Anthropology and First Nations in British Columbia

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Early History

Observations about human society and culture by academically trained visitors to British Columbia began long before anthropology was a recognized discipline (for a summary, see Suttles and Jonaitis 1990, 73ff.). Specialists attached to military and trading expeditions made the first ethnographic and linguistic observations. Collections of such information by visitors and resident immigrants continued during the long “scramble for Northwest Coast Artifacts” (Cole 1985) in the nineteenth century.

The first and most influential of academic anthropologists to give attention to the cultures of the province was Franz Boas, who began his research on the Northwest Coast of British Columbia in 1886, and continued until 1931 (Rohner, 309-13). Working from Columbia University in New York, Boas trained and collaborated with two other important British Columbia researchers, George Hunt, a part Tlingit man raised among Kwakwaka’wakw of Fort Rupert, and James Teit, a Scot with wide experience of Nlaka’pamuxw and other Salish nations of the interior. In the same period there were numerous other observers, such as Charles Hill-Tout, English immigrant farmer and schoolmaster, who conducted research among Salish people (Maud 1978), and G. M. Dawson of the Ottawa-based Geological Survey of Canada, who contributed to linguistic and ethnological studies over a wide area (Cole and Lockner 1989, 18-22).

First Nations continued to attract formally trained anthropologists who visited briefly and then returned to their distant home universities. By the mid-point of the present century almost every language group in the province had been visited and written about by one or more ethnographers. The most significant feature of all this work, and the integrating theme, was research of the sort that has come to be called, sometimes pejoratively, “salvage ethnography.” Its purpose was to record from experienced and

1 “Anthropology” will be used throughout this paper to mean descriptive and analytic study of human culture and society. Thus it includes ethnography, ethnology, and social anthropology, but does not include physical anthropology or archaeology.
fluent native speakers accounts of traditional culture — that is, the indigenous way of life unadulterated by immigrant ideas and values. Its driving theoretical perspective was the assumption that cultures or societies are organized systems which have adapted and are continuing to adapt to natural and social environments. A permanent descriptive record of the full array of cultures would provide the basis for comparative study of conditions and historic processes which brought cultural forms into existence. Ultimately, this was intended to enable much more secure knowledge about processes of growth and change of human cultures.

An enduring legacy of the comparative study of North American cultures has been their classification by *culture area* (Arctic, Northwest Coast, Plateau, etc.). These continue to be used to organize anthologies, text books, university courses, museum exhibitions, and so on. G. P. Murdock, who headed the work resulting in creation of the Human Relations Area File (a world-wide indexed compilation of ethnographic data by culture areas), also produced two editions of a definitive bibliography of North American ethnography which have served as guides for study and research over the last thirty years (Murdock 1960, 1975).

Such ethnographic research was intended to enable scholars to study social change. It was directed at knowing more about dynamic systems. But its practitioners have become associated with an anthropology which described a fixed, unchanging, and unrealistic world. In many cases, because they were intent upon recording distinctive indigenous cultures before these changed under impact of colonial empires, ethnologists were describing systems that existed only in the accounts they elicited. Boas produced masses of ethnographic detail and insisted upon the historicity of each cultural system, but he does not tell us, in his published descriptive accounts of the Kwakwaka'wakw (formerly known as Kwakiutl) what kinds of houses his informants lived in at the time he studied them or what sorts of employment they had in the fast-growing resource industries of commercial fishing and logging. It is only in his personal letters to family and colleagues that he records a little of his own observations of what life was then like on the Northwest Coast. In many other "classic" accounts — for example, Philip Drucker's *The Northern and Central Nootkan Tribes* — it is only in the introductions and cursory lists of major informants that we touch base with actual observed life and events. Detached, addressed to the past, and idealized though these accounts be, they are paradoxically packed with information about memories of events, actions, and how life was lived. Scholars, professional planners, lawyers, and First Nations people find new uses each year for this old information.
Anthropology, as a formal academic discipline, was established locally after most First Nations had been visited and described in summary ethnographies. In 1947, when the rapid post-war growth of Canadian universities began, H. B. Hawthorn was appointed at the University of British Columbia as Professor of Anthropology in the Department of Economics, Political Science and Sociology. In 1959 the department of Anthropology and Sociology was formed, with Hawthorn as head, and by 1969 there were twelve full-time anthropologists in the department.

Anthropology was also established at the University of Victoria (1963) and at Simon Fraser (1965), and all three institutions have offered graduate degrees for the last twenty-five years. This pattern of growth in anthropology prevailed elsewhere in Canada as well. As Burridge (1983: 307) has shown, there was a threefold increase between 1960 and 1970 in the number of Canadian universities with anthropologists, and the number of anthropologists expanded from thirty-five to 170. By 1980 there were thirty-five universities with 270 faculty.

Another significant development in the field of post-secondary education in B.C. during the last three decades has been the growth of public community colleges. The first was Selkirk College, opened in 1966. There were five community colleges by 1969, and fourteen by 1975 (Dennison and Gallagher, 30, 91). Today there are fifteen public colleges or combined university/colleges and two private colleges in the province, all of which offer some university-level credit courses in anthropology (B.C. Council on Admissions and Transfer, 1993-94).

The second half of this century has also been a period of great diversification and growth of theoretical and methodological interests in the discipline throughout the world. In British Columbia, studies of contemporary communities, of processes of socio-cultural change, and of directed social change supplanted or overshadowed the earlier interest in descriptive accounts of so-called "traditional" cultures.

Current (1993-94) lists of faculty interests for the three established B.C. universities show a wide range of methodological and culture area interests. But areas of primary specialization in British Columbian and North American indigenous societies are prominent. In the older, established universities as a whole, more than half of the full-time ethnologists list their primary area of specialization to be in North America. The University of Northern B.C. is still in its formative stage, but has a department of First Nations Studies. Three anthropologists with area interests in B.C. First Nations have been appointed in that department and Women's Studies. I have not attempted to survey the area interests of college faculty in anthropology, but it is my impression that the same pattern holds — diverse area interests, but greatest specialization in North American First Nations cultures.
accidental but a consequence of appointment decisions responding to perceived needs. Among these, teaching demands are paramount. Academic anthropology in British Columbia continues to concentrate upon the study of British Columbia First Nations people.

