Franz Boas Refracted Through His Local Collaborators: A Legacy with Implications for Collaborative Archaeologies

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Abstract

Collaborative ethnographies and community-based archaeologies have become more commonplace throughout anthropology in recent decades. Well over a century ago, Franz Boas initiated collaborations with Indigenous community members. Some of his Indigenous collaborators became recognized scholars themselves, such as George Hunt (Tlingit/Kwakwaka’wakw) and William Beynon (Tsimshian). He also involved James Teit, a settler from the Shetlands who married a Nlaka’pamux woman and became an exemplary anthropologist and advocate for Indigenous rights. Here, I will discuss how these close collaborations transformed Boas’s thinking, with ramifications throughout the discipline. In these examples, we find a dialectical interplay whereby Indigenous groups actively sought to use the anthropological medium to their needs; in turn, anthropologists like Boas and Teit recognized the scholarly need for activism to aid Indigenous groups under the constraints of colonial rule. In important ways, however, Boas did not meet the standards that his own ideas set forth. These partnerships from over a century ago still have implications for contemporary collaborations as instructive histories of successes and failures, for both theory in the expansion of interpretative potential and range and for anthropological praxis in the context of settler-colonial relationships.

Keywords:
collaboration, ethnography, history, archaeology, cultural relativism, Northwest Coast, Inuit, Kwakwaka’wakw

Introduction

In the last few decades, collaborative ethnographies and community-based archaeologies have become more commonplace throughout anthropology. Yet, this type of fieldwork is not recent, but is instead an ongoing praxis in anthropology that extends back to Franz Boas himself and his founding of cultural anthropology. In these early collaborations, there was a dialogical interaction whereby Indigenous groups actively sought to use the anthropological medium for their needs; in turn, anthropologists like Boas recognized the need for activism to aid Indigenous groups under the constraints of colonial rule. The back-and-forth reciprocity involved in these collaborations served well for each side. While Boas is an early exemplar of collaboration, as I will emphasize in the following, he did not always meet the ethical standards that he set out in his theories and writings. In part, this may be seen as anachronistic in reassessing Boas from the standards of contemporary practice and ethics that has built on much work since. Yet, it is apparent with the example of James Teit, who set standards for collaboration that were well ahead of his time. Boas involved James Teit to conduct ethnographies of Interior Plateau peoples. Teit was a settler from the Shetlands who lived among Interior Salishan communities. Teit became an exemplary anthropologist, and he was an advocate for Indigenous rights, as was Boas. Here, I will discuss how these close collaborations with local informants transformed Boas’s thinking, with ramifications throughout the field of anthropology. Furthermore, I argue that these early relationships with Indigenous peoples can still inform contemporary anthropologists and archaeologists concerning their research partnerships with Indigenous and descendant communities.
These partnerships from over a century ago still have implications for contemporary collaborations as instructive histories for both theory in the expansion of interpretative potential and range and for anthropological praxis in the context of settler-colonial relationships. In the following, I will discuss Boas’s intensive engagements, focusing on those interactions with Indigenous peoples whereby Boas’s thinking was transformed. I will begin early in his career, during his time among the Inuit, which led to his interest in anthropology as a discipline. Then, the focus will be on his relationship with George Hunt and the Kwakwaka’wakw. Finally, I will turn to his involvement with James Teit, and consider his collaborative methods in contrast to Boas’s. In so doing, this series of engagements shows the evolving thought and practice of Boas, as well as some of his limitations. Lastly, I will turn to how these examples of collaboration have set the foundation for contemporary archaeological collaborations.

Just as Boas, for his dissertation, had studied how light is refracted through water, here I will assess how in his later studies, his thought is refracted through his local collaborators.

Collaborations in anthropology

In 2005, Luke Eric Lassiter proclaimed the establishing of a ‘collaborative anthropology’. He outlined protocols and procedures that indicated that Indigenous peoples, for instance, were no longer simply objects of study, but participants in such studies. Increasingly, with each decade, Indigenous peoples have read what was written about their culture and have begun to critique what had been presented as authoritative knowledge about them in anthropological literature. Lassiter aimed to reorient such relationships for ethnographic scholars. He defined collaborative anthropology as ‘an approach to ethnography that deliberately and explicitly emphasizes collaboration [with community members] at every point in the ethnographic process, without veiling it – from project conceptualization, to fieldwork, and especially, through the writing process’ (Lassiter 2005, 16, emphasis original).

Yet, with the work of Franz Boas, it is clear that deep collaborations between scholars and local Indigenous peoples have been established since the late 1800s – well over a hundred years prior. Boas worked closely with Indigenous informants throughout the Northwest Coast of North America, some of whom became independently recognized scholars in anthropology, such as George Hunt (Tlingit/Kwakwaka’wakw) and William Beynon (Tsimshian). Indeed, Lassiter (2005, 85) recognizes Boas’s and Hunt’s collaboration first in his discussion of the ‘precedents for a collaborative ethnography’. He also highlights the earlier work of Lewis Henry Morgan (1904) with Háí-sa-noán’da (Ely Parker), of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois).1

A few years after his article, Lassiter inaugurated the journal Collaborative Anthropologies to account for the increasing amount of research that aims to be collaborative with Indigenous or descendant peoples. This mainly has focused on ethnographic studies, but the journal has also included archaeological research (e.g., Murray et al. 2009). Indeed, Celeste Ray (2009) remarked that archaeologists have often played a ‘central role in pioneering collaborative research in anthropology’ due to working with descendant peoples and their material heritage.

