against the danger that cultural analysis will lose touch with the "hard surfaces" of life, a methodological problem that can be got around by paying attention to those very aspects:

> My own position in the midst of all this has been to try to resist subjectivism on the one hand and cabalism on the other, to try to keep the analysis of symbolic forms as closely tied as I could to concrete social events and occasions, the public world of common life, and to organize it in such a way that the connections between theoretical formulations and descriptive interpretations were unobscured by appeals to dark sciences.[13]

James Carey is equally skeptical of the existence of "scientific objectivity," and suggests that scientific thought has no relation to truth because "it too is a prejudice and a passion, however sophisticated."[14] The laws and functions upon

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12 Ibid., p. 5.

13 Ibid., p. 30.

14 James Carey, "Mass Communication Research and Cultural Studies," *Mass Communication and Society* (London: 1977), p. 415.

which scientific activity rests emerge out of the minds of scientists themselves, conditioned to a particular view of human behavior that Braithwaite earlier noted as conceptual devices by which we impose order on the external world.

Following from Geertz, Carey suggests that a cultural science of communication views human action as a text. The task of the social scientist more closely resembles that of the literary critic than that of the behavioral scientist. "Our task," he writes, "is to construct a 'reading' of the text... Our task...is to interpret the interpretations."[15] More fundamentally, Carey argues that cultural studies has more modest objectives than other forms of analysis and is, above all, more human:

> It does not seek to explain human behavior, but to understand it. It does not seek to reduce human action to underlying causes or structures but to interpret its significance. It does not attempt to predict human behavior, but to diagnose human meanings.[16]

Interpretation and Meaning in the Oral Mode

What I want to argue is that first person oral accounts provide another form of representation, a dimension of experience, meaning, and interpretation that is a necessary ingredient to the full analysis and understanding of history and culture. Historical 'fact' and verifiable evidence tell only one side of the story. The other side - what it all means - can only be accessed by talking to participants.

This thesis will show that first person oral accounts reveal certain aspects of the historical process that cannot be measured by any other means. It considers first person oral accounts as emerging out of contemporary approaches to cultural studies theories of political practice, popular culture, and meaning.

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15 Ibid., p. 422.

16 Ibid., p. 418.

This paper draws on Clifford Geertz' interpretive theories of culture; Jan Vansina, and L.L. Langness and Gelya Frank on the methodological use of first person oral accounts; Walter Ong and Jack Goody on the orality-literacy debate; Stuart Hall, Raymond Williams, and Richard Johnson on the social production of meaning.

Gold River, a community on the west coast of Vancouver Island, is used as a case study in which a corpus of first person oral narratives are assessed in relation to the written history of the community. What emerges is a particular interpretation of the past not found in the written documents. Specifically, the oral accounts are applied to Ferdinand Tonnies' concept of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft in an attempt to understand the process of moving from a 'closed' to an 'open' community.

CHAPTER 2:

Spoken Lives in Written Times

> ... Things and events in the real world do not contain or propose their own, integral, single and intrinsic meaning which is then mainly transferred through language. Meaning is a social production, a practice. The world has to be *made to mean*. Language and symbolization is the means by which meaning is produced. [Stuart Hall: *Culture, Society and the Media*, 1982:67]

In moving from a narrow, empirically defined view of the world to an interpretive one, new forms of research and analysis, revealing new kinds of information, must be considered. To date, studies of communication have distinguished between oral and written forms of communication, literate and pre-literate (oral) societies, and the ways in which the means of communication structures our knowledge. With the invention of writing, and the subsequent development of print technologies, we have increasingly come to depend on the written word for our information. It is, however, information that is shaped by particular social relations and constrained by features which are inherent to the means of writing itself.

While writing may dominate the public and official spheres of knowledge, orality continues to be the primary form of daily, face to face communication and interaction. In considering another perspective to the production of knowledge, a further distinction must be made, and that is the role of orality within literate societies. Rather than relying on information gleaned from written records and through empirical data, other forms of communication must be accessed in order to understand the full scope of human activity. First person oral accounts are unique to this endeavor in that they provide easy access to the

human subjective experience. In this view, the oral "voice" emerges out of the concrete experiences of a popular culture that is defined in opposition to the dominant literate elite.

The argument for an "oral dynamic" is found in the fusion of work in the orality-literacy field, and theories of popular culture as a class-based communicational process. Theories of orality and literacy are explored from a cultural studies perspective, drawing on the work of Jack Goody, Walter Ong, Jan Vansina, Stuart Hall, Richard Johnson, and Raymond Williams.

Genesis of Oral Histories

The role of first person oral narratives in research has traditionally been considered from the perspective of their contribution to the body of historical evidence and fact. Methodological concerns have focussed on the difficulties in verifying oral accounts according to the criteria of scientific proof. In most cases, oral testimony is checked against other kinds of records to establish its "truthfulness," thus confining oral histories to the domain of empirical analysis. They are seen as merely another tool in the quantification of human knowledge and experience.

From a communicational perspective, however, the role of first person oral accounts is much more complex. They are research technique, social product, and interpretive analysis in one. More than a simple record of events, oral histories provide an interpretation of those events. Of particular interest in this view is the recent trend towards subjective experience, what Richard Johnson calls the "who I am" or "who we are" of cultural identities.[1] Through oral accounts we are given access to subjectivities not reached otherwise. Johnson writes:

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1 Richard Johnson, *Making Histories* (London: 1982), p. 12.

> What is interesting about the forms of oral-historical witness or autobiography are not just the nuggets of 'fact' about the past, but the whole way in which popular memories are constructed and re-constructed as part of a contemporary consciousness.[2]

Recent approaches in the academic disciplines of history, anthropology, and sociology attempt to present historical and cultural issues as they were experienced by the "actors" at the time. In history, Raphael Samuel notes that there is a move to recover the "texture" of everyday life, to "bring the past to life again by listening to the voices of the dead."

> The main thrust ... has been towards the recovery of subjective experience. One might note, in oral history, the overwhelming interest in reconstituting the small details of everyday life; in local history, the shift from 'places' to 'faces' ... In labor history, the preoccupation with the more spontaneous forms of resistance.[3]

Similarly, contemporary analyses of culture are increasingly focusing on the social processes by which meanings are actively created and knowledge is reproduced. One important aspect to this "construction of meaning" is language, both in its primary oral form, and in its secondary, literate form. This thesis specifically considers the role of oral accounts within the context of the social production of meaning. As a communicational process, oral histories are both methodological tools and the means by which a given group encounters, evaluates, interprets and represents their experiences. First person oral narratives serve as a mechanism for ascertaining certain aspects of the historical process that cannot be measured by any other means.

The argument for an "oral dynamic" is essentially an extension of cultural studies approaches to popular culture as a social- and class-based communicational process, and a synthesis of work done in the orality-literacy

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2 Johnson, "Popular Memory," *Making Histories*, p. 219.

3 Raphael Samuel, "People's History," *People's History and Socialist Theory*, Raphael Samuel ed., (London, 1981), pp. xvii-xviii.

field. In this approach, oral histories are seen as **social** products of particular class-based relationships - i.e., working class histories, feminist accounts, the life stories of indigenous people, and so on. As **oral** accounts, they also represent a dimension of meaning which emerges out of the oral mode of communication as opposed to the literate. That is, the direct, spontaneous, and concrete nature of first person oral narratives provide an interpretation of experience not found in typical history books.

Of particular interest in this thesis is the position of oral histories in the social production of meaning; the relationship between oral and literate forms in contemporary industrial society; the shift in the social context of orality, from the "fixed" and formal oral traditions of primary oral groups to the highly subjective and individual form of orality within literate groups; and, finally, the dichotomy of oral histories: if, as it has been argued by Ong et al, the invention of writing made history possible, then what role does the oral component play in modern industrial society?

The Social Production of Meaning

In its most simple forms, oral history is what Johnson calls "the evocation and recording of individual memories of the past."[4] But it is also much more than that. Viewed as a process in the social production of meaning, oral history involves more than just the simple recording of personal reminiscences. It encompasses a whole range of social relations from questions of individual authorship over collective and collaborative endeavors, to issues of class, gender, and race. It deals with matters of subjectivity and objectivity, the rational and the emotional, domination and resistance, power, and the struggle over meaning.

4 Richard Johnson, "Popular Memory", p. 216.

Oral history is, in its various public manifestations, autobiography and life story, community-based history, personal reminiscence, and memoir.

At one level, then, is the oral transmission of knowledge, the "evocation" of personal memories; at another level is the social and cultural context within which that knowledge is framed. This view of oral histories begins with an analysis of culture as a signifying system through which meanings are continually being created and re-created. Included in this analysis is the notion of popular culture as a class-based set of relations characterized by asymmetries in power and resources, and the struggle over the definition of events.

1) Culture as a signifying system

The analysis of the social production of meaning is grounded in the work of Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall, and Richard Johnson. Raymond Williams' definition of culture is of particular importance to a communicational perspective for he argues that culture is "the signifying system through which necessarily (though among other means) a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced and explored."[5] As a signifying system, then, all things and events, all objects and institutions and social processes are symbolic representations. They signify a particular socially-constructed meaning. Outside of an object's use value - which is itself a social construct - things are given meaning according to their interaction with human thought and the material world. In this view, cultural forms represent 'signifying practices' in a process whereby meanings are created.

Williams argues for a 'sociology of culture' that takes from the anthropological and sociological senses of culture as the 'whole way of life' of a people, as well as from the notion of 'artistic and intellectual' activities. Central

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5 Raymond Williams, *Culture* (London, 1981 (1985), p. 13.

to his argument, and what sets it apart from early semiotics approaches, is the role of the social organization of the means of production:

> At the same time, while it is a kind of sociology which places its emphasis on all signifying systems, it is necessarily and centrally concerned with manifest cultural practices and production. Its whole approach requires, as we shall see, new kinds of social analysis of specifically cultural institutions and formations, and the exploration of actual relations between these and, on the one hand, the material means of cultural production and, on the other hand, actual cultural forms.[6]

Williams suggests that the study of culture is not simply an examination of 'the whole way of life' of a particular group of people. Rather, it is the study of the relations between elements in that 'way of life'. Further, he suggests that popular culture has become the major area of cultural production, where "the real dynamics of the socio-cultural process are most evident."[7] Popular culture, as "the culture actually made by people for themselves,"[8] thus becomes a key element in the dynamics of change.

2) Asymmetries in the social process of meaning

Crucial to the approach taken by Williams et al, is the notion of asymmetries in power, class relations, and access to resources, leading to a deepening of the underlying structure of domination and subordination. These asymmetries, says Williams, have become increasingly more complex with the development of new technologies and the requirements for specialized knowledge and training. He writes that it begins with the invention of writing:

> Writing as a cultural technique is wholly dependent on forms of specialized training, not only...for producers but also, and crucially, for

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6 Ibid., p. 14.

7 Ibid., p. 228.

8 Williams, *Keywords*, p. 237.

> receivers. Instead of being a development of an inherent or generally available faculty, it is a specialized technique wholly dependent on specific training. It is then not surprising that for a very long period the most difficult problems in the social relations of cultural practice revolved around the question of literacy.[9]

Williams goes on to say that the basic asymmetry between those who have the tools of literacy, and the popular, largely oral culture, becomes more apparent as the importance of literacy in society increases, while the actual ability to read lags behind:

> Relations between a still predominantly oral culture and this important and growing sector 'within it' are then especially complex, and the point is soon reached when there is a qualitative difference between the oral area, which all share but to which most are confined, and the literate area, which is of increasing cultural importance but is at once minor and dominant.[10]

As writing moved into print technology, the privileged literate culture became more clearly defined in its dominant and oppositional relation to the general oral culture. The written record took on a more authoritative 'voice.' This position of importance was due in part to the nature of literacy in its material form, and in part to the organization of the means of production. Writing, and particularly print, enabled knowledge and information to be preserved and disseminated over time and space. Their relative permanency and tangibility gave documents a credibility that oral forms of communication didn't possess.

In the context of the social relations of production, writing, as a highly useful technique, was initially practiced and taught amongst a few small groups - the privileged and educated "haves." In the beginning, it was used primarily by officials and merchants for administrative and trade purposes, moving then into the areas of law, learning, religion, and history. It was during this stage, suggests

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9 Williams, *Culture*, pp. 93-94.

10 Ibid., p. 108.

Williams, "that very marked cultural divisions, already socially present in pre-literate societies, became .... technically stabilized."[11] Those who did not have access to writing - the 'have nots' - were excluded from these specialized fields which soon came to dominate cultural production. Relations were further organized around access and control of print technologies, requiring not only specialized knowledge but also the material means to realize that knowledge.

There is an inherent contradiction to literacy, particularly concerning the invention of print media. On the one hand are the democratizing and popularizing effects of mass-produced material, the ability to disseminate the same text (narrative) to a wide audience, and to reach large numbers of people, both as producers and as receivers. On the other hand, writing emerges out of the dominant social strata as a highly specialized form, controlled by the educated elite, the materially wealthy. It is here that the tension between the popular, largely oral culture, and the dominant literate culture is played out.