During the last twenty-five years, First Nations in B.C. have continued to be visited and studied by anthropologists, and citizens in all parts of the province as well as First Nations have relatively ready access to anthropology as a formal subject of study in colleges and universities. Anthropologists established in the province and specializing in study of B.C. First Nations are now familiar fixtures. This is significant not only for students but also because anthropologists have established relationships with First Nations. Such contacts may more easily become continuous than those where researchers are based outside the province or country. Local anthropologists are required to be responsive to requests for results of their work and to answer criticisms, and they are able to negotiate agreements with subjects. This inclusive context of research, reporting, and teaching has helped to give distinctive elements to the way the discipline has developed in the province. Indeed, it has had a bearing on the nature of writing in this journal itself, in that the subjects may be expected to read reported results.

A Crucial Turning-Point

The year 1969, when this journal was founded, was, for quite different reasons, of great significance for First Nations in B.C. It saw the start of renewed struggle for independence and just recognition of aboriginal rights. And for anthropology, it may fairly be said to mark a turning-point, the beginning of a new way of putting the discipline to work for people.

In April 1969 the Nisga'a tribal council took the government of B.C. to court, initiating procedures that ended nearly five years later in the Supreme Court decision known as Calder. In the initial trial, Wilson Duff, just recently appointed in the Department of Anthropology and Sociology at UBC, gave expert evidence attesting to Nisga'a occupancy and ownership of their lands.

Some two months later the federal government issued its infamous White Paper on Indian Policy, proposing to repeal the Indian Act, transfer constitutional responsibility for Indians and Indian lands to the provinces, and do away with the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. Indian treaties were termed an "anomaly" and aboriginal claims "not realistic" (Canada 1969), thus discounting the very issue which the Nisga’a were requiring the courts to address.
These threats to Indian interests and to the status of Indian itself precipitated renewed political activity, and in November the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs was formed. It assembled the largest representation of B.C. First Nations leaders ever achieved to that time, and the staff, under leadership of George Manuel from the Shuswap Nation, went on to create an archives and resource centre and to initiate renewed research on matters relating to aboriginal rights in B.C. Its annual assemblies and uncounted smaller meetings brought new awareness and a reassessment of aboriginal rights to a whole generation of British Columbians.

In the third issue of BC Studies, published in that same year, 1969, there appeared an important article by Wilson Duff, "The Fort Victoria Treaties." Duff's article did not appear to be breaking new anthropological ground. After all, it dealt with conventional ethnographic subjects like remembered place names and archival records of the colonial government's attempts to deal with highly valued parcels of First Nations' land on Vancouver Island. But it emphatically revealed how colonial administrators defined political rules in their own terms and inveigled people who did not have knowledge and understanding of those rules to commit themselves to contracts which were quite alien to their way of dealing with land. The article assembled an apparently simple array of facts that continues to challenge British Columbians. Duff's paper was "applied anthropology" in the time-honoured form of critical history.

Applied anthropology of a different form had already brought distinction to the Department of Anthropology and Sociology at UBC. Professor Hawthorn had co-ordinated two large-scale research projects for the federal government. The first focused on social conditions of Native Indians and Indian Affairs administration in B.C. (Hawthorn, Belshaw, and Jamieson 1958); and the second was a country-wide survey of social, educational, and economic conditions for a selected sample of communities of status Indians across Canada (Hawthorn and Tremblay 1968). These studies were "problem oriented," using interviews and social survey methods to assemble data from which recommendations for relevant government policy and administrative action were made.

Over the years since completion of these large surveys, the idea that a university-based group of experts may realistically initiate a study to assess and prescribe remedies for administration of Indian affairs has fallen into disfavour, especially with First Nations people. However, the positive results of such studies for First Nations should not be discounted. Both studies for the federal government firmly documented inadequacies of government policies, especially in the fields of education, social services, and economic
development. They played some part in altering public policy for the better, and perhaps more to the point, they helped to inform and convince the public of the failure of government policies.

The contrast between those large applied research projects and Duff's paper stands well, nevertheless, to highlight key changes in the nature and direction of anthropology that were taking place at that time. Duff's paper remains to the present day an inspiring example of the utility of integrating ethnographic and historical data to clarify a process by which the South Island First People were dispossessed of their lands. Duff used an old tradition in anthropology of recording the knowledge and customs of the past to shed light on a current political issue. He purposefully made the results of his anthropological research useful to its subjects, thereby setting the tone for future work. He addressed a problem, that of land title, for what has come more and more to be an essential feature of anthropology's relationship to First Peoples of British Columbia.

Issues for the Present

I do not propose, in this review, to examine anthropology in all its branches in B.C. over the last quarter century. But in the spirit of this special issue, which is to provide a series of commentaries on the nature and directions of the various disciplines which have found an effective voice within the covers of the journal, I will turn to a series of critical issues which have faced and will continue to face anthropology in B.C. They revolve around such questions as: What gives anthropologists the right to study others (cf. Ames 1992, 167-68)? What should be done with the results of research? Whose ends should research and teaching serve? Who should decide such issues?

Canadian anthropology has always emphasized Canadian studies (Burridge 1983, 310; Manning 1983a, 2f). And First Nations' cultures have been a prominent part of this concern. Anthropological study has yielded useful "resources for the future of First People," as Ames aptly puts it (Ames 1992, 79). But First Nations voices are challenging the veracity of anthropologists' ideas and reliability of their information. They are dismissing anthropologists' comfortable interpretations and questioning anthropologists' motives — in classrooms, in print, in interviews. It is a time in B.C. of challenge to every aspect of the discipline — its assumptions, theories, methods — and at times to the core of its practitioners' sense of themselves.

