

# THE PIVOTAL ROLE OF THE NORTHWEST COAST IN THE HISTORY OF AMERICANIST ANTHROPOLOGY

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**T**HE HISTORY OF ANTHROPOLOGY, including much of my own work (Darnell 1988, 1990), has emphasized the explanatory potential of biography.<sup>1</sup> Intellectual historians are inclined to attribute a considerable degree of agency to individual academics who have been influential in their chosen fields. Autobiography, for many historicist purposes, has the added advantage of revealing the motivations and intentions of the actor whose life experience structures the telling of a disciplinary story.

Such unexamined privileging of the autonomy of key individuals in creating institutions, social networks, and theoretical paradigms might lead us to re-examine the canonical work of Franz Boas on what Americans refer to as the Northwest Coast or of Edward Sapir on what Canadians of his time called the West Coast. Despite the fact that 95 percent of the Northwest Coast is located in Canada, the American-centred geographic term has persisted in both countries. We might expect the two founding fathers to represent American

<sup>1</sup> It is a pleasure to honour the work of the late Douglas Cole by following through some of its implications for the peculiar intellectual character of both the Northwest Coast culture area and the development of Americanist anthropology across the continent. Whether or not Doug would have accepted my conclusions, there are few of us who have attended seriously to the history of anthropology in Canada; his work forms an essential baseline without which my own would be much impoverished. I thank Wendy Wickwire and Alex Long for making this reassessment possible. Brian Given, Frederic Gleach, Marie Mauzé, Bruce Miller, Stephen Murray, Andie Palmer, and Lisa Valentine have responded to earlier versions. My decision to become an anthropologist is closely tied to the Northwest Coast through stories about the Tlingit told by Frederica de Laguna in my first anthropology course. Later, Dell Hymes kept the Northwest Coast central, informing my sense of how closely anthropologists, as well as those they study, are tied to places. Thirty years of Canadian university teaching have further enhanced my appreciation of the uniqueness of the Northwest Coast for anthropology. I have cited documents from the American Philosophical Society (APS) and the National Museum of Man (NMM), now the Canadian Museum of Civilization.

and Canadian anthropologies, respectively, with differences of perspective reflected in the very identification of the geographic area. Yet, however the boundaries of the Northwest Coast are defined, its centre and cultural fluorescence lie squarely within the Province of British Columbia.

This is not to suggest that Boas and Sapir were not important, either in the emergence of professional anthropology in North America or in intellectual developments indigenous to the Northwest Coast. Clearly, Northwest Coast work was pivotal in both men's careers; it was also seminal to how the Northwest Coast came to be imagined – by anthropologists and by the general public as well as by British Columbians, other Canadians, and Americans.

Franz Boas made twelve trips to the Northwest Coast between 1886 and 1930, spending a total of just under two and one-half years in the field (Rohner 1969, 310-3). During his absences from the area, he continued to receive ethnographic and linguistic texts from Native collaborators, particularly George Hunt, who worked with the Kwakwaka'wakw (who have entered the anthropological record as the Kwakiutl). Boas's *Kwakiutl Ethnography* was unfinished when he died in 1942; it was edited for publication in 1966 by Helen Codere.

From 1910 to 1925 Edward Sapir served as the first director of the Anthropological Division of the Geological Survey of Canada. Only a month after taking up this position, Sapir arrived on the Northwest Coast to begin what he intended to be a long-range program of fieldwork among the Nuu-chah-nulth (then known as the Nootka). In practice, he spent four months in 1910 and the winter ceremonial season of 1913-4 among the Nuu-chah-nulth. He continued to work on texts collected during this fieldwork throughout his career, and his collaborator, Alex Thomas, visited New Haven in 1934 (Darnell 1990, 17-18). Nonetheless, much of the material remains unpublished, although it is scheduled to appear in two volumes of Sapir's collected works edited by Victor Golla and forthcoming from Mouton de Gruyter of Berlin.

What I would like to do in this article is to invert the usual focus of historical interpretation on anthropological careers and personify the Northwest Coast, making it an agent in its own description. In other words, I would like to suggest that anthropologists learn from the places where we work, from the people as individuals as well as from the cultural traditions around which their lives are structured and from the natural environment within which they live. Our interpretations, then, respond simultaneously to the local conditions of

our fieldwork and the theoretical issues within our disciplines (Darnell 1998).