3) The struggle over meaning

One of the concerns of this thesis is a definition of culture not as "fixed" autonomous forms, but as an ongoing process whereby cultural forms and meanings are continually being produced and reproduced. As Stuart Hall puts it:

> The power to signify is not a neutral force in society: The signification of events is part of what has to be struggled over, for it is the means by which collective social understandings are created - and thus the means by which consent for particular outcomes can be effectively mobilized.[12]

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11 Ibid., p. 94.

12 Stuart Hall, "The Rediscovery of 'Ideology,'" *Culture, Society and the Media*, Michael Gurevitch et al, ed. (London, 1982), p. 70.

Central to Hall's argument is the definition of popular culture in terms of its dialectical relationship to the dominant culture. What matters, Hall argues, is not the intrinsic or historically fixed objects of culture; rather, it is the struggle over the shape those forms will take, the struggle over meaning. While the specifics of cultural forms and activities are constantly changing - this book rather than that one, these works of art over those - what does not change is the "uneven relations of force which define the field of culture." Popular culture, he says, is the ground on which those transformations are worked.[13]

> ... Because meaning was not given but produced, it followed that different kinds of meaning could be ascribed to the same events. Thus, in order for one meaning to be regularly produced, it had to win a kind of credibility, legitimacy or taken-for-grantedness for itself. That involved marginalizing, down-grading or de-legitimating alternative constructions.[14]

The Domains of Communication

In "What is Cultural Studies Anyway?" Richard Johnson presents a useful framework for understanding the production, circulation and consumption of cultural forms.[15] Johnson's analysis is based on three main points. First, that cultural processes are intimately connected with social and class relations. Second, that culture involves social asymmetries in power and resources. And third, that culture is not an autonomous "thing," nor is it externally determined; rather, it is the site of social differences and struggles.[16]

The "circuit of production" in Figure 1 represents the social process through which cultural products are given meaning. As we have seen, forms are

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13 Ibid., p. 235.

14 Ibid., p. 67.

15 Richard Johnson, "What is Cultural Studies Anyway?," unpubl. ms. (Birmingham, England: n.d.), pp. 15-16.

16 Ibid., p. 3.

not fixed, and meaning is not inherent; things must be made to mean. On Johnson's circuit, the transformation of meaning occurs at various points. Interpretation is dependent on the conditions of production or consumption at the "moment" of enactment. So, cultural products emerging out of the private lives of "lived" culture, take on new meaning, become more general and abstract, as they move into the public sphere. A downward process is also at work; that is, public forms such as, say, state institutions, are taken out of the public, dissembled, and re-formed at the level of private experience.

Johnson uses as an example the development of an idea to build a "mini-metro" car, following it from initial conception in casual conversation to final production. It began at the private level:

> But as ideas were "put on paper" it started to take a more objective and more public form. The crunch came when decisions were made to go ahead with "the concept" and, then again, to "go public."[17]

The general transformations which occur in Johnson's circuit of production are between private and public, and more concrete and more abstract forms. The distinctions he makes, between private and public, concrete and abstract, particular and general, correspond directly to distinctions made between oral and literate modes of communication. More than a representation of social domains, Johnson's analysis can be extended to include ways of organizing thought and knowledge characteristic of primary forms of communication.

The notion of "modes" of communication follows Jack Goody's work on the effects of literacy in shaping thought. Goody suggests that the means of communication, together with the relations of communication, form the mode of communication.[18] Thus, the oral means of communication by spoken language,

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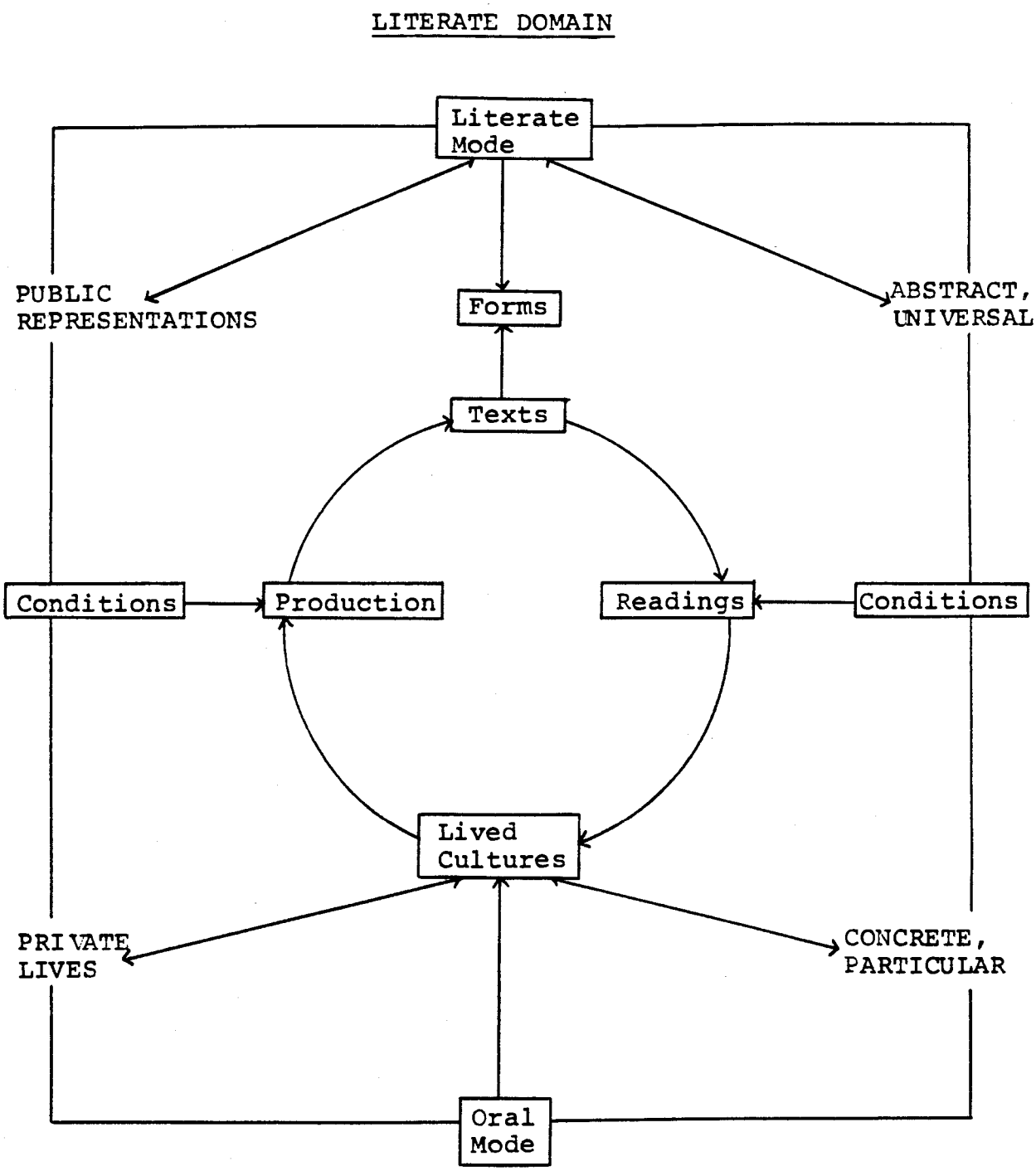
17 Ibid., p. 19.

18 Jack Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (London: 1977), p. 46.


LITERATE DOMAIN
Literate Mode
PUBLIC REPRESENTATIONS
Forms
ABSTRACT, UNIVERSAL
Texts
Conditions
Production
Readings
Conditions
Lived Cultures
PRIVATE LIVES
CONCRETE, PARTICULAR
Oral Mode
ORAL DOMAIN

gesture, and facial expressions, together with the social **relations** of face-to-face contact, form the oral mode. According to analyses by Goody, Ong, and Vansina, oral modes differ from literate modes in much the same way that Johnson's private cultural forms differ from their public representations. The following chart outlines the characteristic features of the oral and literate modes of communication:

Oral mode/ Private forms	**Literate mode/ Public representations**
Concrete	Abstract
Particular	Universal
Specific	General
Subjective experience	Objective knowledge
Intuitive	Scientific
Direct, face-to-face	Indirect, distanced,
Personal	Anonymous
Spoken/heard	Written/read
Interactive	Solitary
Homeostatic	Fixed

In Figure 1, Johnson's diagram is extended to show the modes of communication. Further, the modes of communication and the cultural production of knowledge constitute what can be called, for the purposes of this paper, 'domains of meaning'. The social formation and trans-formation of cultural products, practices, and processes is mediated by and through their positioning in a particular domain.

Johnson notes that social forms experienced or generated at the private level are marked by their concreteness and particularity:

> They relate to the characteristic life experiences and historically constructed needs of particular social categories. They do not pretend to

> define the world for those in other social groups. They are limited, local modes... They are also deeply embedded in everyday social intercourse.[19]

Oral history, rooted in the subjective experience of the concrete and particular, is both social form and expressive mode. As form, oral history recounts the individual, highly personalized story of a particular event in time or space. Paul Thompson notes that it is the "authentic, thoroughly local voice" of the narrator that we hear, conveying the "intimate texture of a hidden and fascinating culture."[20] As expressions within the oral mode, first person oral accounts emerge out of a particular domain of meaning characterized by the relations of popular culture and "people talking."

Public representations of cultural knowledge, on the other hand, operate within a primarily literate mode. The social expression of forms at the public level, "making public the private," takes on an appearance of rigidity and alienation, apart from and imposed upon the general popular culture. Local knowledges become institutionalized in schools and education systems, churches and religion, political parties and government bureaucracies, museums and history books. General categories of thought become abstract, universal, and objectified. Contemplating the stars at night, or a walk through the rain forest, become the study of philosophy, science, or anthropology. A similar transformation occurs with the invention of writing. Goody and Ian Watt argue that the abstract ordering and compartmentalizing of knowledge does not correspond directly to common human experience. It disregards the social and immediate context in favor of the timelessness of written categories, abstract thought:

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19 Johnson, p. 21.

20 Paul Thompson, "The New Oral History in France," Raphael Samuel ed., *People's History and Socialist Theory*, (London: 1981), p. 71.

> The written word suggests an ideal of definable truths which have an inherent autonomy and permanence quite different from the phenomena of the temporal flux and of contradictory verbal usages.[21]

Orality in a Literate Society

The role of oral histories or first person oral accounts in literate societies differs significantly from the role of the oral tradition in pre-literate societies. Within contemporary industrial society, oral forms take on a power that is at once rooted in the oral domain, and freed from the constraints imposed by primary orality. Spoken language, then, can be conceived of as a communicational subset operating within a system dominated by literate categories of thought and forms of expression. As a *means* of communication within the predominate literate mode of social organization, oral forms are primarily the official voices of politicians, academics, television and radio broadcasters, speech makers, bureaucrats, and so on. But, as a *mode* of communication, oral forms continue to operate at the level of private discourse and everyday conversations. Ideas are exchanged and information passed on, stories are presented, in direct, face-to-face encounters between people.

Oral forms in this sense are freer and more colloquial than the oral tradition of pre-literate societies. The oral tradition emphasizes the preservation of cultural values over time and is, to a great extent, fixed and formal. According to Ong, writing has taken over some of the preservative functions formerly fulfilled solely by oral means, thus freeing the mind for more creative endeavors.[22] For instance, written records have replaced memory in preserving specific social traditions. And social institutions have replaced personal

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21 Jack Goody and Ian Watt, "The Consequences of Literacy," *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, Jack Goody ed. Cambridge University Press. (London, 1968 (1975), p. 52.

22 Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (London, 1982 (1984), p. 41.

encounters in the dissemination of knowledge over time and space. Thus, the oral form of communication is pushed deeper into the realm of everyday experiences and local knowledges, separated from their more general functions.

In pre-literate societies, the preservation of social traditions relies solely on non-written means of transmission. Oral, ritual, behavioral, and iconic forms fulfill specific social functions in passing on cultural knowledge. Oral traditions, the recounting of events from memory, are records of the past in societies where there are no other, more permanent methods of storing information. They are certain kinds of records, bearing distinctively oral characteristics, some of which has been taken over by writing.

In preliterate societies, oral traditions are classed by the degree to which they are fixed in form, and by whether they are officially sanctioned by the group as a whole, or are private, family traditions. To a large extent, the need for official, collective forms of oral testimony, sanctioned by the group, has been replaced by writing. The development of social institutions and abstract modes of thought on one hand, and the compartmentalization and specialization of knowledges on the other, have broken down the unifying bond created by collectively-produced oral "texts." The collective is now represented by other forms and mechanisms, some of which function in the oral domain but may or may not be "official."

Rise of the Oral Voice

Contemporary oral traditions are freer in form, more spontaneous, and are generated out of the private lives and lived cultures of the individual. Written records have taken over the memory function, public institutions replace the official "voice." Thus the contemporary oral "voice" is rooted in the subjective, selective as to subject matter - that is, biased as to choice but having a

broader range of material from which to choose - and private. Oral history falls within this category of free-form texts.