The most sobering questions which an anthropology teacher may face at the conclusion of a lecture about indigenous Canadian cultures will come
from First Nations students who ask: How do you know that? Why do you say that? What gives you the right to say that about us? These are sobering for two reasons. First, they challenge the authority of the teacher and empower the student whose self has been made an object of study and who feels the weight of strangers' stares. Such questions reveal immediately and in inescapable terms the colonial context within which our classrooms sit. Secondly, "objects of study" become true subjects calling into question the theoretical, epistemological, and ethical foundations of everything we do as anthropologists. How indeed, do we know? Why do we represent others as we do?

Such simple and ancient questions are at the root of challenges to our conventional ways of thinking in anthropology, which in recent decades have ushered in the era of reflexive approaches to ethnography — accounting for oneself, the observer, in a critical way when presenting a descriptive account. We are much more likely now not to accept any account as it stands but first to search out the conceptual models and methods which underlie and shape it. In fact, if we are honest and reflective we are asking of ourselves those same questions which we hear from First Nations people. These heavily critical approaches within anthropology and the demanding questions from subjects of research are connected. They are both related to the changing world scene in which colonial empires are crumbling and independence movements shaking old ways (Asad 1991, 315).

These kinds of challenges and changes know no national borders, but I suggest they are felt more sharply in places like B.C. where anthropologists are teaching, writing, and applying their knowledge among those people they study. First Nations people enrol in courses about themselves, and they read, review, and write books about themselves. They rebuke editors for misleading newspaper accounts about their communities. They come to openings of museum exhibitions of their arts. Such immediacy is not the same when anthropology is practised at a distance and outside the province. There, unawareness of the subject's voice is of less account in conferences and seminars. James Clifford, a keen California-based critic within anthropology, recently made a tour of four major B.C. museums specializing in First Nations collections and remarked upon their special circumstance: "... the political climate was charged in ways I had never felt in other metropolitan settings: New York, Chicago, Washington, Paris, London" (Clifford 1990, 214).

Michael Ames refers to recent vigorous First Nations challenges to museums, which have not only defined what is called art, but continue to
hold abundant collections from First Nations cultures. He has suggested that

A revitalizing repossession of the past will likely liberate it [indigenous art] from its customary custodians and interpreters, especially anthropologists and museums. (Ames 1992, 86)

"Revitalizing repossession" is firmly underway in Canadian museums, but the phrase also describes well a process which is reaching beyond the fields of art. Ethnologists cannot avoid the plainly evident struggle for repossession of their whole subject matter as it affects First Nations. They are demanding the opportunity and the means to create and use knowledge about themselves for themselves.

In what direction will this move the anthropology of B.C. First Nations? In the end to one of greater strength. The way we engage our tasks and the tasks we choose to work upon are being shaped much more now by collaboration with First Nations. For two decades anthropology students in search of thesis topics have been obtaining band council permission before undertaking research — band councils, primarily, have seen to that. More frequently, students are asking their “subjects” which specific questions their research should be directed to. Community leaders have been insisting on some return for co-operation — at the very least copies of theses and published papers. Anthropologists with graduate degrees are now being directly employed by communities and tribal councils and set to specific tasks defined, not by the anthropologist, but by the employer. First Nations people are also doing more anthropology themselves, and studying the subject formally with that end in mind.

The anthropology of B.C. First Nations has been and will continue to be reshaped in two ways. First Nations will insist that research and thinking be directed towards ends which they deem appropriate and useful. Second, the ideas, methods, and products of the discipline itself will be reshaped in new, perhaps unexpected ways, as both First Nations and public forums of discussion augment academic seminars and conferences as venues for presentation and evaluation of anthropology. The remaining sections of this paper attempt to illustrate how anthropology is being brought more frequently into such forums and to suggest some of the consequences.

Representing First Nations: Ethnography and Exhibitions

Ethnography is the descriptive study of culture. It provides data with which one may begin to see and understand the ways of life of others. In so doing, it provides perceptions which may begin to put our own narrow cultural
selves within a wider human view. Anthropology, as Kluckhohn phrased it years ago, is a “Mirror for Man” (1949). Ethnography has always been at the centre of that anthropology.

About twenty-five years ago the Smithsonian Institution in Washington undertook an ambitious plan to produce a new and greatly expanded edition of the old *Handbook of North American Indians*. In 1990 the long-awaited volume 7, “Northwest Coast,” was issued. It has been preceded by volume 6, “Sub-arctic,” in 1981. The forthcoming “Pla­teau” volume will complete coverage of British Columbia First Peoples. An objective of the series was to make available a modern sketch of the culture of every language group in North America, along with essays on linguistic relationships, archaeological research, as well as comprehensive bibliographies.

Although eagerly awaited, the Northwest Coast handbook proved dis­appointing to many, even to some of us who were contributors. To many of our students it looks curiously old-fashioned — largely because of its prevailing focus on the “ethnographic present,” that timeless, invented no-time of contact between indigenous cultures and Europeans. True, the Handbook has summaries of accounts of prehistory, of the history of eth­nological research, and of post-contact history — all useful in gaining a perspective on Northwest Coast culture history. Such accounts do very well for the grand comparative questions for which Boas and his students sought answers, and they provide a picture, set in the past, and comfortable to immigrant North Americans. But they have little to do with understand­ing contemporary First People: those struggling against unjust laws and racism to maintain viable homeland communities on reserves, or kinship networks of First Nations people living in cities and towns — too often looked upon as foreign immigrants. In the words of one reviewer of the Northwest Coast volume, it reveals “... little about the lives of thousands of present day Northwest Coast people, including urban natives” (Miller 1990, 181).

Fixation with cultures of the past, such as the handbooks exhibit, is a source of much First Nations objection to ethnology. “Why are you so concerned with dead people?”, we are asked in classes and corridors. “Anthropology just makes people think there are no live Indians left!” The handbook invited such questions and comments anew.