Richard Fardon (1990, ix) suggests that anthropology operates within a dialectic of regional and theoretical constraints. Regional traditions, which Fardon calls “localizing strategies,” develop in ethnographic practice and ethnographic writing. Although his edited volume foregrounds British work in Africa and the Pacific, the Northwest Coast seems to me to provide a highly productive example of such processes. Many of the major figures in anthropological history are associated intimately with their most important fieldwork; in this context, Boas’s “Kwakiutl” texts stand alongside Bronislaw Malinowski’s ethnography of the Trobriand Islands. Fardon argues that such ethnographic authority, based in participant observation fieldwork, forms the groundwork for anthropological theory as well as for ethnographic description. By implication, our history of anthropology must trace the anthropologists through their fieldwork back to the theoretical preoccupations within which they are intertwined.

I want to isolate a number of features of Americanist anthropology generally – features that come into the discipline, in both the United States and Canada, by way of Boas’s work on the Northwest Coast. The immediate context is the professionalization of the sciences (including anthropology) in North America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Darnell 1998). Boas was passionate in his insistence on the need for professionalization, especially for formal university training specific to anthropology. This commitment was often expressed in his terse and uncompromising criticism of persons he considered (mere) amateurs.

For reasons that are entirely justifiable but that tell only part of the story, scholars based in British Columbia have viewed Boas’s role on the Northwest Coast in largely negative terms. Boas’s attitude is lamented for its effect of marginalizing local efforts; certainly he paid little attention to the international boundary in his own fieldwork and museum collecting. Douglas Cole (1985) describes the “scramble” for Northwest Coast artefacts and the outside dominance of the museum acquisitions market. Indeed, American and European collectors were able to deploy financial and institutional resources on a much broader scale than could their Canadian counterparts during the crucial years from 1880 to 1906 (Cole 1985, 212).

The role of Sapir, Boas’s student and the only linguist among the early Boasians, has been denigrated within the same scholarly tradition because Sapir was an outsider who came to Canada with Boas’s

recommendation, brought Ottawa anthropology under the umbrella of a Boasian tradition that dominated North American anthropology at least until the end of the Second World War, and left the country after fifteen years to spend the second half of his career in American university positions. This was understood on the Northwest Coast as a betrayal of local interests, the growth of which was consequently stymied.

Among the Ottawa scientists, there was more affection in British Columbia for Marius Barbeau (Nowry 1995; Preston 1976), a Canadian trained in Britain, whose work on the Northwest Coast seemed more home-grown, and whose version of professionalism was combined with an entrepreneurship more accessible to local collectors and ethnologists. British training at least avoided the imminent threat of American dominance.

In a similar vein, John Barker's work on Thomas McIlwraith (1987, 1992) gives positive emphasis to its British, non-Boasian side. For Maud (1982, 135), following Barker, McIlwraith was the man who should have been hired to develop a national research program in anthropology in Canada. But the opportunity was a decade too early for him, necessitating, by default, the import of American talent (ironically, given that both Boas and Sapir were European-born). Indeed, McIlwraith spanned a number of dichotomies that have divided Canadian anthropology: he worked on the Northwest Coast, but he was based at the University of Toronto and the Royal Ontario Museum; his training was British, but he had also spent time in the United States. His style of professionalism was apparently more conciliatory towards local investigators, amateur or otherwise, than was that of either Boas or Sapir.

Scholarly attention turned to the history of anthropology in Canada in the early 1970s, at precisely the time Canadian scholars were acutely worried about American intrusions into Canadian culture and national autonomy. The self-consciousness and the insularity were, it seems to me, sides of the same coin. These discussions either denied the existence of a Canadian national tradition in anthropology that was distinguishable from the American tradition (e.g., McFeat 1976, 145; Burrige 1983, 318) or saw the Canadian tradition as a unique amalgam of pieces drawn from elsewhere (Ames 1976, 2; Darnell 1975; Trigger 1990, 261).