As Goody and Watt point out, the relationship between oral and written traditions in Western cultures continues to be a problematic one.[23] While the invention of writing significantly altered the mode of communication, it did not, nor will it ever replace verbal interaction:

> For, even within a literate culture, the oral tradition - the transmission of values and attitudes in face-to-face contact - nevertheless remains the primary mode of cultural orientation, and, to varying degrees, it is out of step with the various literate traditions.[24]

They suggest there is a gap between the public literate traditions of society and the private oral traditions of the family. Those public literate traditions are created and maintained by the public institutions of society which are themselves reinforced by the literate mode. Oral forms, then, are pushed further down to the private and local levels of family and community. They operate separate from but not independent of, the formal literate structures.

The distinction between oral networks and literate forms suggests a further distinction: between those who use the tools and concepts of writing on a daily basis, and those who, while they know how to read and write, do not incorporate the literate perspective in any meaningful way. John Fiske and John Hartley suggest this is perceived to be a "cultural lag" between the dominant and the subordinate classes respectively.[25] On the one hand are the literate elite, fluent in the manipulation of concepts and forms at the abstract, public level: scholars, professionals, intellectuals, bureaucrats, entrepreneurs. At the other end of the spectrum are those who live and act in a primarily oral domain. Use

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23 Goody and Watt, p. 68.

24 Ibid., p. 58.

25 John Fiske and John Hartley, *Reading Television* (London, 1978), p. 121.

of written forms is secondary and limited. While members are influenced by the literate mode of structuring thought, they are not directly involved in its shaping.

Creating a New Self-Consciousness

The power of oral histories in communicating a particular view of life emerges out of the convergence of the oral and literate. Ong refers to a self-conscious orality based on the use of writing and print:

> Unlike members of a primary oral culture, who are turned outward because they have had little occasion to turn inward, we are turned outward because we have turned inward.[26]

At issue here is the question of reflexivity. The effectiveness of oral history, as a component of the "oral dynamic" and as originating in popular class-based culture, is due in part to its role in creating consciousness. Knowledge is power; self-knowledge is self-creation. Through history, says Johnson, groups acquire knowledge of the larger context within which they're positioned, thus becoming capable of a wider transformative role in society.[27] Oral histories tap into otherwise subordinated or subjugated knowledges. Consciousness is created by giving expression to alternative (subjective, private) perspectives of the dominant (objective, public) historical representations.

In literate society, oral history as autobiography and life story, has become much more reflective than would have been possible in primary oral groups. L.L. Langness and Gelya Frank, writing about the use of life history in anthropological work:

> ...if an autobiography is, by definition, an account that focuses on the inner life, a very interesting point arises, because there is evidence that not all people conceive of an "inner self," nor do they have the same ideas as those prevalent in contemporary Western cultures about personal

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26 Ong, p. 136.

27 Johnson, "Popular Memory", p. 214.

development or change.[28]

Ong, Goody and Watt, Langness and Frank, believe that the invention of writing deepened the conditions whereby self-consciousness could be realized. The objectification of thought in words and its subsequent isolation in space permitted reflection and self-reflection, Goody's "backward scanning" of events. As Ong suggests, self-analysis requires the isolation of the self in order to allow the center (the self) to be examined and described.[29] Thus, the process of making oral histories draws upon concepts of self and consciousness structured by the literate mode. At the same time, the awareness of self creates an oral account that will be richer in subjective and personal experience.

Oral History as Interpretative Tool

Jan Vansina makes a strong case for the legitimacy of oral tradition as historical methodology.

> It follows that oral traditions are not just a source about the past, but a historiology (one dare not write historiography!) of the past, an account of how people have interpreted it. As such oral tradition is not only raw source. It is a hypotheses, similar to the historian's own interpretation of the past.[30]

Conservative approaches to history have been concerned with the orderly, logical development of a society's passage from lower to higher stages of civilization; history, with the exception of "great kings and men," was largely impersonal. In this sense, Claude Levi-Strauss distinguishes between history's

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28 L.L. Langness and Gelya Frank, *Lives: An Anthropological Approach to Biography* (Novato, 1981), p. 90.

29 Ong, p. 54.

30 Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition As History* (Madison, Wisconsin, 1985), p. 196.

"conscious expressions of social life," and anthropology's interest in getting beneath the visible social phenomena to the unconscious foundations and processes.[31] Thus, the second notion which informs the development of a modern approach to oral history comes from Levi-Strauss' structuralist perspective:

> The anthropologist is above all interested in unwritten data, not so much because the peoples he studies are incapable of writing, but because that with which he is principally concerned differs from everything men ordinarily think of recording on stone or on paper.[32]

As with the structuralist perspective, cultural studies approaches are concerned with understanding the underlying processes and relations of force within society. It should be noted that, while Levi-Strauss here refers specifically to oral traditions, he also goes beyond the actual spoken word to the activity of mind - an extension Goody also uses in his construct of oral and literate "modes" of communication. Johnson addresses this same issue when he stresses the significance of "radical structuralism" in critiquing empiricism:

> This radical constructivism - nothing in culture taken as given, everything produced - is a leading insight we cannot fall behind... It is because we know we are not in control of our own subjectivities that we need so badly to identify their forms and trace their histories and future possibilities.[33]

The practice of oral history, in an attempt to get beneath the social and into the deeper, structural level of meaning, emerges out of the realization that empirical research alone is unable to adequately explain the complexities of human experience.

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31 Claude Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (Garden City, New York, 1963 (1967), p. 19.

32 Ibid., p. 25.

33 Johnson, "Popular Memory", p. 34.

The third source of oral history as a method of analyzing cultural process comes from the sociological-ethnographical domain. Goody and Watt distinguish between sociology as the study of literate societies and thus of historical documents, and anthropology as the study of non-literate and thus oral traditions and modes of communication.[34] Again, the literate/oral distinction, and a view of oral-based information as being **different in kind** from written forms, requiring different analytic tools.

All methods and processes use the raw data as the basis for further investigations, either to "reconstruct" the past, or to discover new meanings about how different people inhabit their pasts, experience their social worlds. But, and even more important, the techniques and form of oral history as practice reveal certain kinds of information that cannot be "got at" by more empirically informed means. The use of written documents, while having increased our store of particularized information, is nonetheless limited. Other forms of empirical observation are similarly quantifiable and add to the store of information, but they too do not take into account the subjective creation and re-creation of meaning. First person oral accounts do.

In general, then, oral history forms draw upon the subjective experience and reconstruction of everyday life, "experience as lived" by the members or actors in a culture. They attempt to reveal the underlying meaning of relations and processes where conscious, visible expressions are insufficient or fail to do so. And, finally, they function in the oral mode; that is, they are direct, personal, and interactive.

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34 Goody and Watt, p. 64.

PART II: AN INTERPRETATION

CHAPTER 3:
The Oral Mode in Practice

> Generally, as Gramsci argued, a sense of history must be one element in a strong popular socialist culture. It is one means by which an organic social group acquires a knowledge of the larger context of its collective struggles, and becomes capable of a wider transformative role in society. [Johnson: 1982, p. 214].

In Part I, an argument was made for an interpretive approach to understanding the cultural process: an approach which would extend beyond traditional quantitative methods to include qualitative forms of analysis. In particular, first person oral narratives were assessed as an important key in accessing the human subjective experience.

In order to demonstrate that the qualitative approach does, in fact, extend our knowledge of historical events, the theoretical perspective developed in Part I has been applied to a corpus of first person oral accounts. The site selected for the case study is Gold River, a small, single-industry forestry town on the west coast of Vancouver Island in British Columbia. Gold River was chosen in part because its oral history is a recent one, and is readily accessible, and in part because the town represents a microcosm of British Columbia's development.

The history of the industrial development of the community has occurred within living memory, beginning in the mid-1930s with A-frame logging operations. The transformation of the community, from a closed, company-owned logging camp of less than 200 people to an open municipality with a population of 1800, corresponds to changes in the economic conditions of the

area. Over a 30-year period, the local economic base of small-scale, independent logging contractors has given way to large, multi-national corporations. Today, Gold River's single largest employer is Canadian Pacific Forest Products Ltd., a subsidiary of Canadian Pacific.

This case study examines the evolution of the community, from logging camp to modern municipality, as interpreted by the people who lived there. Specifically, the subjective experience of historical events, integrated with information obtained through the official written records, yields a deeper understanding not only of the past, but also of the present. Further, the process of collecting first person oral accounts, of "doing" fieldwork, must also be considered in light of its contribution to the body of knowledge. Beginning with the fieldwork process, this chapter sets the stage for understanding the corpus of first person oral accounts. It provides a brief description of the geographical, economic, political, and social conditions of the area, reviews the background of the project, and assesses the research methods used.

The Fieldwork Experience

According to Langness and Frank, there are five fundamental tasks to gathering data in the field. They are: watching (observing), asking, listening, recording, and (sometimes) doing. They go on to say that a knowledge of the fieldwork context is crucial to understanding and analyzing the corpus of oral accounts which emerge out of that context.[1] Factors such as the circumstances surrounding the collection of information; the role of the researcher, her relationship to the people being interviewed, her motives and objectives; the

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1 L.L. Langness and Gelya Frank, *Lives: An Anthropological Approach to Biography* (Novato, California: 1981), p. 32.

length of time spent in the field; the physical, social and cultural context of the area being examined - all are an integral part of the overall project.

The fieldwork and research for this thesis took place over a period of four years, from May, 1985 to July, 1989, as part of a larger project to research and 'make public' the history of the Nootka Sound and Kyuquot Sound region on the west coast of Vancouver Island. During that time, I lived and worked in the region for the period May to August, 1985 and again in 1986, and from June, 1987, until April, 1988. I made my home in Tahsis and regularly visited the other communities in the region where I stayed at the homes of the mayors and their families. Upon moving out of the region in 1988, I returned frequently to attend community events, conduct interviews, make public presentations, and collect further information.

There were several levels to the Nootka Sound History Project and thus, to the thesis itself. At one level was the object of study, the stated purpose of the project which was to "document and record the historical development of the region." In the case of the thesis, the object of study is the examination of a body of oral histories and what they reveal about the history of the region.

At another level is the qualitative analysis of the oral accounts. That is, at one level, the oral accounts document certain events in the development of the region, while at another level, they provide a subjective interpretation of those events.

At still another level, the project was seen in terms of what Johnson refers to as a "dimension of political practice."[2] The practice of researching the history ultimately became a political process of helping the region to define a "sense of community" and "identity." My job required that I work with a committee of mayors, the top elected officials in the region. They had initiated the project out

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2 Richard Johnson, "Popular Memory: Theory, politics, method," *Making Histories: Studies in history-writing and politics* (London: 1982), p. 205.

of their desire to define a regional identity - an identity that they felt could only come with knowing their past.

The project also dealt with the political, economic, and social relationships within the region. The communities are economically tied to a single industry, forestry, and to a single company, Canadian Pacific Forest Products Ltd. There is a competitive relationship between Gold River and the other, smaller and more geographically remote communities of Tahsis and Zeballos. Political struggles and inter-community rivalry were often played out at the level of the Regional District committee and over the definition of the project.

At the same time as working with the committee, I was out in the communities, talking to people, asking questions, making them aware of the history project. In the process, local residents developed an interest in their history, leading to the initiation of various local history projects throughout the region. In Tahsis, my partner and I became involved in a project to preserve and renovate an old bunkhouse for use as a local museum, a tourist information centre, and a campus for North Island College. In Tahsis and Zeballos, I helped local groups form their own historical societies. And in Gold River I assisted the local historian to design and set up a permanent exhibit of artifacts in the municipal hall.

There was, however, a fine line between democratizing the process of history - giving the voice back to the people - and intervening. I found myself becoming more and more involved in community activities, inhibiting my ability to maintain impartiality. I eventually moved to Campbell River for its politically neutral position outside the region.

During my first two summers in the region, I lived in the town of Tahsis, a community of about 1,000 people. Both summers were spent in vacant teacherages on School Hill, so named because it was once the site of the town's elementary school. When the new elementary-secondary school was built in

1970, the old school was demolished and the site was used for teacherages: five mobile homes and a modular triplex owned by the school district to provide subsidized housing to teachers and their families. I thought it was interesting that the teachers, who are generally considered "outsiders" by the townspeople, lived on a hill above town, their social isolation reinforced by their geographical separation. Other teacherages are located behind the hospital on a bluff near the town hall, and there are a handful of houses scattered throughout the community. It seemed fitting that, as a researcher, I too lived on the hill, apart from the main community.

Upon leaving Tahsis in 1988, however, an incident occurred which made me sharply aware of area's keen interest in the history project. The house I had been renting while in Tahsis was one of four on property belonging to Canadian Pacific Forest Products Ltd. For some months, the company had wanted to have the houses moved or demolished in order to free up the land for industrial purposes. But, as one company official told me, they had postponed their plans because of my role in the history project. When I gave notice that I was moving, the company immediately evicted the other tenants. Two houses - including the one I had lived in for the past nine months - were moved to other locations in the community while the remaining two were demolished. The only thing left on the property is a tall cedar tree which we had asked the local fire chief to save. On my last visit to Tahsis in the fall of 1989, the tree was still standing, its green branches in sharp contrast to the barren field of tall grasses.