What is more clearly questionable now than it was when the first plan­ning meetings for the Northwest Coast volume of the handbook were held in 1971 is the lack of attention to contemporary issues and contempor­ary cultural systems. The publishing costs and the time and effort of the
Ethnological community spent in producing the Smithsonian series have been substantial. Expending resources on these subjects has certainly meant that less attention could be given to others — perhaps more pressing and desired by Northwest Coast people.

Expensive, encyclopaedic handbooks of cultural systems, which present the past to the world as an account of living people, plainly do not have high priority among First Nations. But paradoxically, both ethnographic data collected long ago and those which are newly collected from elders are just as highly valued by First Nations today as they were in the past. Although much knowledge has disappeared, much remains in memory, experience, and oral teachings. It is being purposefully maintained as living oral tradition and by written and electronic records. Where genealogical and ceremonial knowledge is family property, it is the owning families who are keeping the knowledge. Where such restrictions of ownership are not present, appointed band or tribal cultural offices are creating archives and libraries of such information. Anthropologists and other specialists are continuing to assist in many such efforts, but more and more is being kept by First Nations people themselves for their own uses.

Even though anthropologists are at times criticized by First Peoples for being exploitative in conducting research for selfish ends (obtaining degrees and employment), and museums for being possessive of other people’s properties, they are “resources” which First People find useful. They provide information for school curricula, books, community cultural programmes, and language programmes.

**Specialized Studies**

In the last three decades, First Nations cultures have begun to draw the attention of scholars in many fields other than anthropology. Just as Boas a century ago perceived the need to preserve languages and cultural systems which were threatened, much recent ethnographic research has again been motivated by the perception of a need to save and protect such still extant and still threatened knowledge. Much of this is now seen to exist in the highly specialized fields of ethno-science, and is undertaken by experts trained in other sciences as well as ethnography. Their interest in indigenous cultures led them to record in detail the taxonomies, concepts, and practical knowledge of such fields as botany, zoology, ichthyology, and so on. Such research has early roots in B.C., having been encouraged by Boas, working with George Hunt among Kwakwaka’wakw, and Teit among Nlaka’pamux. Steedman (1929) prepared a notable study of ethno-botany from Teit’s notes. Most influential in the last two decades
has been the ethno-botanical work of Dr. Nancy Turner and associates (Turner 1975, 1978). Her series of handbooks has done much to publicize First Peoples’ botanical knowledge and to encourage other scholars in their intensive, detailed work with various language groups (see, for example, Compton 1993; Ellis and Swann 1981; Ellis and Wilson 1976; Bouchard R. and Kennedy, D., of the B.C. Indian Language Project, Victoria).

Linguists are continuing the study of First Nations languages and have produced grammars, dictionaries, and texts of a technical nature (see Thompson and Kinkade 1990, 49). Much of this has been conducted in close co-ordination with bands and cultural centres, and many linguists have applied their skills to assist in preparation of language instruction kits and work books for primary school students. Prof. J. Powell, of the Department of Anthropology and Sociology, UBC, has produced or amended practical orthographies and corresponding work books for eight different B.C. native languages since 1973 (personal communication).

Some early surveys and field collections of music were made by Densmore, Herzog, and Halpern, but this field of specialized study has lagged behind others in B.C. The work by Anton Kolstee is a notable exception. Indigenous plastic and graphic arts exerted continuing fascination. Museum collections have grown and continue to be the focus of exhibitions. Anthropologists associated with the two major museums, the Royal B.C. Museum and Museum of Anthropology at UBC, have also been instrumental in assisting the long process by which indigenous Northwest Coast artists have achieved recognition for their work as great contemporary art (see Ames 1992, 59-69 for summary).

The study of First Nations history, political science, geography, and law, by specialists in those fields, has become a matter of course. BC Studies has played a most important role in such change by providing an academic forum where such regionally focused specializations obtain a critical readership.

Study of contemporary First Nations social systems, a topic of research closely associated with ethnology and social anthropology, has continued since the time of the first survey by Hawthorn and associates. Much of this has taken the form of survey research or inquiries into social issues such as employment, provision of justice, health services, housing, and the like. Most such studies have also centred upon status Indians and reserve communities. A large social survey of urban First Nations people was undertaken in co-operation with the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs and the B.C. Association of Non-status Indians in 1972 (Stanbury and Siegel 1974), but there have been no studies of the dimensions, continuity, or structure
of these populations. The nature of First Nations communities in off-reserve, urban settings is largely unknown, despite the fact that in the province as a whole in 1989 nearly half of registered status Indians were resident “off-reserve” (B.C., 1990).

Despite continuing interest in social issues, studies of contemporary communities viewed holistically in the manner of conventional ethnographies have been relatively few. Notable exceptions are studies which, while focusing on particular issues, also set them within the framework of community, and thus provide an overview of contemporary social life which takes account of the multiple and powerful linkages to the state and regional immigrant society (examples with varied focuses are: Brody 1981; Culhane Speck 1987; Stearns 1981; Boelscher 1988; Carstens 1991). Whatever the causes, it is clear that most effort is still being directed towards continuing research and writing about social systems of the past and to topics related to historical changes.

Descriptive and explanatory accounts of a people’s history and culture, the substance in a broad sense of ethnology, are universal. All people tell their own stories in their own way and for their own purposes. Anthropologists tell other people’s stories, and have tried, since the time of Malinowski at least, to tell those stories from the perspective of the people being studied. This has always been an impossible objective, given the fact that anthropologists are usually native to and shaped by a different culture, and describe in a different language and medium from the vernacular of the society observed. Their accounts are useful for comparative and academic purposes but often do not work well for telling a people’s history in a social context where images of peoples are politically contested. Because “culture” in the field of anthropology is so inclusively defined, it is easy for anthropologists to fall into the trap of speaking about all aspects of a people’s life and to be identified, often quite wrongly, as an expert in that, rather than the actual field of research or expertise, which is always much narrower. It is a fact that the critical voice of First Nations has had a salutary effect, inducing anthropologists to define more accurately their expertise and to avoid the pretence of an ability to speak for other people.