Turning to the Northwest Coast, Douglas Cole began the critique of the Boasians as outsiders with his 1973 paper, "The Origins of

Canadian Anthropology, 1850-1910." This paper tends to be cited without a consideration of alternative readings of the more positive effects of Boasian professionalization in Canada. For example, Carl Berger (1996, 40) identifies Sapir as a student of Boas and unequivocally asserts that his position is "usually taken" to constitute the "displacement of an indigenous, amateur Canadian tradition by one oriented to Boas and the United States." No evidence is cited, and Berger rapidly moves on.<sup>2</sup>

Ralph Maud, whose scholarship has centred around the work of Charles Hill-Tout, is particularly negative, charging that Boas built his anthropological theory around keeping his distance from Indian people and, in the process, marginalized Canadian amateur anthropologists. Maud attributes this sentiment to Marius Barbeau (Maud 1978 1:14), whose jaundiced view of both Sapir and Boas can be traced to the politics within the Anthropological Division in Ottawa. Barbeau was acutely disappointed when Diamond Jenness usurped his coveted succession to Sapir's position as director (with the further consequence of a shift away from Sapir's and Barbeau's emphasis on the Northwest Coast towards Jenness's emphasis on Northern [especially "Eskimo"] interests). Barbeau's disaffection with Boas and Boasian professionalization (Preston 1983, 288) was widely disseminated and should not be taken at face value.

It is undeniable that Boas did his best to marginalize amateurs (arguably also his competitors). He was instrumental in discouraging the University of British Columbia from including anthropology in its initial course offerings, urging President Westbrook in 1916 to wait until a trained professional was available to hold the proposed professorship (Darnell 1984, 1990; Hill-Tout 1982, 109; Preston 1976). Hill-Tout, in addition to his "exasperating" personality, "lacked sufficient scientific training" for an academic position, being "thoroughly unscientific in his conclusions" (Boas to Brock, 14 May 1910, APS). This attitude would hardly have endeared Boas to Hill-Tout, the unsuccessful candidate (see Darnell 1998b for further details).

Sapir was also at odds with Hill-Tout, who attempted to disengage Sapir's Boasian loyalties soon after his Ottawa appointment. Hill-Tout urged Sapir to acknowledge the important work of Canadian amateur anthropologists and accused the new director of "patronizing" such contributors:

<sup>2</sup> For a counter-argument, see Darnell 1975, 1976, 1984, 1990, 1992, 1998a, 1998b, and 1999, forthcoming.

I cannot think you are aware of the amount of pioneer work which has been done in this country, and Canadians are very touchy ... You don't want to alienate anyone with anthropological interest ... [Y]ou will see that it is indiscrete to start your work by rousing feelings of antagonism to yourself ... I have your work at heart and would be sorry to see any obstacles placed in your way. (Hill-Tout to Sapir, 26 February 1912, NMM)

Sapir apparently did not respond either to this subtle threat or to Hill-Tout's claim that the anthropological interest culminating in his own appointment had been built up by just such amateurs as he and his cronies. Not surprisingly, when Sapir was asked to recommend Hill-Tout for an academic position at the University of British Columbia, he, like Boas, was unmitigatedly negative (Sapir to Wesbrook, 29 June 1916, NMM).

From a biographical standpoint, both the Boasian and native British Columbian anthropologists and collectors have legitimate axes to grind. Historians of Canadian anthropology have also been positioned in debates, both historicist and contemporary, in which more is at stake than the facts of what happened on the Northwest Coast. Although Boas's "temperament" is often cited in particular cases in which he failed to get along with local colleagues, the reasons were not personal but professional. Both Boas and Sapir were consistent in applying anthropological principles to their Northwest Coast research.

A more balanced assessment is overdue. The other side of the story, in my view, is the influence that the study of Northwest Coast peoples exerted on the discipline of anthropology across North America *because* Boas and various of his students worked there. In addition to the work of Sapir, the Haida work of John Swanton (Bringhurst 1999) is particularly notable. I intend less to defend Boas and Sapir than to note the extent of their influence and the complexity involved in judging its effect on Northwest Coast anthropology. I would like to focus on three issues: Boas's shift away from environmental explanations of culture, his critique of evolution in favour of historical particularism, and his reliance on Native language texts to reveal the Native point of view and to embody cultural knowledge in a concrete form amenable to effective and ongoing study.

## CULTURE VS. ENVIRONMENT

Boas's dissertation was written in (psycho-)physics, and it concerned the perception of the colour of sea water. With the more sophisticated techniques of measurement available to us today, it seems obvious that the observer effect would complicate experimental results. But for Boas, the difficulty seemed to lie rather in the artificiality of the experiments. He wanted to know how real people perceived the physical world around them. At the same time that he became disenchanted by his work in experimental physics, Boas became interested in geographical explanations for human behaviour, questioning the materialist epistemological assumptions of his earlier scientific training (Bunzl 1996; Darnell 1998a; Muller-Wille 1998; Stocking 1968).