The Political and Social Factors of the Project

In addition to the information obtained through research, social and political factors influenced the definition of the project and, ultimately, shaped the definition of past. The West Coast Committee is made up of the mayors of each incorporated community and one representative for the unincorporated

area. Native communities are excluded from the regional district level of government. For the Nootka Sound region, this meant that the native bands of the Mowachaht-Muchalat, Ehattesaht, Nuchatlaht, Kyuquot, and Chekleset were not part of the committee, a point which became a critical issue in establishing the criteria for the history project. While the manifest objective was to "document and record the historical development of the Nootka Sound and Kyuquot Sound region," there was some reluctance on the part of the committee to include the Native Indian history, because, according to one committee member, "they don't contribute to the regional tax base."

The question of "who pays" also arose in discussions with the mayor of Gold River who frequently stated that, of the four areas represented, Gold River has the largest tax base and paid a larger portion of taxes to the regional district. Because the history project was financed by taxes raised from each community, the mayor of Gold River seemed to think the history should be written on a proportionate basis with Gold River being given, if not the largest role, certainly the largest amount of research time and work on other, related projects. It should be noted here that the issue of proportionate tax dollars is relative. Gold River's industrial tax base, the pulp and paper mill, is inextricably tied to the economic survival of the communities of Tahsis and Zeballos which supply the pulpwood and sawdust chips to keep the pulp mill running. Without them, Gold River would not exist. The reverse, however, is not true: that is, if the Gold River pulp mill closed down, Tahsis would continue cutting lumber in its sawmill and Zeballos would continue logging.

The communities of Tahsis, Zeballos, and Gold River are predominantly a mix of Euro-Canadian and East Indian ethnic backgrounds. Social divisions are based on the union-management dichotomy, and on job classifications which fall broadly into three domains: logging (loggers and equipment operators), sawmilling (unskilled laborers and skilled technicians, hourly-paid and management), and pulp and paper (again, skilled and unskilled, workers and

management). As with most resource extraction industries, the labor force is comprised primarily of men, although that is changing with the times. More and more women are being hired in the sawmill and pulp mill sectors, and as tree planters in the logging division. It remains, however, a male-dominated industry, a "macho" world.

There are three Native Indian communities in the region whose main economic activity is fishing. With few exceptions, they are not integrated into the social life of the non-Native communities, nor are non-Native residents involved in the community life of the Native Indians. Only a handful of Native Indians are employed by Canadian Pacific Forest Products, despite a legal commitment by the company to hire a certain number of Natives. The pulp mill is built on Indian reserve land which was leased to Tahsis Company in 1965 for the construction of the mill.

The Question of a Regional Identity

"I think we have a history, but the people in the community don't think they have roots or history," says Anne Fiddick, mayor of Gold River, "I think we've got the history, I don't think we have the roots. That can only happen over time, and when this community is forty or fifty years old, it will have roots. But the history of the area is important to making people feel that sense of permanency, that sense of circular time. Like, 'I'm here for awhile but it will carry on.' In a young community there's always the sense 'Well, it could be just another ghost town, you know,' in another "ex" number of years. Which makes people reluctant to invest, either commercially or in homes. It makes people unsure about the future of it."[3]

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3 Interview, Jim and Anne Fiddick (Gold River: May 12, 1988).

The communities of the West Coast Committee were interested in documenting the history of the region in order to reinforce a collective identity and to establish themselves as a cohesive unit. At the regional district level, they are marginalized and considered an anomaly by the major players of Campbell River, Courtenay, and the Comox Valley.

Initially, they wanted to capitalize on the region's role in European history as the place where Captain James Cook landed, thereby establishing the first contact between Europe and the west coast of Canada, and as the place where Spain and Britain argued over territorial rights to the Pacific. The committee tended to glorify this link and wanted to promote the tourism value of being the "birthplace of B.C.". Tahsis, for example, makes much of the fact that, in the fall of 1792, Britain's Captain George Vancouver and Spain's Bodega y Quadra met with Maquinna, an important chief of the Mowachaht Indians, at his winter village at the head of Tahsis Inlet. Gold River feels that as a completely planned and architecturally-designed community, and as one of the first communities to be incorporated as a municipality under new "instant town" legislation of the day, it has a distinctive place in the modern history of the province. Zeballos, too, considers its history to be unique. As a gold rush town in the 1930s, its origins are tied to the mining industry, not forestry. All three communities perceived that, by documenting their history and making it publicly available, they would somehow legitimize their regional identity.

The "sense of community" and "sense of history" makes its first appearance at the level of the West Coast Committee. The town of Tahsis has the strongest sense of history. The Tahsis local history project was initiated by the mayor of Tahsis who contacted B.C. Heritage Trust to help establish a community archives. I was recommended by Heritage Trust, having worked for them on a previous project. The mayor of Tahsis also initiated the regional project, following preliminary research compiled in the summers of 1985 and

1986 which identified the interconnections between the history of a single community, Tahsis, and the history of the region as a whole.

The industrial development of Tahsis begins with the construction of a sawmill at the head of Tahsis Inlet in 1945. The mill was the foundation of what, through a process of corporate takeovers and merges, has led to the economic domination of the region by a single multi-international corporation, Canadian Pacific Forest Products, Ltd. Stages in the town's development are marked by the move from a company-owned town to incorporated municipality, and by the opening of a road link connecting Tahsis to Gold River and the east coast of the island.

"Zeballos isn't going to go away," said John Crowhurst, the mayor of Zeballos. "It's still the three basic resources being utilized here. Fishing, mining, and logging. The mining to a lesser degree, and the logging more, at this point in time."[4]

Zeballos has two histories. Today, the community is a logging camp and log sort for CPFP, and a base for renewed gold mining activities in the area. But the history the town prefers to present to the public is the history of Zeballos as a gold rush town. By-laws require that all commercial and public buildings have house fronts in the style of the gold mining era of 1930-1938. During the period of my research, the mayor and council were debating how best to construct sidewalks for their tiny community which would be in keeping with its earlier era. Yet, Zeballos today and Zeballos yesterday are two separate realities. Only one person in the town was there during the heady days of the gold rush. The remaining townspeople are loggers and fishermen and exploration miners.

Gold River, an "instant town," was planned and built around a pulp mill in 1965, and has two separate and distinct histories. One is the history of the

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4 Interview, John Crowhurst (Zeballos: December 17, 1987).

Beach Camp, a logging camp on the site of what is now the pulp mill. Former Beach Camp residents recall a sense of community and history not shared by the town's present residents, and found lacking in the community of Gold River today. The other history, the most recent one, has to do with the opening of the pulp mill in 1967 when an influx of pulp mill workers and their families swelled the population of the former logging camp.

Gold River is the youngest of the three communities. Although human occupancy in the immediate area can be traced back several thousands of years before European contact, the "remembered" history of the non-Native population only goes back to 1953, and the history of the town itself begins in 1965. This relative newness made it difficult at first for local residents to understand what relevance the project had to their lives. They firmly believed that their town had no history; "history" to them meant being able to trace a continual line of settlement back for generations, to their great-grandfathers' or great-great-grandfathers' time. Part of the research work, then, necessitated raising the awareness of the community that their history, although recent, was just as significant as older histories, and that their town was tied to the development of logging and forestry in the region, and to the history of the province.

A fourth history, the history of the Native Indian people in the region, is not perceived by the non-Native communities as being part of 'their' history. Rather, it is seen as something separate from the regional history. And yet, in Nootka Sound there are three surviving Native Indian communities whose history is inextricably linked to the history of European contact and settlement, and to the modern development of the forest industry. Theirs is a contemporary history of oppression, racism, poverty, and the struggle to reclaim their cultural traditions. In the process of researching and writing the history of the region, the interrelationships between the two histories was revealed to the local residents.

The "Insider-Outsider" Role of the Researcher

An important determining factor in the success of this project was the establishment of the research position by the West Coast Committee. For three years, they placed priority on the project by including it in their budget and providing administrative support at both the municipal and regional district levels. A percentage of the annual tax assessment collected by the regional district from the region went toward the project. The money raised covered salary, supplies, and travel expenses for the research; funded the packaging and marketing of the video for retail sale (more than 500 copies have been sold to date, more than covering the cost of the initial run), and it has guaranteed the purchase of 400 copies of the book upon publication. Revenue generated by the sale of the videos goes back to the regional district.

Although I was an "outsider," I was coming in at the initiation of the three communities themselves. The project belonged to them, not to someone else. I was their employee. I was not coming in with my own separate agenda to study the communities for academic or other reasons. Nor was I sent to the region as a corporate or government representative to assess a particular problem and make recommendations as to its solution. Most residents, and particularly in Tahsis where I had worked previously, felt a strong sense of ownership, a sense that this project was truly theirs. It was a feeling that I actively reinforced and promoted. I perceived my role to be that of "storyteller," albeit storyteller with a purpose: that of making public the history in order to reinforce a sense of identity, one based on the residents' own interpretation of events and experiences. My task was to relate the story as it had been told to me, not to invent the story.

Public presentations were made in each community, focussing on the role of history as a means by which a community establishes its own identity and comes to terms with its past, whatever that past may be. Upon completion of the

first phase of the project, I toured the region again to show the completed 90-minute video, "Nootka Sound Explored," to packed houses in Gold River, Tahsis, Zeballos and Campbell River. Both the presentations and the showing of the video sparked discussion and reminiscences, often providing me with additional information to pursue.

As a researcher, a certain degree of rapport and trust had been established based on my two summers working in Tahsis. My initial strategy was to keep a low profile until accepted by the residents. One of the first stories told to me came from the Recreation Director, Brian Kidd, and I took it as a cautionary tale. He told me that a young woman had been hired to do a needs assessment on recreational facilities in Tahsis the year before I arrived. One day, apparently frustrated at the lack of response from the community, she barged into an alderman's home and demanded answers to some questions. The alderman became angry, and the researcher subsequently left the job, leaving the project unfinished and bad feelings in the town towards "professionals" who didn't really understand the town's needs.

Professionals, experts, academics, government bureaucrats are all viewed as outsiders who do not understand or fully appreciate conditions in the region. Residents are ambivalent about them. There is a mixture of aggressive hostility, defensiveness, and pride in their attitude. On the one hand, village councils and local organizations seek a professional opinion on matters of administrative and economic issues, believing they are not qualified to do it themselves. On the other, they resent anyone from "the outside" telling them what to do with their community. Town councils in Gold River and Tahsis regularly contract with Vancouver-based consulting firms for various studies and reports, only to dismiss their findings as inaccurate or unworkable. They ultimately treat these various consultants with little regard. The planner who developed the Official Community Plan for Tahsis is adamant in her refusal to return to the region.

She is bitter about the way she was treated by the town council and the local citizens.

During the period of my research, my experience was somewhat different. I maintained a certain degree of respect and trust due in part to my acceptance of and participation in west coast life. I lived in the region - in Tahsis for two summers and then, later, for a ten-month stretch while working on the regional project - and so was not "travelling in" from one of the larger urban centers. When I eventually did move out, it was to Campbell River, a mid-size town on the east coast of Vancouver Island and the service centre for the north island. It was remarked at the time that "thank god it wasn't Vancouver."

One key to the success of my acceptance was the road between Tahsis and Gold River. It was an active logging road some 40 miles long which took about an hour and a half to drive. Steep, winding, rough, it has some of the steeper inclines on the island for public roads. The road, and road conditions, were a main topic of daily conversation in Tahsis, particularly from the middle of fall through winter and into spring. Once the rains started, road conditions deteriorated. "Outsiders" often refused to drive the road, and many anecdotes are told, at the expense of government bureaucrats, professionals, and "city folk," about their fears of driving the road, their incompetence, etc.. Visitors' reactions were monitored as soon as they arrived: How was the road? Did they have any problems? How long did it take them? Most would have some story to tell about how terrible the road was, how anxious they were coming over the mountains in fog/rain/snow/mud/ice, how long it took to get from Gold River to Tahsis.

I felt the same way my first trip in to Tahsis. It was the beginning of summer and, although I was experienced in back road driving, it seemed to take forever to get there. I soon learned to master the road: travelling was part of my job, and I had to make frequent trips out to do research, conduct interviews, and visit the other parts of the region. The fact that my partner and I took the

road in our stride and travelled it regularly, gained us a considerable amount of respect and credibility. In fact, the mayor of Gold River was so impressed with our driving the road that she publicly praised us at a village council meeting in Gold River and again at a regional district meeting in Courtenay.

Research I - The Documentary Evidence

Documentary sources were consulted to establish an overview of the historical development of the region. The most well-documented period in any consistent and analytical form is the period of initial European contact and the maritime fur trade between the Native Indians and the Spanish, British, and American ships that stopped in at Nootka Sound during the late 18th Century. Journals and diaries kept by ships' captains, officers, botanists, and priests - all well-educated and trained in their profession - have been preserved. Most are readily available to the public through reprints and transcripts in the Provincial Archives and university libraries. Many have been published in book form. These are all first-person accounts and as such, often reveal more about the writer's culture and background, his interpretation of events, than about the meaning of the events themselves. This is particularly true of the accounts of northwest coast Native Indian culture which, when first encountered by strangers from another culture, is nearly incomprehensible.

Many secondary sources have also been written about the early contact period, providing analysis and a synthesis of the period.