How B.C. First Nations are represented in books and news media has become more and more crucial as they struggle to obtain recognition of their rights from legislatures, courts of law, and in daily walks of life — in all of which they face stiff opposition. There is for them a strong incentive to ensure that the story told suits their needs.

Although such need to control the telling of their own story has special urgency today, it is not new. In fact efforts to be the teller outside the
bounds of their own communities have been integral to political action of First Nations people from the beginnings of immigrant settlement. One need only refer to the recorded accounts of the Nisga’a and Tsimshian delegates to the Commissioner of Indian Reserves in 1887 (B.C. 1887, 1888) and of the delegation which visited the Premier in Victoria the following year, to be reminded of the fully understood necessity to make clear the nature of their own interests, property rights, and methods of governance. Efforts to write or tell about themselves in more narrative fashion and to less reluctant listeners have also been underway for decades. The period in which this journal began saw outstanding efforts by Clutesi (1967, 1969), James Sewid (Spradley 1969), and George Manuel (Manuel and Posluns 1974). There have also been numerous relatively inexpensive booklets and manuals prepared for First Nations cultural programmes, language courses, and local school curricula.

The desire of First Nations people to speak for and about themselves to academic readers was pointedly expressed in the 1991 special issue of BC Studies, “In Celebration of Our Survival: the First Nations of B.C.,” edited by Jensen and Brooks (1991). The editors’ invitation to contributors made the point that

for years and years we as aboriginal people have been studied, observed and written about, generally by non-aboriginal writers. We have been portrayed in a variety of ways, from being ignorant savages to victims of the dominant societies and sometimes as even fascinating anthropological specimens. While all of us who have been in the feast halls and have been involved in Indian organizations have heard the correct versions of our history and our leaders’ plans and visions for the future, many people have not had the opportunity to be there and to hear this information first hand, without the biases and slants of observers and interpreters . . . (Jensen and Brooks, 9)

Did the issue achieve its purposes? Each of the articles carries an explicit criticism of the way in which the larger immigrant society imposes its perception and values upon First Nations (e.g., Atleo 1991, 48f.; Mathias and Yabsley 1991, 34f.), or the implicit reminder that the world and human experience is seen differently with First Nations people’s eyes (e.g., Sewid-Smith 1991; George 1991). But it seems to me that an academic journal and contributions to its various fields of study do not provide what is meant by those who want their voice to be widely heard. For many readers, the poetry of Ron Hamilton in that issue speaks loudest and most critically of the issue of voice.

We are struggling to find our voice, The right tone, the right pitch,
The right speed, the right code
The right thoughts, the right words
......  (Our Voice — Our Struggle, p. 7)

and,

Sadly some are prisoners of history,
Their very lives defined,
And their futures determined,
By a history compiled by their enemies.
(Our Story Not History, p. 87)

The need for First Nations people to tell about their own history and life in their own way, and the resulting challenge to anthropology's assumed role in doing this, has been sharply expressed to museums, perhaps most controversially in a boycott of The Spirit Sings exhibition at the Glenbow Museum, Calgary, 1988. The issues were complex and not centrally about the exhibit itself. The exhibit was used to focus grievances over unsettled land claims of the Lubicon people against government and industry also supporting the museum exhibition (see Harrison, Trigger, Ames 1988).

However, it is a matter of record that curators of ethnology and archaeology in B.C. have been among the vanguard in their disciplines in responding to such challenges and exploring ways of collaborating with First Nations. A totem pole preservation and restoration programme was initiated in 1949 with support from the Museum of Anthropology at UBC and the Provincial Museum in Victoria. First Nations artists have been employed on salary or contract by the latter museum (now the Royal B.C. Museum), continuously since that time. In the large B.C. museums with First Nations collections, First Nations persons regularly participate as curators and consultants in designing and preparing exhibitions (see Ames 92, 81; AFN & CMA 92, 17-18).

First Nations are also directing and managing their own museums in the province. Two of the largest were built with federal government assistance to enable housing and exhibiting assemblages of ritual property improperly confiscated during a government attempt to suppress potlatching in 1921.

The joint task force of the Assembly of First Nations and the Canadian Museums Association made a recent effort to restore to First Nations in Canada a voice and controlling interest in management of their cultural heritage. Its 1992 report endorses partnership between museums and First Nations and recommends that museums ensure First Nations have a voice in planning exhibitions, directing museum programmes, and have access to sacred objects, and opportunity for museum training, etc. From
the museum perspective the most radical recommendations were proposed guidelines for repatriation of materials in museum collections, including human remains. The task force recommended that cultural objects of "ongoing historical, traditional or cultural importance to an Aboriginal community or culture" be restored to ownership, loaned, replicated, or co-managed. The task force further recommended that governments and museums adopt the recommendations without delay. This has been done by the B.C. Museums Association and the larger public museums.

One of the consequences of this shift in policy will be, first, that personnel in institutions which have been hesitant to engage in collaboration, or resistant to the idea of repatriation, will be assisted in bringing about changes. Second, some of the cruel insults and unjust appropriations of material, especially removal of committed human remains, will be recognized and such material returned. Finally, the policy will also provide a stronger rationale for providing assistance to First Nations attempting to create and manage their own cultural institutions, whether museums or other arrangements for using cultural property.

The challenges to anthropology by First Nations for "return of voice" and for repatriation of ancestors' remains and cultural treasures are fundamentally an assertion of social power. It would be short-sighted for anyone to view the issues as only about the right to tell one's own history, possession of artifacts, and human remains. These are assuredly meaningful and valuable for many culturally specific reasons to First Nations, but their value as symbols in "dramas of moral opposition," as Paine calls them (Paine, 190 ff.), is critical. Stories, masks, and ancestors' remains become means for moving publics to urge and support political decisions of significance. Such personally meaningful things are capable of spotlighting injustice about which all can share moral indignation.