He sought a field site within which to test the relationship between culture and environment, and he chose the Eskimo as the most dramatic possible test case for environmental determinism. His expedition to Baffin Island, usually called Baffin-land in the 1880s, in 1883 convinced him that, in spite of the extremities of the climate in which they lived, the Eskimo had a rich symbolic culture that could not be explained by their environment. He had moved, intellectually, from natural science to physical geography to cultural geography, which, in turn, led to ethnology, or cultural anthropology. He wrote to his uncle Abraham Jacobi in New York:

I became convinced that my previous materialistic *Weltanschauung* [worldview] – for a physicist a very understandable one – was untenable, and I gained thus a new standpoint which revealed to me the importance of studying the interaction between the organic and the inorganic, above all between the life of a people and their physical environment. (Boas to Jacobi, 10 April 1882, APS; quoted by Stocking 1968, 138-9)

In this letter, Boas went on to explain his wish to test the explanatory power of mechanistic science and noted that he turned to the Eskimo “chiefly from a methodological standpoint.” Although he worried that the Eskimo were already too complicated to enable him to draw simple conclusions about the relationship between environment and culture, he sought local knowledge of geography and the psychological conditions that constrained the movement of nomadic peoples. History and psychology were two sides of the same question.

The movement from geography to ethnology is not particularly startling; the two fields were closely related in the late nineteenth

century. Boas studied with Karl Ritter and his student Theobald Fischer in Germany, and he was intrigued by their theory of how, among "primitive" peoples, migrations functioned to distribute cultural forms.

What is more remarkable is that Boas moved from materialism to culture/history/geography. Indeed, not long after his return from the Eskimo, Boas published a seminal paper: "The Study of Geography" (Boas 1940a). He distinguished two kinds of intellectual endeavour, each properly having its own method. Science in the narrow sense (*Naturwissenschaft*) privileged logic, clarity of thought, aesthetic elegance, laws, objectivity, deduction, and classification. Geography, in contrast, was a historical science, valuing phenomena for their own sake; subjective in its dependence on the mind, or standpoint, of the observer; affective, qualitative, and holistic (*Geisteswissenschaft*). The operative term is "standpoint," a term that carries over into Boas's later efforts to gain access to the internal worlds of cultures through linguistic and ethnographic texts.

Boas's formulation of the problem of geographical determinism, as demonstrated by his correspondence in the period preceding his Eskimo study, shows both the consistency and tenacity of his research program. He found in Baffin Island what he had expected to find – the Eskimo were not crushed by their harsh environment and their culture was not determined by it. *The Central Eskimo*, published in 1888, said little about environmental determinism. Although Boas would retain, in principle, a lifelong commitment to the search for scientific laws, his Eskimo sojourn confirmed that the immediate task for anthropology was to comprehend the variability of culture. Having defined this as the pivotal question, Boas again sought a research problem that would open up the complexities of culture as a structuring concept. This led him to the Northwest Coast.

#### THE CRITIQUE OF EVOLUTION

There is little to suggest that Boas's Eskimo fieldwork was a transformational experience. He more than suspected, when he left for Baffin Island, that materialist science would prove inadequate to the task of describing an alien culture. In fact, his swing towards the humanistic pole of geography and ethnology led him to avoid comparative judgments of the psychological value of any particular culture (including his own) for its members. (Some years later, Sapir [1922] was to make a similar distinction, defining the culture of Northwest



Coast Indians as “genuine” and North American culture in the midst of the Great War as “spurious.”) For Boas, “genuineness” was a question of *Hertzenbildung*, the capacity of the individual to create a meaningful self through experience and reflection. The first piece of Boas’s critique of evolution, then, was his refusal to accept that rankings of cultures could proceed independently of the psychic conditions and internal values of the cultures in question.