Ethnographic material was also consulted with reference to the region's indigenous people: Phillip Drucker, Gilbert Malcolm Sproat, Susan Kenyon, A. Y. Arima, John Mills, Michael Folan. The Provincial Archives of B.C. in Victoria was consulted for both its written as well as its visual records. At the University of B.C. Main Library, the Special Collections division has some good

primary material on the fishing industry in the area. Libraries at SFU and UBC were used to consult primary and secondary works.

Newspaper articles and local newspapers, including those published by the communities themselves as well as the company newspaper, were also reviewed, particularly for their local views on events and issues in their communities. The community newspapers are a tremendous source of colloquial information. Until the past few years, each community had its own newspaper. Today, the *Gold River Record*, published every two weeks, is the only locally-produced newspaper remaining in the region.

Several popular histories have been written over the pas 30 years: George Nicholson's *Vancouver Island's West Coast*; Margaret Sharcott's *A Place of Many Winds*; Bethine Flynn, *The Flying Flynns* and *Flynn's Cove*; *Splendour from the Sea*, by Phillip Keller, and *Bull of the Woods*, by Gordon Gibson, founder of Tahsis Company. Company reports and records, government reports, statistics, and so on, rounded out the documentary research.

The documentary sources themselves were organized into several categories: "popular" accounts; personal narratives; observations and descriptions of people, places, and things; statistical information; and secondary material. The main categories examined for this thesis are those dealing with the popular perspective and the personal, eyewitness accounts. These are included in the journals and diaries written by the European explorers and fur traders; personal comments and quotes recorded in newspaper articles; observations and opinions included in company reports - for example, mining and cannery records were often used to record information on weather, community events, and accidents, including the writer's opinion or feeling about the matter; and, first-hand observations and comments contained in the published works of eyewitnesses and in the autobiographical writings on contemporary history, including books by Gordon Gibson, George Nicholson,

Margaret Sharcott, and Bethine Flynn, all former residents of the Nootka Sound area who went on to publish their accounts of life on the west coast.

Wherever possible, I relied on first person accounts, be they oral or written. Secondary documentary sources, however, were also utilized to determine the overall structure of the history through chronologies, dates, and other quantifiable kinds of information not readily ascertained through eyewitness accounts. Generally written by academics, newspaper reporters, and other professionals, secondary sources were useful in providing an "outsider's" perspective. They moved from the particular individual life experience to the broader, world view.

The research was further categorized as statements of fact and observable conditions, or as interpretation of experience. Statements of fact deal with time and place, a description of events, persons, locales, etc.. Interpretation of experience deals with the feelings expressed about a certain time, place, or event. For example, "Tahsis Company built a pulp mill at the head of Muchalat Inlet on the former site of the logging camp" is a description of an event. It is a statement of fact, telling us little about the implications of that event. There are various interpretations of that event, however, according to who is telling the story: the president of the company whose decision it was to build the mill; a resident of the logging camp who was forced to move; a member of the Native Indian tribe now living next door to the mill.

Research II - Voices from the Community

If it can be said that the documentary sources provided the structure or bare bones of the history, then first person oral narratives provided the meat, the guts, the heart of the matter. Through life stories, anecdotes, and personal observations, the intimate details of life on the coast emerged. First person accounts, as used to interpret the historical development of the region, were

themselves interpretations of events and personal experiences. They added meaning to the otherwise dry and formal accounts of dates and facts and descriptions of events.

The underlying social themes of the history emerged during general conversations with residents. These themes first arose superficially as anecdotes or offhand comments. As the research progressed, the themes became more apparent through repetition, and soon stabilized into fundamental "truths." At the same time, a pattern of the historical development began to emerge from more intensive interviews.

The people interviewed were selected organically, from the community itself. My initial contact in each community was the town council, the officially-elected, representative body of local government, the "voice" of the people. The mayors and their spouses, aldermen, and village office staff were my immediate access into community life. They were able to give me basic introductory information on their communities, particularly concerning current affairs, community leaders, and the local social life.

Structurally, the village councils are positioned somewhere between the corporate interests (the company as represented by mill management), on the one hand, and the union (hourly-paid laborers) on the other. But town councils are a relatively recent phenomena in the two largest centers in the region, Tahsis and Gold River. Until 1965, when Gold River was built as an incorporated municipality, the forest company owned and controlled everything: land, waterfront, houses, water and sewer systems, the roads. The resident manager of the mill was mayor, town supervisor, and mill boss all in one. The "community" was represented by the union, Local 4 of the International Woodworkers' Association based in Port Alberni. They lobbied on behalf of workers and residents alike for better working and living conditions, and improved recreation and social services.

Tahsis became an incorporated municipality in 1970, shortly after Gold River's incorporation. Gradually, over the years, the town councils began to emerge as the voice of the community, replacing the unions which had historically held that position.

The relationship of the councils to the mill management and the unions varies. In Gold River, the Pulp, Paper, and Woodworkers of Canada (PPWC) represents the pulp mill workers. Tahsis is heavily union-oriented and relations between the union in Tahsis and the company are hostile. The long-running mayor, Tom McCrae, is an ex-union leader in the style of the old union bosses, resulting in a tense and adversarial relationship between the company and the town.

Gold River is less antagonistic and more conciliatory, an approach which they say has won them a golf course, an ice arena, and an indoor swimming pool. It should be noted, however, that Tahsis too has received an indoor swimming pool, a bowling alley, and an extension to its community recreation centre. It's not obvious, then, which approach works the best.

The third community, Zeballos, has the least tense relationship with the company. Considerably smaller than Tahsis or Gold River, it doesn't have the same kinds of issues and concerns they do. It's also an older community with a somewhat more diversified economy. While Canadian Pacific Forest Products is still the largest single employer, more and more residents work in mining, aquaculture, and the commercial fishery.

An initial list of prospective interviewees was compiled through discussions with elected officials and village office staff who identified key members of the community, "old-timers," and people with specialized knowledge of a particular time period, place, or sphere. Often the only qualification was that they could tell a good story, or were one of the first in the region. Some names were collected through scanning newspaper clippings and local newspapers. Others came from mailing lists for community celebrations.

Zeballos, for example, had compiled an extensive list of former mining town residents for a reunion it had held in 1986.

In Tahsis, the circulation of a newspaper article describing the project and requesting former residents of the region to reply, brought in a dozen or so responses, including donations of photographs, written reminiscences, and offers to be interviewed. The article was published in local, regional, and provincial newspapers.

Throughout the duration of the fieldwork, periodic assessments were made to ensure that the interviews represented a broad cross-section of era, place, industry, and social position (i.e., management, labor, etc.).

A total of 61 people were formally interviewed on tape. One other person refused to be recorded on tape but did allow note-taking during the interview session. Many others, although not interviewed on tape, provided invaluable background information and insights, based on informal conversations and questioning.

The interview format was open-ended and informal, beginning with general life history information: birth date and place; names of parents, including mother's maiden name; where parents were born; marriage date and place; spouse's name, birth date and place, and parents' names; children and children's birth date. By the time basic biographical information had been collected, the person being interviewed had become comfortable and was in a frame of mind to think about the past. The first questions generally dealt with their first contact with the region - what initially brought them to the area, why they were moving, how they got the job, what their first impressions were. People were interviewed at their homes where they were most comfortable and relaxed. In many cases, at the same time as they were being recorded on audiotape, they were being videotaped for the video, *Nootka Sound Explored*.

Three exceptions to the interviews taking place in the home were Cliff Holst, manager of woodlands in Gold River; Bob Kilmartin, resident manager of

the sawmill in Tahsis; and Tom McCrae, mayor of Tahsis. All were interviewed in their offices. For these three men, who were also being videotaped at the same time, the positioning in their work environment where they are men of some prestige and importance, was critical to the shape of the interview. Instead of speaking of personal experiences, they preserved their formal roles and official statuses in the community.

The interviews were transcribed and analyzed as to their subjective accounts of events and experiences. Wherever possible, only first person, eyewitness references were considered. Second or third hand stories were useful in terms of corroborating other accounts, but have not been included in the final analysis unless they reveal a personal interpretation by the person relating the account. This thesis is concerned with the interpretive expression of history as revealed in first person accounts of experience, not in the scientific verifiability of events.

CHAPTER 4:
A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

> Since our way of seeing things is literally our way of living, the process of communication is in fact the process of community: the sharing of common meanings, and thence common activities and purposes...[Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, p. 55][1]

In reading the written and 'official' sources of information, what one learns is that the formal history of Gold River is linked to the economic growth of the forest industry. In this sense, then, the empirical data is useful in providing a certain factual perspective on the community's historical development. Nonetheless, the documentary evidence alone does not provide a complete picture of "the past." There is another side to the history of Gold River, one that represents more than simply the economic interests of a multi-national corporation. That "other side" can be accessed by talking to the people who lived and worked in the region. Further, not only do first person oral accounts provide another interpretation to historical events, but they provide access to a certain kind of information not available through traditional means.

In order to test the validity of this argument, I have drawn on the classic work of Ferdinand Tonnies, a 19th Century German sociologist and philosopher. Tonnies advanced the theory of **Gemeinschaft** (community) and **Gesellschaft** (society), suggesting that certain fundamental aspects of the human experience are lost in the development of modern industrial society. In particular, he argued that we lose a sense of community - a feeling of fellowship that binds people together.

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1 Stuart Hall, "Cultural Studies: Two paradigms," *Media, Culture and Society*, Volume 2 (1980), p. 59. (From *The Long Revolution*, by Raymond Williams, p. 55).

That "sense of community" Tonnies talks about is an intangible aspect of life that cannot be adequately measured through traditional research methods. But does that mean it is not important to the understanding of historical events? Is Tonnies' elusive notion of Gemeinschaft so trivial as to be discounted without further analysis? I suggest that the opposite is true: that Tonnies' concepts are, in fact, fundamental to understanding the past, and to understanding modern historical development. And that by talking to people, we are able to access those intangibles through the subjective experiences of the people who lived and worked in the region at the time.

Tonnies' Theory of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft

In 1887, Tonnies' developed a theory of social organization based on the concepts of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft, "community" and "society." Tonnies suggests that, corresponding to the development of modern industrial society, there is a shift from Gemeinschaft-like organizations, rooted in the "real and organic life" of human beings, to Gesellschaft-like states which are characterized by convention and rational thought. He goes on to compare Gemeinschaft to a living organism, Gesellschaft to a mechanical artifact.[2] No one form or type, however, exists to the exclusion of the other. "The essence of both Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft is found interwoven in all kinds of associations," he writes.[3]

Gemeinschaft is based on the notion of a community bound together by mutual dependence and interdependence, by nurturing relationships, and by shared values. Tonnies speaks of three interrelated concepts: Gemeinschaft of blood (family relations, kinship ties), Gemeinschaft of place (ties to land, neighborhood), and Gemeinschaft of mind (friendship and co-operation).

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2 Ferdinand Tonnies, *Community and Society*, Charles P. Loomis ed., (East Lansing, Michigan: 1974), p. 34.

3 Ibid., p. 249.

Gesellschaft, on the other hand, is characterized by the development of the modern state, industrialized trade, and science. Arbitrary and formal relationships, based on legal contracts and legislation, replace the bonds of kinship, neighborhood, and friendship. Tonnies notes that in Gesellschaft-like society, the freedom of the individual, as separate and autonomous from the group, is a priority:

> The family becomes an accidental form for the satisfaction of natural needs, neighborhood and friendship are supplanted by special interest groups and conventional society life.[4]

What Tonnies is referring to is the move from a small-scale market economy of owner-operators, to a world economy characterized by industrialized capital and, in today's world, by multinational corporate organizations. At the level of Gemeinschaft, small, independently-owned ventures have direct control over their means of production, be it fishing, farming, mining, or logging. Relationships between workers, and between workers and owners, are personal and direct, based not on abstract notions of class roles and positions but rather, on mutual respect and support, and on the ability to do the job at hand. Communities are bound together by a sense of fellowship and mutual support.

Small-scale ventures are generally owned and operated by a family; they work alongside their employees who are also their friends and neighbors. With industrialization, technological change, and the large-scale development of corporate capital structures, comes a society which has grown estranged from its organic roots. Multinational corporate dealings - impersonal and anonymous in form - take the place of "real" and direct relations between people. People in management positions represent the "company interests," although they themselves are also employees. They speak on behalf of corporate policies, market conditions, profits and losses. The financial success of the company becomes paramount and is, in fact, seen to be a pre-condition for the success of the community.

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4 Ibid., p. 168.

'Measuring the Gaps'

Tonnies believed that the move from Gemeinschaft to Gesellschaft represents a loss of the co-operative spirit and fellowship that bind communities together. With the development of capitalistic societies, the original qualities of Gemeinschaft disappear as the primary basis for living together changes, from the principle of collectivity, to individualism. In the process, he says, social life itself is not diminished, but social life of the Gemeinschaft is impaired.[5] "One goes into Gesellschaft as one goes into a strange country," he writes, "A young man is warned against bad Gesellschaft, but the expression bad Gemeinschaft violates the meaning of the word.[6]

How to determine what is "bad Gesellschaft" and, by extension, what is "good" Gemeinschaft? Tonnies' theory provides a set of fundamental concepts with which to understand the process of historical development, concepts which have, in fact, been dealt with by other theorists throughout the ages. But how to measure the "loss of community," the change in subjective human experience that transpires in the move from Gemeinschaft-like associations to Gesellschaft? How do you get at the intangibility of a concept that refers to a "complete Gemeinschaft of life", connected to the human soul?