There is, in the processes by which museums and the discipline of anthropology are opening to collaboration and co-operation, a series of organizational changes to which more attention should be directed. An obvious one is the danger of co-optation of First Nations persons and programmes — taking them over within the larger institution and society in a spirit of collaboration, but diverting them in the process from pursuing and developing their own indigenous voice and converting them instead to the language, methods, and objectives of the larger society and its institutions. The pressure on all students to learn and to act in the known and approved mode is real. These times of searching for new ways of practising old crafts call for determination to think critically and with imagination (Mills, 1959).
Impact Assessment, Sustainable Development, and the Courts

Since the landmark decision of the Supreme Court in Calder, 1973, and the federal government decision to negotiate settlement of existing land claims in Canada, the significance of aboriginal title has become more and more apparent. It is clear that First Nations have unique property rights beyond those of other citizens. These include rights to lands, use of resources, and increasingly apparent rights of self-government (see Royal Commission 1993). These developments are changing the way in which governments, corporations, and other actors in the provincial economy approach issues of resource management and development. The locations, governance, and uses made by First Nations of their homelands, and their collective interest in how those lands have been and are being managed, must now be taken into account. Although negotiated settlements of terms and extent of property rights have yet to be achieved, it is clear they are substantial. The power of those interests, as yet un-negotiated, to bring development to a halt with court injunctions, already ensures that First Nations are important players in the economy.

Anthropological knowledge and research related to First Nations has gained new relevance for a wide range of planning. One approach to the issue of aboriginal rights which has gained popularity is that of co-management, in which government and local residents, both First Nations and others, are associated in conserving and regulating resource use. This has been closely linked to the ideas of sustainable development, given impetus by the 1987 report of The World Commission on Environment and Development (see M’Gonigle 1989-90; Cassidy and Dale 1988; Kew and Griggs 1991). But the most challenging applications for anthropology have come about in the fields of development impact assessment, court actions ensuing from disputes over aboriginal rights, and attempts to clarify the meaning of these rights (often resulting from deliberate infractions of challenged laws).

In a recent paper in BC Studies (nos. 91-92: 51-78), Wickwire raised some critical issues concerning impact assessment of development in B.C. She focused on the case of the Stein Valley and conflict between forestry interests on one hand and “environmentalists” and the Nlka’pamuxw Nation on the other. For archaeologists in B.C., contract work on impact assessment studies is an important source of employment mainly because provincial regulations under the Archaeology Branch require such studies (ibid., 70). Wickwire points out clearly how the regulations, which direct
attention to specific sites, overlook and thus discount the importance of entire regions which, like the Stein valley, have value as integral units surpassing that of the value of their separately considered resources.

Wickwire also addresses the problem of the objectivity or credibility of expert consultants, one especially vexatious issue in applied anthropology. She strikes at a central problem by criticizing the regulations which require forest and other industrial companies initiating development to have assessments made, and allow them to select and employ the assessor. The result, in her words, is that “those who depend upon such work become influenced by the goals of their ‘clients’” (ibid., 77). To minimize this influence, she suggests establishing an intermediary between the archaeologist and the client by creating an independent board to select and employ the archaeologist. This is a practical proposal of immediate merit.

But even with establishment of independent boards to ensure that all applied work is “arm’s length,” the problem of objectivity will remain. Such a board itself would need to be appointed by some authority and would be composed of persons who could not be assumed to be neutral. It is inescapable that political interests permeate such activities and that research has political significance. There is, in fact, no such condition as political neutrality for persons whose training, position, or knowledge has potential consequences in a contentious situation. As C. Wright Mills put it in a brilliant essay on the role of the social scientist in the post-modern world (1959, 184), “No one is ‘outside society,’ the question is where each one stands within it.”

Even though there is no provincial regulatory board requiring ethnological assessment, as there is for archaeological sites, anthropologists are engaged in social impact assessment, as Wickwire’s case study illustrates. I know of no study or attempt to survey the extent of such work, but it is my impression that most is conducted by anthropologists retained directly by Indian bands or tribal councils. And most of it has been done in preparation of statements of comprehensive land claims, as preparation of arguments for injunctions to prevent damage to property (e.g., a claim area) under threat of development, or as preparation in defence of charges for breach of hunting or fishing regulations. Use of anthropological experts by one side in a dispute usually calls forth use of other anthropologists on

3 Perhaps the recognition of a need for regulation of archaeological sites which deal explicitly with the past, but not ethnological sites, which deal with the contemporary, is another illustration of the greater readiness of non-aboriginal North Americans to accept the idealized native cultures of our myths rather than the reality of the present (Berkhofer 1970).
the other side, and they are thus joined unavoidably in the adversarial climate of a court.⁴

Such situations put the moral and intellectual strength of the individual practitioner to the test. It is therefore all the more important that academic questions and ethical problems which confront individuals become issues of concern and debate within academe.

Control of ethical standards in the discipline resides first with the individual, secondly, with the discipline itself. Recognition of this has led to adoption of codes of ethics by professional associations. These, coupled with the increased vigilance of First Nations people themselves for protection of their rights of privacy and for explicit agreements on terms and conditions of ethnological research, are certainly influential in maintaining high standards of research.

Since the appearance of Duff to give evidence in Calder, there has been an increasing use of testimony by anthropologists where questions of tribal territory, cultural traditions, history, or customary practice bearing on aboriginal rights are made part of arguments in defence of hunting, fishing, or other rights of First People. At least a score of anthropologists and archaeologists have been called by the courts, and extensive research reports have been submitted and received in evidence. These documents, transcripts of examination and cross-examination of anthropologists as expert witnesses, and the reasons for judgement delivered by the judiciary — all the business of our courts — constitute a new and important arena for discussion and for the practice of anthropology.

The importance of this applied role of anthropology in Canada has been remarked by others (Asch 1983, 201; Salisbury 1983). And there is no doubt that should the present litigious conditions surrounding First People's rights continue, anthropologists will become even more drawn into the fray as more First Nations become involved and more issues surrounding all forms of aboriginal rights became contested. But aside from the sheer increase in numbers of cases, there are developments within the courts themselves which may call for even more anthropological evidence.