The second piece of the critique arose from Boas’s scientific position. He was firmly convinced that scientific *laws*, especially those arrived at through evolutionary reasoning external to local cultural realities, were premature. The Northwest Coast became his laboratory for a complex experiment in the history of peoples without written historical records. His chosen field site, to which he would devote his remaining career, was ideal for his purposes. His research design celebrated the complexity of, and interconnection between, the inter-related cultures along the coast from northern California to southern Alaska, centring in British Columbia. In spite of clear connections pertaining to trade, intermarriage, and the borrowing of cultural traits, the various tribes differed dramatically in linguistic affiliation. Culture had to be seen as a variable independent of language (and also of race, although Boas’s positions on race were argued largely in other arenas).

The kind of variability that Boas observed on the Northwest Coast could not be approached through the environment. The environment, in Boas’s new ethnographic home, was relatively constant. The richness of maritime and riverine resources provided leisure for cultural fluorescence and genuine, individually fulfilling, personal development. The interesting question became how the various groups developed their particular characters and remained distinct from one another despite their physical and cultural proximity. There were two prongs to the answer: the historical (i.e., the anti-evolutionary) and the psychological (i.e., the Native point of view).

The critique of evolution began with the observation that the Northwest Coast was a counter-example to the unilinear sequence of development, beginning with hunting and gathering then moving to agriculture and, finally, to urbanization and industrialization. The Northwest Coast environment provided the benefits of agriculture without back-breaking labour. Easily available sea resources facilitated permanent villages, monumental architecture, complex artistic and narrative traditions, and an elaborate social system involving ranks and privileges. Therefore, social complexity could not be tied to unilinear

evolution in the economic domain. Since many of the cultures of the Northwest Coast were matrilineal, evolution to a patrilineal social structure was equally clearly unnecessary to progressing towards civilization (especially if civilization were defined in affective terms, as Boas was now wont to assume it should be).

Boas's most explicit critique of evolution is found in "The Limitations of the Comparative Method of Anthropology" (1896) and reflects the lessons of several seasons of survey fieldwork on the Northwest Coast. He was prepared to argue that the causes of cross-cultural similarity, and local variations on universal themes, were a product of culture history rather than a uniform law for the sequence of human development. *Elementargedanken*, elementary ideas, a concept adopted from Adolf Bastian, developed characteristic local forms because of the constraints of the external environment and, more important, because of internal psychological tendencies that become exaggerated over time (i.e., through history). Different historical causes could produce the same surface results, as demonstrated by Boas's own work on the Northwest Coast. Boas explicitly stated that the issues of concern to him were theoretical:

The object of our investigation is to find the *processes* by which certain stages of culture have developed. The customs and beliefs themselves are not the ultimate objects of research. We desire to learn the reasons why such customs and beliefs exist – in other words, we wish to discover the history of their development. (Boas 1940b, 276)

He continued, describing what he considered to be a "safer" method:

A detailed study of customs in their relation to the total culture of the tribe practicing them, in connection with an investigation of their geographical distribution among neighboring tribes, affords us almost always a means of determining with considerable accuracy the historical causes that led to the formation of the customs in question and to the psychological processes that were at work in their development.

Three potential variables were available: environment (which could usually be dismissed, at least on the Northwest Coast), history, and psychology. Boas was not prepared to settle for descriptive ethnology.

The culture area, "a well-defined, small geographical territory" (Boas 1940b, 177), provided an appropriate unit of analysis for getting at history as Boas understood it. Boas believed it possible to identify

foreign elements and to trace the process whereby they were integrated into various cultures. The assumption of historical connection was taken for granted unless there was strong evidence to the contrary. The older historical work of the evolutionary comparative method, in Boas's view, "has been remarkably barren of definite results" (Boas 1940b, 280).

In retrospect, Boas's late nineteenth-century position on the need for a turn to history and a rejection of evolutionary theory seems obvious. At the time, however, most of his contemporaries in North American anthropology – amateurs and professionals alike – were self-professed evolutionists. Lewis Henry Morgan was the theoretician, and Major John Wesley Powell of the Bureau of American Ethnology implemented his program through the researches of his staff. The members of the bureau staff were professionals in that they were employed as anthropologists, but they lacked formal training in the discipline. Boas's disputes with his British Columbia colleagues reflected these same larger battles, which are portrayed effectively in Douglas Cole's *Captured Heritage* (1985).