This thesis proposes that first person oral narratives, rooted in the subjective experiences and concrete, everyday realities of the popular culture, provide a means for accessing the shift from Gemeinschaft to Gesellschaft. It is suggested that popular oral accounts are to the dominant literate culture what Gemeinschaft is to Gesellschaft. Oral histories - people talking, reflecting, and evaluating their experiences - provide an account of life as lived in a direct and immediate way.

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5 Ibid., p. 258.

6 Ibid., p. 34.

Loss of Community in Gold River, B.C.: A Case Study

Tonnies' concept of Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaft is considered in terms of how people talk about their lives in Gold River. The historical development of the region, as portrayed through the "official" and written sources of industry and government, is analyzed in conjunction with a corpus of first person oral narratives. It will be shown that the move from "community" to "society" is expressed in two very different ways. Seen from the perspective of the dominant Gesellschaft society, the historical development of the region is synonymous with the economic growth of the forest industry. Decisions based on increased profits and technological advances are viewed as having positive benefits on the progress and development of the region as a whole.

On the other hand, what emerges from the first person oral accounts is a sense of loss: changes for the good of the corporation are not necessarily changes for the good of the community.

Gold River: Two Pasts

Gold River and the Nootka Sound region exemplify a pattern of historical development similar to other communities along British Columbia's west coast. It is a pattern that is characterized by a resource-based economy, dependency on foreign markets, a rugged terrain, and sparse populations. Located on the west coast of Vancouver Island, Nootka Sound is one of five large sounds that break up the island's rocky coastline. Branching off from the mouth of the sound are three major inlets: Muchalat (seventeen miles long), Tahsis (fourteen miles), and Tlupana (seven miles). Penetrating deep into the mountains, these long narrow fjords form a network of sheltered inland waterways along which communities and settlements have been built over the years.

The village of Gold River is near the head of Muchalat Inlet, about nine miles up a narrow valley from the mouth of the Gold River itself. The community

got its start in 1965 as an "instant town" when new provincial legislation made it possible to incorporate with only five landowners. Under previous legislation, 500 property owners were required before a community could qualify for municipal status. Carved out of the rainforest to support a $60 million pulp mill then under construction at the head of Muchalat Inlet, the town was incorporated as a municipality several months before residents had moved into their newly-built homes.

Two key factors in the region's development are accessibility and transportation. Until the mid 1960s, Gold River, along with hundreds of other small communities, logging camps, fish plants, and homesteads along the west coast, relied solely on steamship service for freight and transportation. Initially, the C.P.R. vessel *S.S. Princess Maquinna* made the run up the west coast, from Victoria to Port Alice, every ten days, carrying groceries, equipment and supplies, mail, and passengers. After the *Maquinna* was retired in 1952, the ten day service from Victoria was replaced with a shorter route from Port Alberni which was eventually discontinued sometime in the 1960s. By then, roads had been constructed and airlines were offering daily scheduled flights to Vancouver.

A road connecting Gold River with the east coast communities was opened in 1964. It was the first public access road to be built in the region. A few years later, other roads were built to connect the towns of Tahsis, Zeballos, and Fair Harbour to the main highway on the east coast of the island. Today, with a population of some 2,100 people, Gold River is about 60 miles by paved highway from the town of Campbell River, the major service center for northern Vancouver Island. What was once a north-south maritime link to the urban centers of Vancouver and Victoria, has now become an east-west land link to Campbell River and Courtenay.

The controlling force behind the development of the region has been a resource-based economy. In the 18th century, Nootka Sound was the hub of a thriving maritime fur trade, dominated by British, Spanish, and American traders,

and by Asian markets. Later, fishing, logging, prospecting, and mining became the focus for small-scale industry. Canneries, logging camps, and mining operations flourished during the 1930s, '40s, and '50s.

Today, a single resource - forestry - and a single company dominate the economy. Canadian Pacific Forest Products Ltd., a major international forest company, is the single largest employer in the region and, as the holder of Tree Farm License #19, has control over nearly all of the undeveloped land in Nootka Sound as well as Kyuquot Sound to the north. A sawmill in Tahsis, pulp and paper mills and a logging division in Gold River, a log sort in Zeballos, and several logging operations throughout the area constitute the region's economic mainstays.

Historical Development of the Region

Canadian Pacific Forest Products Ltd. is the most recent incarnation of a series of corporate mergers which have taken place over the past 40 years. The company owes its beginnings to the Gibson brothers, five west coast entrepreneurs who, in 1945, built an export sawmill at the head of Tahsis Inlet. The mill was destroyed by fire in 1948, and in 1949 the Gibsons formed a partnership with East Asiatic Company (E.A.C.), a Danish shipping firm with international markets. The Gibsons needed the capital E.A.C. could provide in order to build a new sawmill, and E.A.C. wanted an assured supply of lumber for its export markets. The name of the company was changed from Gibson Brothers Mills to Tahsis Company Ltd. to reflect the new partnership.

In 1952, the Gibson brothers sold out to East Asiatic Company which in the meantime had acquired considerable timber holdings in the Gold River-Muchalat Inlet area. At the time, the provincial government was in the process of implementing a new program of forest management licenses, giving the private sector greater responsibility over management of the forests. Under the new legislation, companies were required to contract out a certain percentage of their

timber to small, independent logging operators; to provide public access on logging roads during weekends and off-hours; and to establish permanent settlements in remote areas.

East Asiatic's first bid for a forest management license was rejected in 1951. It re-submitted its application and in July, 1954, E.A.C. was awarded the 19th Tree Farm License in the province (TFL #19), covering 192,170 acres in Clayoquot Sound, Nootka Sound, and Espinosa Inlet, and giving the company long-term tenure over the region's resources. A period of consolidation followed the acquisition of TFL #19. One of the company's major logging camps near the head of Muchalat Inlet was moved off floats and relocated on land at nearby Jacklah Creek. In Tahsis, a new subdivision of completely modern houses was built, and the town's services were upgraded. A few years later, a series of logging roads between Campbell River and Gold River were connected and opened to the public.

By 1960, the decision to build a pulp mill on the west coast of Vancouver Island made good business sense to Tahsis Company. They had been actively logging in the region since the late 1940s, and according to then-president Jack Christensen, the company had more timber than it could handle. Most went to the sawmill in Tahsis to be cut into lumber, but chips from the mill and "pulp logs" - low grade wood that couldn't be used in the sawmill - were exported to overseas markets or sold to other pulp mills. "If other companies were benefiting from our surplus," said Jack, "why shouldn't we?"[7]

What the company needed to fully utilize its timber resources was a pulp mill. A research team from Stanford University in California was hired and spent close to two years studying the feasibility of the project. By 1963, the Tahsis Company had decided to take the plunge. Lacking experience in the pulp and paper industry, they took in a partner, Canadian International Paper. The Montreal-based

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7 Interview, Jack Christensen (Vancouver: September 8, 1987).

firm was a subsidiary of International Paper Ltd. in New York and had several large pulp and paper plants in Ontario and Quebec.

"At that time, one of the responsibilities that C.I.P. had was to arrange for the financing of the pulp mill," said Henry Funk who was secretary-treasurer for Tahsis Company at the time. "The other responsibility that C.I.P. had," he continued, "Was to provide the technical know-how for the construction and the operation of the pulp mill."[8]

In October, 1964, Tahsis Company announced its intentions to build a new 750-ton-a-day bleached kraft pulp mill at the mouth of the Gold River. Christensen says that at the time, he felt it would be cheaper to "bring people to the heart of the resource rather than ship the resource out to the people." Site studies indicated that the flat delta land at the mouth of the river, the ease of access to ocean-going freighters, and a good source of fresh water made Gold River an ideal choice for the construction of a mill. Survey work and site clearing began in February, 1965.

Building the Town

Tahsis Company's plans included building a brand new town to serve the needs of the pulp mill. "It was a necessity," said Christensen. When finished, the Gold River facility was expected to employ some 400 people in its pulp division and another 200 in its logging division. Those workers, and their families, needed a place to live. Christensen envisioned a modern, well-planned community which would be completely separate and independent from the company. "I did not want to have a company-owned town," he said, "There are too many problems with them." For one, companies are in the business to make a profit, not to be landlords. For another, he believed that the residents would be more committed to the town if it was their own. Recent amendments to the Municipal Act whereby five landowners

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8 Interview, Henry Funk (West Vancouver: September 4, 1987).

in a community could apply for incorporation, made it easier for single-industry towns to become self-governing.

The site chosen for the new town was a 300-acre section of land on a plateau overlooking the juncture of the Gold and Heber rivers. It was located about nine miles up the Gold River Valley, away from the new pulp mill complex. Here, the steep narrow walls of the river canyon opened out into a large, bowl-shaped area, ringed by mountains.

Gold River, company-built but not company-owned, was incorporated as a district municipality on August 26, 1965 - the first town in B.C. to receive its charter while the townsite was still under construction.

Gold River, A Planned Community

The new town of Gold River was - and still is - in sharp contrast to most other forest industry communities on the west coast. Billed in the promotional material as a "Model Community" and "Canada's first all-electric town," it boasted underground wiring, modern schools, and all the amenities of urban life. According to project coordinator Mike Norris, they had to have a town, and they had to offer the "best of everything": "Because the fact is that no matter how you slice it we are still out in the bush, not at the corner of Georgia and Granville. With the pulp mill expansion in B.C. skilled personnel are highly prized. But unlike loggers, they won't live in bunkhouse camps."[9]

The town has been professionally designed by a team of architects, town planners, and landscapers. The residential area is built around a centrally-located commercial core which is within comfortable walking distance from anywhere in town. Wide curving streets and tree-lined boulevards sweep gracefully through neighborhoods where houses are set well back from the road, screened from their

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9 *Vancouver Sun*, July/August 1965.

neighbors by strategically-placed carports and greenery. Instead of building row upon straight row of tract houses, architects provided prospective homeowners with several different housing styles to choose from, laid out on irregularly shaped lots. Throughout the small community, attention to detail is evident in the ornamental plum and cherry trees which line the boulevards, and in the numerous footpaths and trails that connect one area with another, or wind through the parks and along the river banks.

A market research study determined Gold River's immediate and long-range needs, taking into consideration the town's isolation from larger centers. Among the services proposed in the initial plans were a supermarket, drugstore, and 50-room hotel, all of which have since been built.

Architectural drawings and artists' sketches show an idyllic "town of the future," while glossy brochures include photographs of smiling families, happily ensconced in their new homes. "Why settle for a logging camp in the virgin forest?" asks one Tahsis Company ad, "Gold River will be just about as unlike a logging camp as you can get... It will be a place where families can settle and enjoy the good life to the full."[10]

The Oral Perspective

The town's first residents were loggers and their families who had been living in Tahsis Company's logging camp at the mouth of the Gold River. The camp had to be relocated to make way for the new mill, and that meant moving some 35 families up to the townsite almost immediately. Bulldozers began clearing the land in February of 1965 and by mid-October, families had begun to move into their new homes.

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10 Vancouver Sun, May 25, 1965, p. A15.

From the company's point of view, the new town of Gold River, with all its modern conveniences, provided an incentive for attracting workers to the pulp mill, and was a community where the loggers would be better off than they were before. But the town's history, as documented from the newspaper articles and press releases, is presented from only one perspective: the company's. What we don't get is the history as experienced by the people who actually lived in the new town. Are material conditions the only meaningful aspects of life? Did the move to brand-new homes in a completely modern setting represent a qualitative improvement over the "primitive" logging camp on the beach? Was the company's idyllic "town of the future" the same town that residents actually lived in?

The oral accounts of the people who moved up from the logging camp reveal another perspective on the development of the region, another aspect of meaning. For them, the picture presented by the company wasn't all that rosy. Bunty and Carole Sinclair are Gold River's earliest and longest-term residents. They had lived at the Beach Camp since its establishment in 1955, and before that had been at Muchalat Camp across the inlet at Jacklah River.

"I actually don't think there's anybody that lives up here now that lived down there that wouldn't move back tomorrow," Carole said, "I know we would. Oh yeah, I'd go back there any time. You miss your good times, eh. Whenever there was a dance, you always divided the place up, and you all met there at a certain time. It was just something that just isn't here now, really."

"Even the people that we knew there, we don't visit back and forth any more," Bunty said, "I don't know what it is. Maybe it's catching... I've visited people that have moved away to other towns, more than I've visited people from the Beach Camp right here in Gold River."[11]

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11 Interview, Bunty and Carole Sinclair (Gold River: July 9, 1987).

The new subdivision in Area A of the town plan, was known as Loggers' Row. It was the very first neighborhood to be built to house the former Beach Camp residents. For the first year or so, they had the townsite to themselves, and watched as construction crews worked feverishly to complete the remaining houses in time for the mill workers.

