

Book Review

Landscapes and Social Transformations on the Northwest Coast: Colonial Encounters in the Fraser Valley. Jeff Oliver. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2010. 249 pp.

Catherine A. Nichols, Arizona State University

This work's content produces a social history of British Columbia's Fraser Valley through the lens of human modification, a materialist approach more familiar to archaeologists and historians than ethnographers. Oliver draws on a wide disciplinary range of studies and archival documents, through which he presents compelling and nuanced scholarship that explores how landscapes were socially produced through complex relationships in the contact zone between European settlers and Indigenous communities.

The scope of the work spans 1792 to 1918, a period framing intense colonial interactions, which Oliver approaches through technologies that capture changes in the landscape -- maps, narratives, photographs, and environmental studies. By theorizing the landscape "as both outcome and medium of social interaction" he explores ways in which social senses of place were experienced, contested, and altered through time (p. 6). His use of the portable artifactual record is an effective way to understand the circulation of knowledge about landscape transformations at different scales of experience. His treatment of landscape is instructive for scholars with an interest in materiality, because while his analysis broadly interprets material culture as a representational system, his approach provides a way of understanding how things (in this case, the landscape) shape and socialize people.

The contents of the book present both Indigenous and settler engagements with the landscape. Indigenous cosmologies and narratives, including the Katzie Book of Genesis, a well-known Coast Salish origin story are combined with environmental resource studies, including modification of plant communities like cedar stands and berry gardens to show how social history can be written from the landscape. He presents landscape history as contested history for Indigenous inhabitants as well as European set-

tlers. Oliver then moves to an examination of exploration and mapping as a way of creating geographical knowledges. He considers the consumption and circulation of maps as a way of questioning the authority and consistency of colonial knowledge. He also presents survey and forest clearing as strategies of visualizing settler histories on the landscape.

Oliver's intent is to demonstrate to the reader that the material products of culture-landscape interactions reveal details of complex and oftentimes ambiguous social relationships. The shifting social production of the landscape – through maps, photographs, and resource utilization – is presented as a way to read social relationships, oftentimes in ways that challenge the grand narrative of colonial and settlement history.

This work will be of interest to cultural geographers, cultural anthropologists, ethnohistorians, historians, and Native scholars. While focusing intently on the social history of the Fraser Valley and the relationships between and among settler and Indigenous communities, Oliver's approach to historical scholarship -- one that highlights the ambiguity of colonial relationships -- is valuable in advancing how scholars understand and produce colonial discourse. His ability to integrate disciplinary and temporally diverse publications on natural resources and cultural knowledge about the Fraser Valley results in solid scholarship and provides compelling data to advance his theoretical positions. However, use of data gathered and analyzed by other scholars requires a consideration of the validity of previous studies. Though his focus is that of colonial encounters, I wonder how this history influences contemporary life – a narrative strategy used at the opening and closing of the work, which is clearly and eloquently written.