Boas was far ahead of his time in putting forward what is now called historical particularism as an antidote to evolution. He was able to do this because he had a ready-made laboratory within which to reconstruct culture contacts along the Northwest Coast. His earliest efforts focused on linguistic classification. The Bureau of American Ethnology and the British Association for the Advancement of Science, who sponsored his research, required survey mapping of linguistic and cultural diversity. In the years preceding Powell's 1891 classification of all the languages of the continent into fifty-five stocks, Boas was caught up in the bureau's enthusiasm for linguistic classification. He proposed that the Northwest Coast had four stocks, although Powell maintained that proof of this was not yet certain. Indeed, Boas himself retrenched as his historical perspective shifted towards non-linguistic traits, particularly folklore elements.

Increasingly over his career, Boas found it impossible to distinguish between those cultures with a shared past and those that had become increasingly similar to their neighbours through long-term co-residence and borrowing. This put him into direct conflict with Sapir and other former students who were convinced that, because language had structural properties different from those of the rest of culture, the genetic relationship of languages could be distinguished from areal similarities caused by diffusion. Systematic sound correspondences could not occur by accident, through borrowing.

As Sapir elaborated this position increasingly strongly, his work shifted away from the Northwest Coast. His laboratory for testing genetic hypotheses about the culture history of peoples without writing came to be the far-flung Athapaskan language family, which he even tried to link to languages of Asia. Sapir wanted to reason from the diversity of contemporary languages to their common heritage in a single, hypothetical common ancestor (i.e., a proto-language). Boas wanted to reason from contemporary cultures to the complex *mélange* created by their hybrid histories. The conflict was not resolvable, and these two versions of North American prehistory went largely separate ways, especially as linguistics became more autonomous from anthropology after about 1920 (Darnell 1998a, 1990).

#### THE BOASIAN TEXT TRADITION

Having dealt with history, Boas turned to the psychological prong of his investigation. He was interested in generic cultural responses, and he attempted to obtain canonical versions of texts and to filter out the details of particular performances. Maud (1982, 59) goes so far as to charge that Boas's "need to appear scientific deprives us of the individual quality of the event" (in particular, the 1894 Fort Rupert potlatch).

Boas's long-term collaboration with George Hunt, the son of an English trader and a Tlingit noblewoman raised among (and married into) the Kwakwaka'wakw, documents both Boas's intentions and the intractable realities of the variability of Fort Rupert "informants." The ambivalent co-authorship of Boas's enormous output on the "Kwakiutl" has fascinated many intellectual heirs. Jeanne Cannizzo (1983) has argued persuasively that Hunt, rather than Boas, created the representation of Kwakwaka'wakw culture that continues to shape, reflect, and constrain anthropological views of the Northwest Coast. Because he was an outsider, Hunt's need to demonstrate his own status dominated his actions and coloured the way he presented texts. Judith Berman (1996) elegantly examines the textual corpus collected by Hunt and analyzes the cross-purposes that often characterized it.

Boas wanted to resolve ambiguities among different narrators. As early as 1895, only four years after Boas taught him to write his language, Hunt wrote to Boas about the difficulties of "writing the Indian ways of speaking" (Hunt to Boas, 5 November, APS). He explained: "as I told you Before no matter if you ask ten Indians about one History not two of them would speak ... the same." Hunt con-

tinually assured Boas that he was writing down the stories “word for word” (e.g., Hunt to Boas, 9 March 1896, APS), although it is clear that he often listened and reconstructed narratives later in his own words. Boas asked questions for clarification, proposed topics that he would like to know about, and tried to get Hunt to stay in regular contact with him. In addition to collecting texts, Hunt collected artefacts for sale to museums; Boas insisted that he must get both the story and the pertinent ceremonial object in order to have a full ethnological record. Again, Boas’s interests quickly exceeded the materialist to incorporate the ideational, or cultural.

In a particularly interesting exchange, Boas wrote to Hunt noting that a new story agreed with Boas’s 1886 version but that there were some differences between it and the version that appeared in “our published texts” (Boas to Hunt, 1 September 1906, APS). Boas asked if Hunt remembered who told him the story, then he commented: “Of course, stories of this kind are always likely to change in course of time, and I should like to know the history of this form of the story.” Boas did not consider the possibility that different individuals, or even the same individual under different circumstances, would have different versions of the “same” story. He expected that there would be a single correct version and that Hunt could identify it for him.