⁴ This adversarial context, augmented by the allegiance fostered through the employer/employee relationship, has created an informal but explicit division among applied anthropologists in B.C. The strength of this division has been revealed to me when, as a member of an academic department, I have been asked by legal firms and government agencies for names of possible consultants knowledgeable about particular cultures. Such requests are always coupled with inquiries about previous applied experience. The issue was put starkly by one government employee who phrased the question: "Does ............... work for the Indians or government? Which side is he on?"
Recent judgements confirm that aboriginal rights cannot be defined in absolute terms, that they are unique in each case and vary from First Nation to First Nation (see, for example: Guerin, Sparrow, and Court of Appeal for B.C. Reasons for Judgment in Delgamuukw, pp. 100, 169). To the extent that this trend continues, litigants will be driven to searching out particulars of each case, and this will require that ethnographic evidence for particular customs and practices be presented.

Appeal Court of B.C. decisions in Delgamuukw and the several hunting and fishing rights appeals delivered by the court at the same time also raise another issue of concern to anthropologists. Seeking to clarify the meaning of aboriginal rights, in reference to the appeal of The Queen v. Van der Peet, Judge Lambert presents three possible methods of describing Sto:lo people’s use of salmon: (1) according to the purposes for which they fished; (2) according to their own mode of self-regulating fishing; and (3) according to the social description of their use, i.e.,

a right to live from the salmon resource and to continue to make the salmon a focus of the sustainment of the lives of the people.

(Lambert in Court of Appeal, Queen v. Van der Peet, p. 125)

Should courts accept one or more of these methods as preferred for establishing existence of an aboriginal right, more ethnographic evidence would be called for by all sides.

There seems to be a continuing expansion of the demand for anthropologists to apply their knowledge in the courts. But there are also disconcerting features of the application of the discipline in courts.

Theoretical questions and ideas which ought to find resolution within academic discourse are being given over to courts for resolution. Let me try to illustrate this with some recent examples.

In a stimulating comment on applied anthropology, made a decade ago, Asch referred to his own experience in giving evidence about Shuswap hunting practices in Regina v. Dick. He noted especially how forums and discussions during the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry of the 1970s had helped to dispose of the acculturation model as a way of thinking about socio-cultural change of First People (ibid., 202-06). Neither in the north nor among Shuswap was there evidence supporting the proposition, advanced by anthropologists, of an inevitable process of change in which indigenous people lose their own identity and customs and become Westernized.

Asch observed that, in court, as in all applied contexts, preparation and giving of evidence put our ideas and models to the test. As he put it, applied
“problems become a means to ‘rethink’ old issues and old solutions... [and] create a challenge to theory-building...” (ibid., 202). But it must be emphasized that they do so only if they are taken up and examined in the academic forums.

Anthropological research and conclusions certainly are tested in court, but in a different way than in the academic forum. We may not assume that courts, any more than the public, will reject anthropological or other theories and conclusions because they have been discredited within the discipline (see Miller et al. 1992). Asch’s observation that the acculturation model was generally rejected by the discipline as a whole was correct, but the “theory” resurfaced vigorously in the Delgamuukw trial, and is clearly evident in the trial judgement (for discussion see Culhane 1992, 70 ff.; Miller 1992, 55 ff.).

The “acculturation model” was not the only outmoded anthropological idea apparent in the Delgamuukw trial judgement, for evidence given by chiefs and anthropologists about Gitksan-Wet’suwet’en society was measured by Chief Justice McEachern against an evolutionary model of societies ranged on a scale of degrees of complexity, as if the model could be a test of truth. Such models have a venerable history in anthropology, deriving in modern times from Lewis Henry Morgan’s stages of “savagery” through “barbarism” to “civilization,” and represented more recently by “band, tribe, and chiefdom” (Service 1962). These models are out of favour now, being rejected as oversimplified and mis-representative of differences between societies.

It needs to be remarked, however, that as hypothetical models of forms of human social organization, models which may facilitate comparisons and enable testing of hypotheses about societies, they are neither true nor false. They are merely methodological tools. Models do not describe reality and are erroneously used if they are taken to describe some kind of enduring validity such as necessary stages of evolution or a process of development through which all societies must pass, or which may encompass all forms of society which exist. Such an idea was long ago discredited and dismissed from anthropology and from the thinking of students, or so we had thought. Much to our dismay it crept back into the courtroom and helped carry the day against the Gitksan-Wet’suwet’en in the Delgamuukw trial judgement. The judge accepted the old evolutionary model as correct, and he found that the Gitksan and Wet’suwet’en were a hunting-gathering society that could not be stratified, have social units owning and managing property, or have a system of law. All this he accepted in the face of abundant anthropological evidence to the contrary. The fundamental logical error was
committed of deducing an absolute truth from a tentative proposition. Courts, wishing to be precise, may accept too readily a proposition from anthropology which is anything but precise and proven. In the face of the court's expectation of precision, anthropologists need to defend and maintain the need for their own field of knowledge to be imprecise. To put it another way, we need to defend the value of qualitative data and be prepared to point out the error of false precision.

The implications of having hypothetical propositions and taxonomic models from anthropology become fixed in meaning by the courts is disturbing. The danger is real. Here is another example. In the trial of *The Queen v. Van der Peet*, a sequence of ideal types—band, tribe, chiefdom—delineating an evolutionary model focused on forms of political organization was presented. The model proposes an association of various degrees of cultural complexity with each form or stage. In the Reasons for Judgment of the British Columbia Court of Appeal in *Van der Peet*, Justice Macfarlane (concurred with by Mr. Justice Taggart) referred to this passage from the trial judgement:

Anthropological and archaeological evidence was in conflict. This court accepts the evidence of Dr. Stryd and John Dewhurst in preference to Dr. Daly and therefore accepts that the *Sto:lo were a band culture as opposed to a tribal*. While bands were guided by siem [high-born leaders] or prominent families, no regularized trade in salmon existed in aboriginal times.