As for the first houses on Logger's Row: "They were built to get rid of the camp employees and their wives and families, to get them out of the way so the pulp mill could proceed," said Des Stewart, "We were really rushed. We were just rushed." Des and his wife, Mae, had lived at the Beach Camp since 1962 and were among the first to move up to the new townsite.[12]

Doug and Betty Wilson said the houses had been built so fast that the wood was still wet when they moved in. "Everything was damp. We were in them three months, they said, before we should have been. That's why everybody had such high hydro bills in the beginning, because the houses had to dry out," said Betty.[13]

The finishing touches were still being put on as people moved in. Doug said that a representative from Tahsis Company would come around two or three times a week to make a list of things that still needed doing, and then send a carpenter around to fix them. Little things, said Doug, like doors out of line or wood molding around the floors. And in the beginning, the power and water service was sporadic.

"When we first moved in, we never had power and water together for the first two months. You either had power and no water, or water and no power. They never got the two together. We cooked on gas stoves. A nice, brand-new home, and gas stoves in your fireplace!"

The day Des and Mae Stewart moved in, their kitchen wasn't finished yet, the water wasn't hooked up, the lights weren't hooked up, and the cement sidewalk had

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12 Interview, Des and Mae Stewart (Gold River: July 2, 1987.

13 Interview, Doug and Betty Wilson (Gold River: July 2, 1987).

just been poured. "We had to put planks over it so that we could get the furniture in," said Des. It was an adventure: "I'd always dreamt of pioneering," said Mae, "And here it was, handed to me on a silver platter."

After the project was first announced, company officials and the project designers held a series of general meetings at the community hall. "We were all very well informed," says Doug.

"They come around with pamphlets and asked you what you wanted," said Bunty, "Y'know, asked your ideas. But they just did as they pleased anyhow. They were trying to make you feel good."

"All they did was get your hopes up," said Carole, "They'd say, like, did you want a counter-top stove and a wall over? Did you want a single or double carport? Did you want this, did you want that. And you wrote down what you wanted. And you took what they give you."

The Beach Camp families were given their choice of lots in the Dogwood Drive area, and could choose from three basic house designs, ranging in size from two- to four-bedrooms. Everything was done by paper: lots and houses were selected from architects' drawings, and residents took home pamphlets of paint samples and tile colors. And often, what looked good on paper didn't work in practice:

"This house actually is backwards on the lot," said Betty. "Our back door is really supposed to be our front door."

Many of the houses in the Dogwood area were, inexplicably, placed on the lots backwards, so that the lofty and elegant cathedral entrances faced away from the street and onto the back. The plain and ordinary back doors became front doors, opening into the kitchen instead of the living room.

There were other discrepancies. Plans for service alleys running behind the houses - a decidedly urban feature - were scratched when architects realized there wasn't enough room to have both alleys and backyards. The lots were considerably smaller than the original plans showed, and carports that were designed to be

attached unobtrusively to the sides of houses, ended up being built onto the fronts and are the first thing you see when entering. Town planners hastened to justify the mistakes.

"We had meetings with that landscaper later on down at the community hall there," said Doug, "And he convinced us that this is the way to have it, because you could come right out of your car into your house."

"It was all done so fast," he said, "There was supposed to be a service alley through the back. Well, then they ended up there wasn't enough property, so nobody would've had any backyards." Thus the reality of the architects' drawings, the glossy brochures, the well-designed "town of the future."

Life at the Beach Camp

Tahsis Company's logging camp at the head of Muchalat Inlet was home to about 35 families and 200 single men. Bunkhouses for the single men were at the front of the camp, just up from the dock. The married quarters were towards the back, separated from the bunkhouses by a huge playing field with a schoolhouse in one corner and a paved tennis court in another. Next to the tennis court was a community hall, housing a small store, the post office, and a cafe.

"They made it a very, very nice living camp," said Mae, "A lot of thought was given to the people that lived there. Our gardens were all beautiful. Just snap your fingers and you'd get a load of soil if you needed it."

"It was a very, very happy life, that we hated to leave," she said, "Our children especially."

"We were closer-knitted I think in a place like that," said Bunty, "Right now, I've got to think who my neighbors are and I've probably lived alongside of them for ten or fifteen years. It's a different attitude altogether."

"We did more visiting then than we do actually up here," he said, "Like, everybody knew everybody else, eh."

Carole remembers taking her children on a visit to Vancouver one year. "They'd say hello to everybody because you knew everybody up there, you know... So they couldn't understand, when they'd get to Vancouver and say hello to somebody, why they wouldn't speak back... They couldn't understand it. 'Are they mad?' 'No darling, they're not mad; they just don't know you, so they don't talk.'"

"We were like one big happy family down there," said Carole, "You knew that once it became a town, it would get bigger and bigger."

"I mean, if your kids were ever sick, there was always somebody who'd come over. You know, it was just, amazing, really. Like you say, now you hardly even know the neighbors up here."

"Everybody knew everybody," she said, "If you needed something, or ran out of something, you could always go to a neighbor."

When Mae first moved into the camp, she said it didn't take her long to get to know people.

"Two days after I'd moved in, I looked out my kitchen window, and here's a man walking into my yard with the largest fish I've ever seen in my life. Threw it on my lawn and said 'Would you like to can this?' You know, that's the kind of thing that went on. Took me two days to can it. What was it, sixty-four pounds? Never met him before in my life," she said, "But you see, that's the way things were down there. But the wives - I knew his wife. They all came. In no time at all, I knew everyone in that camp. They would come calling."

Doug and Betty Wilson lived at the Beach Camp for nine months before moving up to the townsite. "It was a good bunch of people, said Doug, "Everybody helped everybody else. You're almost like one big happy family when you live like that."

Housing was provided at a nominal rent which ranged from $15. a month for trailer sites to $31.50 for the largest house in camp - a four-bedroom, two-storey building in the middle of the settlement. "As far as cheap living, you couldn't beat the price," said Bunty, "We had a four-bedroom home there, twenty-five dollars a

month for rent, and the company supplied everything. If any repairs were needed, they sent someone around to do them."

Housing for the "married men" and their families was limited. There was always a waiting list, but not everyone qualified for a house.

"You see, in the logging camp they used to offer houses according to your ability of logging, and how badly they needed you," said Bunty. "You couldn't just come and say 'Hey, can I have a house?' and get one."

Key employees, people skilled in a particularly specialized job, were given priority for a house. Foremen, loader operators, cat drivers, riggers, and head loaders were among the positions the company considered critical to their logging operations. Without them, they couldn't log. Houses became a way of attracting qualified personnel and ensuring a reliable workforce. Doug Wilson was a grapple yarder, and the offer of a house came at the right time. "We were going to buy in Courtenay, but we were sort of undecided," said Betty. "Then he came up here and they offered him a house, so we moved up."

A Sense of Community

"I liked it down there," said Gail Shillito who first moved to the Beach Camp in February, 1963. "I like being out in the wilderness. We had neighbors, but there weren't too many people. We got to know everybody. I never felt isolated. A lot of people do, even up here. I just enjoyed that type of life. Such an easy-going, relaxed period."[14]

Nor did Des and Mae Stewart have a sense of being isolated. "It was a very, very happy life, and we hated to leave. Our children especially," said Mae. "It was real primitive in those days," said Des, "But an awful nice camp. Peaceful. Laid out

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14 Interview, Gail Shillito (Gold River: May 4, 1988).

perfect. And we had our own little entertainment. And I liked driving logging truck. I really enjoyed it, I really did."

"We used to have shows brought in twice a month, and everybody would go to a show. And usually once a month there was a dance. You know, you made your own fun," said Gail, "For recreation, you made your own recreation. Which is too bad that we've lost that. Because everybody had fun."

"We had a real community club amongst ourselves, eh," said Des Stewart, "We kept the whole thing going year in and year out. Like, all the entertainment and everything. We had beer nights on Friday nights, and we had the odd dance, and we had our own sports."

Dances were "more like a big house party held in a community hall," said Mae. Everyone met at the community hall for an evening of music, dancing, and a generally good time.

"All the women would get together, we'd all cook up something, and we would have a dance," said Betty, "Like I say, it was just like a big family. Because you knew everybody there. There was no such thing as a wallflower."

"It was and it wasn't" a dry camp. Liquor was served at the dances, and every second Friday was a beer night or "smoker" where you could buy beer at the community hall. At that time, the only liquor store in the region was at Zeballos, about three hours away by small motorboat. Once or twice a week, Slim Beale, who ran the water taxi from Zeballos, would come into camp and take orders for liquor. The 'no liquor' rule was primarily for the bunkhouses. In the married quarters, the restrictions were looser and less easy to enforce.

"Every Saturday night was a smoker," said Jim Fiddick. "You could buy beer - the camp was a dry camp, but in the community hall you could buy beer. So all the single guys went over to the community hall. They had tables set up, and you'd sit around and b.s. and have a few beers. They were called 'smokers.' Once a month

there was a party, where the wives were invited. Other than that, the wives generally didn't go to the smokers."[15]

"And then for New Year's, it practically cost you nothing to go out for New Year's Eve," said Bunty, "We'd dance to the tune tapes, and everybody brought food and your own liquor, and had a heck of a good time at the dance. And then the next day, everybody brought the heels of their bottles and went down, cleaned the hall up."

Nearly all the families at the Beach Camp were young couples in their early twenties just starting out. They all had families, young kids and preschoolers. The oldest was in grade eight, and there was usually someone with a baby in diapers around.

"You spent a lot more time with your kids than you do today," said Betty, "Raising kids all day, they kept you busy."

"You'd have young kids babysitting your kids, because the oldest in town only went to grade eight," said Gail, "But you weren't very far away from anything that if they had a problem you were only next door, or a couple of houses away."

Loss of Community

"When we moved up here," said Gail. "My husband said 'Don't go putting any nails in the walls because we might not stay.' This instant town he wasn't sure of. And going into a big house, he just didn't know whether we could afford it either."

"We were hesitant about the move in one sense, we really were," said Mae. "Because we really didn't want to be uprooted. But we had no choice." But: "You can't stand in the way of progress," said Des.

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15 Interview, Jim and Anne Fiddick (Gold River: May 12, 1988).

The transition to the new townsite was difficult, although in the beginning, the Beach Camp community managed to maintain a certain amount of cohesiveness.

"It might have been 'instant,' but it was still basically all the same people from down at the Beach," said Gail. The old community hall was moved up to a site just below Dogwood Drive, and while the shopping center was under construction, it held the co-op store and post office, a branch of the Port Alberni Credit Union, and a small library, as well as continuing to serve as a meeting place and recreation centre. Along with the building came many of the same traditions which kept the Beach Camp together: movies, Saturday night socials, and recreational activities.

Mae says that "a community is what you bring to it, what you make it." A few months after moving to "Loggers' Row," engineers and others involved in the planning of the pulp mill project joined the Beach Camp residents in the new townsite. "And you know, it's funny, because we were the predominant residents, the ones that came from the logging camp, so that community spirit carried through," said Mae.

"That lasted possibly for two years at the most, that sort of community spirit. Then it started to drift away from that, the more people came in, the more they wanted larger centers and more entertainment and such like, so the company had to assist in them."

A massive influx of pulp mill workers in late 1966 and 1967 had a significant impact on the town, both materially and socially. The population nearly tripled, jumping from a relatively stable core of about 400 to close to 1800, almost overnight. Turnover was high - nearly 40 percent, according to one report - and the loggers had to adjust not only to a strange town, but to neighbors who were themselves newcomers.

"Your kids were going to school one year in a one-room little trailer, and the next year they were in a school with all these kids they'd never seen before," said Betty. "It was a shock to everybody. A different way of life. We'd lived in our own

little cocoon, and everybody helped everybody, and everybody spoke to everybody. Then all of a sudden, there's all these new people and we don't know any of them."

"I don't know half the people," she said, "At one time, if somebody stopped and said where's Missus so-and-so, I'd go 'Up around the corner and down there.' Now its 'Who? Where? I don't know.' And we've had a real turnover of people. Most of the ones we came here with are gone."

Initially, there was some tension between the loggers and the pulp mill workers, the "old-timers" and the "newcomers". Differences in occupation were aggravated by the sudden increase in population and the fact that the loggers and their families lived in their own neighborhood on Dogwood Drive, nicknamed "Logger's Row."

"The logging division was their own bunch, and the pulp mill were their own bunch," said Des, "And it took many, many years to break that down. They're a different breed, I'll have to admit. They're a different breed."

"The mill-workers were "cake-eaters" to us," said Betty, "At one time this whole neighborhood was loggers. And for a cake-eater to move into the logging area was unheard of."

"We figure they got pretty jammy jobs, that's why they're called cake-eaters," said Doug. "So a logger goes into the pub and he'll say 'Any "cake-eaters" in the pub?' It's said mostly in good fun. But every now and again, a couple of guys feeling fairly frisky, looking for a battle, say 'Any "cake-eaters"?' So sometimes it gets a little iffy."

There was also some friction within the community over the issue of an appointed council. Four of the six appointees were company executives, and two of those four lived in Vancouver. Concerns were raised over whether or not the council was merely a puppet of the company. "They thought the company had appointed us and that we were working strictly for the company," said Mae.