In the case of stories about particular families, however, Boas acknowledged the individuality of the texts and hoped to use this kind of variability to make the culture come alive as well as to reconstruct local histories. He wrote to Hunt and suggested that he choose any of the families “which you know so well” in Fort Rupert and document their (ranked) names, relatives, marriages, and house affiliations:

You will see that what I should like to have is the real family history of a number of people. We have a good many of the laws, but I shall understand them very much better if I can see how they really work out in the case of a number of particular men and women. (Boas to Hunt, 20 May 1911, APS)

Boas urged Hunt to be very careful about the details, to go “back as far as possible,” and to include “all the rights to masks and dances that each person has” (Boas to Hunt, 4 April 1913, APS). This was the format of Northwest Coast history as understood both by Boas and by Hunt’s narrators. Boas wanted to document the old ways rather than to examine the new forms of potlatch and winter dance that were developing during this period.

Occasionally, Boas wanted to know whether he was listening to Hunt or to Hunt's elderly informants: "Did you get these meanings [of Indian names] from the old people, or do you translate them from your own knowledge of the language?" (Boas to Hunt, 17 September 1918, APS). In this case, Hunt's response may have been more complicated than Boas had expected:

I do ask some of my old Friends the meaning of there names and most the time there answer comes Right to my translating it and some time I ask another old man. then some times he comes little Different from the other. that is why some times you will find some of the name is translated Different from the other ... And if I am not Pleased the way they translate the names then I translate them the way I see it Right way to Put it. for it is not so Hard for me. Because I know one thing that lots of middle age men comes to me, and ask me about the History of there family and even there names. (Hunt to Boas, 28 September 1918, APS)

Boas was fully aware of the rapid social change taking place on the Northwest Coast (Boas to Hunt, 1 February 1921, APS), and he tried to filter out the effects of depopulation and changing economic circumstances. He expected "conflicts of opinion ... [I]f this is the case, we ought not to try to make it uniform, but simply say what everyone tells." He continued:

Of course, it is not our fault that the information given by the different people does not agree. I have checked up the tales from various people here and there and did not know at that time whether I got the owner of the story or not ... [I]t is important to know also all the differences of opinion in regard to the ways of telling stories, although of course, we ought to know also what is considered by the owner as the right way. (Boas to Hunt, 22 March 1921, APS)

The authority given to the interpretation of the owner of a name or ritual prerogative clarifies Boas's theory of history and social change. Variability was to be expected because a story's standpoint would change according to whether it was told by the owner, other contenders, or outsiders. Matters were further complicated by secrecy, the need for anonymity, and vested interests. Hunt described his method of making his rounds of the community in order to produce a whole history:

thes thing take time to get a Help from the Indians, for I Dont go to and take these stories from one man the owner of the story after

the man who belong to the nEmemot the story Belong to tells his story then I go to the rival nEmemot and ask him to tell the same story to me and I alway find out by Doing this that where Ever one side got Beaten then one of the Rival leave this out. then I go to the third man and ask him to tell me the same story. then I get the whole story by Doing this and it takes time to do it. (Hunt to Boas, 21 November 1926, APS)

There are multiple laments concerning the loss of language and Hunt's inability to find people who remembered the old stories. In the later years of their collaboration, both men perceived that variation was decreasing as people relied more on English and turned to White lifestyles (e.g., Boas to Hunt, 15 March 1930, 8 February 1931, APS).

Boas's position on variability differed starkly from Sapir's. Sapir picked up John Owen Dorsey's classic phrase "Two Crows Denies This" and used it to get at how culture is uniquely embodied within each individual member. One Omaha elder could disagree with another on matters of apparent fact. Both positions could be legitimate, reflecting the different positions of Two Crows and his fellow Omaha in their society. Sapir's effort to portray names and ranks in the Northwest Coast resulted in various essays (e.g., Sapir 1922) and a poem about Sayach'apis (the Nootka trader) called "The Blind Old Indian Tells His [Successive] Names." Situated firmly within the humanities rather than within the sciences, Sapir's texts evoked one individual's experience rather than a full range of variability (though he collected a corpus comparable in magnitude to that of Boas and Hunt).