*(Appeal Court of B.C., Reasons for Judgment, *The Queen v. Van der Peet*, p. 82, my emphasis)*

Once more the "truth" is deduced from the model — being only at a "band" level or organization the *Sto:lo* could have had no regularized trade! In anthropology the question of the nature of Coast Salish (including *Sto:lo*) political organization is a matter of long uncertainty and under current debate (see Miller 1989; Tollefson 1987). Whether critical in the decisions or not, misapplication of an anthropological model seems to have helped to reverse the acquittal of Van der Peet and have her convicted of unlawfully selling salmon.

An even greater gap between the way ideas are used in anthropology and in courts may exist in respect to the tendency of courts to make conditions precise, "to mark fine line quantitative distinctions between aspects of things [anthropologists] would call qualities" (Asch 1983, 208). Anthropologists, therefore, must view with some uneasiness the way in which these judgements are engaging the problem of determining what constitutes an aboriginal right. Of the three options Judge Lambert introduces (see above), he prefers the "social description," and although there was
no unanimity among the other Appeal Court judges in Van der Peet as to
the most suitable method of describing an aboriginal right, in their struggles
to fix meaning to the idea, they use terms and ideas which have similar
qualities. Judge Wallace writes that to qualify as an aboriginal right a
custom or action must be shown to be “integral to the aboriginal culture
and traditional way of life” (ibid., Wallace on Van der Peet, 111); Judge
Macfarlane writes “integral to the distinctive culture” and “integral to the
organized society” (ibid., Macfarlane on Van der Peet, 87).

Anthropology in its popular versions has blithely encouraged common-
sense thinking that points to one or more features as essential to a society.
If such a direction of thinking were to continue in the courts and the test
of aboriginal rights to become whether or not a custom is integral to a
society, courts would be unlikely to accept evidence of its mere existence
as sufficient for proof of a right. That goes against common sense. What
might be called for would be a quantitative summary of action, which
again, as Asch notes, anthropologists have been reluctant to produce (ibid.,
209), and in which classical ethnographies are notably deficient. Never-
theless, experts would likely be called to summarize existing ethnographic
accounts for presence or absence of elements of culture and to pronounce
on their essential value for the culture in question, again relying on, at best,
an erroneous common-sense notion that the essence of a society can be
located in some precise bundles of data.

The possibility that our courts might be turned into arenas where anthro-
pologists and lawyers would repeat the old empty arguments about func-
tionalism would be laughable were it not for the bearing of the issue on the
very existence of First Nations.

In addition to the differences in the way theoretical issues are dealt with
by courts and academic anthropology, there are also differences in how
they regard data or evidence. Chief Justice McEachern’s expressed diffi-
culty with the sheer quantity of evidence presented to the court (Supreme
Court of B.C. 1991-93) alerts us to one such difference. A great deal of
effort was expended collecting and presenting the plaintiffs’ ethnographic
evidence, which, while it has other uses and values, may not have been in a
form most effective in court (Elias 1988, 7-8). The problem is not with
the quantity of evidence alone but the nature of what is meaningful to the
court.

An obvious answer to the apparently growing need for ethnographic
evidence is for anthropologists to assist First Nations people in bringing
more evidence about their customary practices directly to the courts. How-
ever, that is not in itself a solution. The Gitksan and Wet’suwet’en chiefs
did this only to see their own presentations discounted, along with evidence of anthropologists who, in the words of the trial judge, “were on the side of the plaintiffs” (Supreme Court of B.C. 1991, 49 f.).

There is a lesson here to be heeded by anthropologists, not as proponents of one side or the other, but as scientists concerned with how human social institutions operate. The lesson lies in the fact that what is for anthropology an unsurpassed ethnographic record of empirical data given in the words and under the direction of the people themselves, became, in the eyes of the court, a repetitive, biased, and ultimately not to be believed account. Such an outcome, amounting implicitly to denial of the existence of living people standing before the bench and sitting daily in court, imposed a fearful burden upon Gitksan and Wet’suwet’en witnesses, making the task of giving evidence itself a severe personal test (Wilson-Kenni 1992, 7-11). But the crucial question is: why should such witnesses be prized informants for ethnographers yet scorned in a court of law for providing the same information?

Asad provides an answer which merits reflection when he writes, in reference to presenting anthropological analyses:

we should remember to distinguish between legal facts and social practices that might be relevant to the law, for the former have an institutional force that the latter lack. Western legal discourse participates in processes of power by creating modern realities of a special kind, and it should not be thought of as a form of representation that can be subverted by scholarly argument. (Asad, 1991, 321)

Anthropologists cannot assume that their rules of evidence hold in the court. It is as if, in order to be understood, the anthropologists must explain their rules — theoretical assumptions and methods — before presenting their evidence.

The confounding and distorting of anthropological knowledge has profound implications for the discipline. It must be the responsibility of anthropologists to alert themselves to the dangers of being misunderstood and to the necessity of ensuring that they use their own concepts and data accurately. Putting anthropology to work anywhere, including the courts, requires first that we ourselves understand what we are doing, and second that we enable others to understand it. This requires bringing what we do as applied anthropologists under the scrutiny of our own discipline. What is delivered to the band council or the court should also receive the critical examination and discussion of our peers within the discipline itself. Too often the results of applied research are left solely to the client — industrial company, government agency, First Nation, or court record — as if it were
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a finite product and an end in itself. But such clients assess and use research reports with their own criteria and ends in mind. Impact assessments and other applied work would gain in quality were they more regularly the focus of academic discussion in seminars, conferences, and journals. To this end, all researchers should secure publication rights of their work, and when opportunities arise place it before others in the discipline. BC Studies, with its multi-disciplinary coverage and a constant eye to the British Columbia significance of scholarly work, has a continuing role to play in critical assessment of applied social sciences.

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