While Gold River was not a company-owned town, as a single-industry town, it continued to be company-dominated. At the time, Tahsis Company paid $825,000

of the $1 million in taxes the town received annually, and controlled all of the undeveloped land: the municipality had very little it could call its own, and none for expansion. As one report put it: "The company has perhaps played the part of the company father who wants the most for his children," wrote Pete Louden in the *Victoria Daily Times*. "But as most parents come to realize, one day children want to make their own decisions."[16]

Twenty-five years after the construction of Gold River, another industrial expansion is playing a major role in the community. An expansion which, like the one in 1965, the company is saying will "put Gold River on the map." In 1990, Canadian Pacific Forest Products completed the first phase of construction on a $320 million newsprint mill adjacent to the pulp mill. According to CPFP officials, the new paper mill is expected to create 120 permanent jobs and boost Gold River's population by another 600 people.

"Today you don't know hardly anybody any more," said Gail. "It's like any other town. You only know the people around you and who you associate with. There are so many new faces in town now, you just wonder 'Do they live here or are they from Tahsis?'"

A Regional Perspective

It wasn't only in the modern industrial town of Gold River that the sense of 'community lost' was experienced. Other area residents, too, recall a simpler life on the coast. Eric Ericson and his wife, Elvera, operated an A-frame logging outfit in Tahsis and Esperanza in the 1930s and 40s.

"It was a fairly easy life as far as living on the floatcamp was concerned," said Eric, "The wood was easy to get and the garbage was no problem, and wherever you wanted to go you just took your home with you and tied it up somewheres else in a

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16 *Victoria Daily Times*, August 22, 1967.

little bay. It was no hardship, really... As long as you had a good boat, you see. So you weren't altogether stuck."[17]

There were few women living on the camps then. But some women preferred to live on the floats with their husbands rather than spend months at a stretch living without them. Elvera Ericson was one of those women. She says that the women she met during that period have remained close friends over the years. "We used to meet so many interesting people, travelling on the coast," she said, "Or even just living on the coast. Where, sitting in a house in the city, you met two or three of your neighbors, and that's all you met."

They have good feelings about their time in Nootka Sound. "It's all interesting work, you know," said Eric, "I'd get up and have breakfast. Elvera made good hotcakes, fed me good, so I was happy going away to work. Sometimes it'd be raining and cold and whatnot, and you're always looking forward to a good supper.

"It was our life, you know. We knew when we were working we were making a dollar, and we had ideas what to do if we ever got enough, you see. Sooner or later we would maybe make a change. But while we were there, far as I was concerned, I was happy."

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17 Interview, Eric and Elvera Ericson (Sointula: February 15, 1988).

CHAPTER 5:
CONCLUSION - RECLAIMING THE HUMAN VOICE

> Nine times out of ten, you could get to know the president of the company by his first name. He would ask you about your family, and one thing and another, on his visits up here. There's a total isolation from that, of course, a total impersonal approach to everything, now. And that is being felt throughout the whole community. It's becoming sterile in the effect of human communications. And that's very sad. [Tom McCrae, Mayor of Tahsis, 1988][1]

So, should social scientists talk to people? Is the material gained through that interaction valid? Should it be given the same prominence as empirical data? My answer is, emphatically, yes. If we don't talk to people, then our analysis of historical events and, ultimately, of contemporary issues, will be lopsided, skewed in favor of only one perspective - the dominant one.

To support my argument, I have chosen to use concepts developed by the classic theorist, Ferdinand Tonnies who, in 1887, observed the loss of something he felt was important to human existence: a sense of community. Tonnies' theory of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft is used here as an analytical tool to demonstrate that intangibles such as the loss of a "sense of community" can, in fact, be accessed.

Many theorists since Tonnies have discussed similar shifts occurring in the development of society, noting a move away from the intimate, personal bonds and "connective tissue" of social relations to more anonymous and alienated forms. Yet, there are no existing empirical tools by which to verify those shifts; they can only be hinted at. This case study shows that oral accounts are an effective means of acquiring knowledge and a greater understanding of abstract, intangible concepts. It

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1 Interview, Tom McCrae (Tahsis: April 9, 1988).

suggests the need for further research into this area of historical methodology, and a greater emphasis on the role of subjective experience in creating meaning.

My experience has shown that ordinary people, talking about everyday concerns, have something important to say. Their words may not be eloquent. The ideas they have and the things they talk about may not be on a grand scale. Their interpretation of events may not even be verifiably "true." But, they should never be neglected in our pursuit for understanding past events. Their words should not be relegated merely to a background role as "color commentary" or "anecdotal stories." People's recollections of events that touched them are as vivid and as rich in material, as "legitimate" as any written account could hope to be.

The first person oral accounts used in this thesis are only a sample taken from hours of interviews out of which emerges a common thread: a sense of community lost. It is an intangible feeling which was experienced in the transition from Gemeinschaft-like forms of community to Gesellschaft. In Gold River, it occurred in the move from logging camp to townsite. In Tahsis, it was felt when the road to the east coast of the island was opened and, during that same period of time, when the community moved from being a 'closed' company-owned town to an 'open' village. Those who lived on floatcamps and in tiny settlements along the coast, also recall experiencing a sense of loss when they returned to larger, urban centers.

It is not the intent of this thesis to romanticize the notion of Gemeinschaft and community. What the case study shows, and what is revealed through the corpus of oral accounts, is that people's interpretations of their experiences - the memories they have constructed of their lives at the logging camp - reveal an aspect of life that seems to be missing from their current situation. In direct contrast to the oral accounts are the written accounts which make no mention of this sense of loss. They support the Gesellschaft features of rational thought and scientific advancement, the 'who, what, where, why, and when' of measurable phenomena: the well-planned townsite, the modern technology of the pulp mill, the rationalization of economic interests. The written reports adhere to what is

observable 'fact' or objective information, told mainly from the company point of view.

The starting point of most research is the selection of an appropriate method, based on the type of information needed and on available resources. Used in this way as an analytical tool, literate forms of communication - taking in as they do the means of communication as well as the social and thought processes involved - reinforce the dominant view. Abstract thought, the compartmentalizing of knowledge, principles of quantification and objectivity, automatically determine the kinds of information revealed, disregarding or eliminating those forms that do not fall within its criteria.

The literate means of communication, then, privileges the dominant company view. The multi-national corporate structure of Canadian Pacific Forest Products, with its public relations department and its centralized offices in downtown Vancouver, has easy and direct access to the media. Newspaper articles are written by reporters who visited the new townsite and pulp mill complex on public relations tours arranged by the management. Company press releases, extolling the virtues of the new town, are widely distributed. Articles appear in the province's major newspapers, *The Vancouver Sun* and *The Province*, in industry and trade journals, and in community newspapers as far away as Terrace and Kamloops.[2] Viewed from the dominant literate perspective, the historical development of the region is synonymous with the economic growth of the forest industry, and with the modernization and expansion of C.P.F.P.

Nowhere in the written documents and company news releases is there mention of the human experience. The "lived" culture of everyday life has been subsumed in the larger picture of corporate decision-making and the glitz of a major, multi-million dollar construction project. The essence of what it means to be

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2 Index to newspaper clippings, Tahsis Community Archives, Village of Tahsis, B.C.

human is missing from the documents. What does this suggest about the integrity of social inquiry? If analyses are based solely on empirical data and written accounts, then the final interpretation of events will be distorted. As this thesis has shown, there is a wide gap between the interpretation of events represented in the written accounts, and those described in the oral. The oral accounts, the first person narratives of people who lived at the Beach Camp, present a highly-personalized, subjective view of life, based on the intimate details of daily existence.

Whether or not the subjective interpretations are verifiably true is precisely *not* the point here. In fact, the analysis of the accounts ignores 'fact' in order to get at 'meaning.' The point is that by talking to people about their experiences we are able to ascertain the meanings they ascribe to those experiences, how they have constructed (or re-constructed) their world view. Through the oral, we gain access to the "human lifeworld" as Ong describes it. It is a lifeworld of flesh and blood, sight and sound and smell and touch. It is the world we all inhabit, day in and day out. Our interpretations are, ultimately, how we make sense of the external world. And as social scientists, as communicators, "our data," to borrow from Geertz, "are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to."[3]

This is not to minimize the impact of the company on the region, or the significance of social structures. In the Nootka Sound region, decisions of the company did have direct and significant bearing on the lives of the residents. It was a company decision to build a town near the pulp mill at Gold River. It was a company decision to incorporate Tahsis as an open municipality. And it was the company that completed the roads linking the west coast communities to the east coast of the island. These are all actions that are well-documented in the written records as well as in the oral accounts.

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3 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: 1973), p. 9.

In terms of the implications of literate forms to research: they, too, have their place. They are especially useful for determining precisely those things writing is good for: chronologies and categories and quantifiable phenomena such as corporate mergers, purchase of timber holdings, and company policies. In the highly literate world of western industrialized society, written accounts provide an easy way of structuring observable events.

First person oral forms provide the substance of those structures. They give them life and meaning and, of course, the essence of what it means to be human.

POSTSCRIPT - Empowerment

A final note. The use of first person oral accounts is more than merely a matter of methodological choice. It is ultimately a political practice with far-reaching implications. I refer here to the work of Stuart Hall and Richard Johnson, and the notion of popular culture not only as a class-based set of relations, but also as the site of the struggle over meaning.

In the case of Gold River, and indeed the Nootka Sound region itself, the definition of history has, until now, been dominated by the company. However, in the process of "doing" the research for the three communities, another definition of the history has been revealed, one that has had some immediate effects on the community today. In talking to people, and by featuring the popular accounts of Gold River's history - giving the 'voice' back to the community - a sense of self-awareness was created, leading to several community initiatives at the local level.

The three communities on the west coast of Vancouver Island have since undertaken another joint project, this time to organize a 1992 celebration as part of the bicentennial of Captain Vancouver's circumnavigation of Vancouver Island. As with the regional history project, this project was initiated by Tahsis. In addition, each community has gone on to develop individual community projects. Tahsis commissioned its own, 10-minute promotional video and a four-page color brochure to encourage economic development. The first 2,000 copies of the brochure were sold to townspeople at $2.00 apiece and were sold out in a matter of weeks. Another 5,000 copies have since been printed. The Tahsis Historical and Archives Society has raised close to $3,000 in local funds and has been placed in charge of the operation of the local museum.

In Gold River, the nearly defunct Nootka Sound Historical Society, which had been maintained in name only through the village council, was revived by several citizens who took over its operation at the 1989 Annual General meeting.

This past spring, one of the buildings from the original logging camp was moved from its site at the logging division to a new site at the entrance to town. It will be turned into an information booth and feature exhibits and photographs of the community.

Zeballos' historical society raised local funds to purchase and restore a building used as a hospital and doctor's clinic during the first years of the mining boom. The building will be used as a small museum and as the base for the historical society.

All three historical groups have been assisted, supported, and encouraged by their town councils. Through financial help, official representation on the boards, and through administrative support, local history has been given a position of prominence and importance in the region not usually afforded local historical societies in other communities.

APPENDIX A - List of interviews

The following people were interviewed during the course of the research for this project. They gave generously of their time and their knowledge. Interviews are on audiotape cassette and/or VHS videotape. Tapes and transcripts have been turned over to the Comox-Strathcona Regional District office in Courtenay, B.C. Interviews followed by a [T] are in the Tahsis Community Archives in Tahsis, B.C.

Anderson, Andy and Lorna, 1987.

Anderson, Laura, 1987.

Cawood, Dave and Moya, 1988.

Christensen, J.V., 1987.

Coburn, Wes, 1988.

Crabbe, Jessie, 1989.

Crosson, Jack, 1989.

Crowhurst, John, 1987.

Davies, Kathleen, 1987.

Davies, Bruce, 1988.

Donovan, Bert and Joan, 1988.

Ericson, Eric and Elvera, 1987 & 1988.

Fiddick, Jim and Anne, 1988.

Frumento, Marjorie, 1988.

Fulton, Sandy, 1989.

Funk, Henry, 1987.

Gibson, Gordon, 1986 [T].

Gibson, Jack, 1986 [T].

Grobb, Frank, 1987.

Hanson, Margaret, 1988.

Hansen, Ralph, 1988.

Harlow, George, 1985 [T].

Hill, Charles and Anne, 1987 & 1988.

Hill, Gerry, 1987.

Holst, Cliff, 1988.

Howard, Nick, 1988.

Jack, Ben, 1988.

Johnson, Sam, 1988.

Kilmartin, Bob, 1988.

McCrae, Tom, 1988.

McLean, Marion and
Shirley Sutherland, 1987.

McLeod, Neil, 1985 [T].

Munro, Jack and Jean, 1985 & 1986 [T]
and 1988.

Ostergaard, Aksel and Edith, 1985 [T].

Perry, John, 1988.

Shillito, Gail, 1988.

Sinclair, Bunty and Carole, 1987.

Squire, John, 1989.

Stewart, Des and Mae, 1987 & 1988.

Sturdy, Ken and Freda, 1985 [T].

Swanson, Aina, 1986 [T].

Tasker, Ken and Charlotte, 1985 [T].

Tyerman, Wally, 1988.

Wilson, Doug and Betty, 1987.

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