Boas's textual work was intended to produce psychological portraits of the Native point of view and way of life. The Boasian text tradition (Darnell 1992) is the most salient and persistent contribution of Boas and his students to Americanist theory and practice. Boas attempted to implement his ambitious plans for a series of grammatical sketches of selected American Indian languages, illustrated by texts, through the Bureau of American Ethnology. As its honorary philologist, beginning in 1911 he produced four volumes of a *Handbook of American Indian Languages*. In the process of justifying this work after the death of Major Powell in 1902, Boas made some of his clearest statements about the textual method. He wrote to W.H. Holmes, the new director:

You asked my opinion in regard to the advisability of printing full collections of Indian texts. Since texts in the original languages form the only material on which a later study of American linguistics can

be based, I may say that the publication of these texts is quite indispensable. It is of course out of the question that a single investigator, in a brief study of a few years, can exhaust the many intricate problems of Indian languages; and the published texts are the only basis on which advance of science is possible. The problem is just the same as that of the ancient languages of Europe. Scientific institutions and governments do not hesitate for a moment to publish all the available material relating to unknown languages, in order to make it accessible to as many students as possible. (Boas to Holmes, 2 November 1903, APS)

Apparently having failed to persuade Homes, Boas reiterated his point:

I do not think that anyone would advocate the study of antique civilization or, let me say, of the Turks or the Russians, without a thorough knowledge of their languages and of the literary documents in these languages; and contributions not based on such material would not be considered as adequate. In regard to our American Indians we are in the position that practically no such literary material is available for study ... My own published work shows that I let this kind of work take precedence of practically every thing else, knowing it is the foundation of all future researches ... What would Indo-European philologists be, if we had only grammars made by one or two students and not the live material for which these grammars have been built up, which is, at the same time, the material on which philosophic study of language must be based ... We require a new point of view now ... [I]t seems to my mind that we can accept undigested collections of translated traditions only in cases where, for one reason or other, this collection of the originals was impossible. (Boas to Holmes, 24 July 1905, APS)

This is the heritage of the text tradition, upon which work has, indeed, continued. But that is another story (see Valentine and Darnell 1999).

#### THE "KWAKIUTL" LEGACY

Because of Boas's classic work with the people he called the Kwakiutl, they have been cited repeatedly as providing classic exemplars of anthropological description, along with a series of theoretical arguments grounded in the textual database produced by Boas and Hunt. Ruth Benedict's best-selling *Patterns of Culture* (1934) depicted the Kwakwaka'wakw potlatch as comparable to the economic aggressiveness



of contemporary robber barons. Borrowing terms from abnormal psychology but purporting to eschew their pathological connotations, she labelled the Kwakwaka'wakw as "megalomaniacs."

Boas himself did not take such a view. He saw the economic side of the potlatch as a way of producing social order and of saving for prestige prestations. With his characteristic deconstructive bent, Boas argued that the separation of economic interests from social, religious, and artistic ones was arbitrary. During the period when the potlatch was outlawed on the Northwest Coast (Cole and Chaikin 1990), both Boas and Sapir were firm defenders of the right of the Indians to defend their traditional culture by preserving one of its core institutions – in spite of the dramatic changes in the potlatch system as a result of postcontact population decline and increasing wealth.

Helen Codere, who edited the remaining Boas-Hunt texts for publication in 1966, attempted to counter the one-sidedness of Benedict's famous interpretation of the Kwakwaka'wakw personality. She emphasized "The Amiable Side of Kwakiutl Life" (1956) and the cooperation essential to the potlatch system. Benedict had insisted that a single personality characteristic would dominate a culture, whereas both Boas and Codere saw the Kwakwaka'wakw in more nuanced and variable terms. The literature continues to grow as anthropologists dispute this dichotomy, which is, perhaps, important mostly because it powerfully demonstrates the anthropological stature of the Kwakwaka'wakw as a test case for theory.

The Kwakwaka'wakw continue to be salient in anthropological debates. Eric Wolf (1999, 73) has the last word for the moment, as he suggests that the texts have been "long neglected, because they did not easily fit with subsequent theoretical paradigms." But he notes that new interpretations are again emerging. These are leading us away from a timeless ethnographic present towards "native involvements in local, regional, and global changes over time."

As Boas and Sapir predicted, the texts give us the baseline from which to understand the history of our present. Because they tailored their anthropology to Northwest Coast specifications, we have inherited a complex and ongoing reciprocity of theory and ethnography. The ethnographic character of the Northwest Coast created a context within which Canadian anthropology came of age and within which American anthropology came to encompass the study of all Aboriginal peoples of the North American continent.

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