In a commentary on Lassiter’s original article, Sjoerd Jaarsma (2005, 98–99) asks: ‘Yet, if early ethnographers like Boas collaborated closely with their key informants, why did this not develop into accepted ethnographic practice?’ He emphasized the difficulty of the process, in that it requires ‘long-term field relations’ to become ‘multi-stranded’. Indeed, productive collaborations do require commitments and engagements between those involved regarding multiple aspects of the project, as I will discuss in the following.

Franz Boas had several important collaborations with Indigenous peoples over his career. First, let us turn to Boas’s first anthropological experiences among the Inuit.

Boas among the Inuit

Soon after completing his doctorate in physics at the University of Kiel in 1881, Boas aimed to expand his research scope, turning from the physical sciences to a more geographical focus. He planned to engage with Indigenous peoples such as the Inuit to understand their migrations throughout the landscape of Baffin Island in Canada (Fig. 1). He persuaded his father to fund his expedition and arranged for a series of articles to be written about his adventures for a newspaper, the Berliner Tageblatt. Early in the fieldwork, Boas had started calling the Inuit of Baffin Island ‘my Eskimos’ (King 2019, 21), which does not suggest a relationship of collaboration. This reveals his initial attitude as one of utility, that the Inuit served merely as

1 Although, Morgan later provided us with a highly Western ethnocentric hierarchy of cultural evolution with Ancient Society (Morgan 1964) that Boas would challenge directly.
objects of his geographic study. At another point, he referred to his main informant, Signa, as ‘my servant’ – also certainly not a term for a collaborator (King 2019, 25).

Yet, during his year-long expedition living among them, Boas became quite impressed by the Inuit, especially regarding how they managed to thrive in a difficult environment that most peoples of the world avoided. Boas came to recognize that the Inuit should not be treated generically as just the focus of a study, that they were not simply cultural manifestations that were determined by the natural arctic landscape. Rather than considering them only as a collective, he realized that each group was complex, that they did not share the same common experiences, but were individuals with particular biographical histories. For instance, he learned that Signa was from another group originally, Davis Strait, a people that hunted deer among interior lakes. Signa knew several languages from his travels and interactions with other peoples. It seemed, the Inuit were not as simple as Boas originally conceived, either in their historical experiences or with how they lived in the arctic environment. His conceptions of Indigenous peoples, and of humanity in general, began to expand. As Gladys Reichard (1938; quoted in Harris 1968, 266) has stated:

‘His life with the Eskimo made him change radically his predisposition to assign geographic influence as primary to the development of culture... In other words, he was taught to realize the significance of culture by the Eskimo, and the environment seemed to him to be at least secondary. He concluded that they did things in spite of rather than because of the environment.’

In a letter from 1883, composed during this period of fieldwork, Boas wrote about what he learned from his collaborators, which shows that his experience with the Inuit set in motion a change in his thinking towards cultural relativity in general:

‘I often ask myself what advantages our “good society” possesses over that of the “savages” and the more I see of their customs, I find that we really have no right to look down upon them contemptuously. Where among us is there such hospitality as here?... We should not censure them for the conventions and superstitions, since we “highly educated” people are relatively much worse.... The Eskimos are now sitting alert, their mouths full, eating raw seal liver, and the blood stains on the other page will tell you how I was assisting them. I believe that if this trip has a significant impact on me as a thinking person, then it is the strengthening of my notion of the relativity of all education and the conviction of how the value of people lies in the guidance close to their heart [Herzensbildung], which I find, or miss here, just as at home, and that thus all service which a person can render to humanity must depend on the furthering of truth, which may be sweet or bitter for humanity’ (Boas 1998, in Müller-Wille 1998, 159, emphasis added).

This appears to be his first mention of ‘relativity’ regarding ethnographic fieldwork. He later first published about relativity in 1887:

‘It is my opinion that the main object of ethnological collections should be the dissemination of the fact that civilization is not absolute, but that it is relative, and that our ideas and conceptions are true only so far as our civilization goes’ (Boas 1989, 66, quoted in Greenhouse 2017, 1061).
This interest in relativity actually precedes Albert Einstein’s (e.g., 1905; 1907; 1911) work on relativity in the physical sciences. Einstein emphasized that our conceptions and measurements of external reality were relative to our spatiotemporal position. While the speed of light was a constant, space and time were linked and could be warped in perspective, especially in relation to the gravitational pull of massive objects. For physicists and others in the natural sciences, this was a conceptual earthquake. It shook the discipline and even the imaginations of the public. For Boas’s insight, however, it appears that the social sciences have taken longer to absorb the implications. Yet, his relativism was no less Copernican (Fig. 2). Like the starlights that Einstein predicted would be distorted by the gravity of the sun during an eclipse, Boas’s conception of relativity maintained that anthropological perspectives can also be skewed concerning cultures under study, biased by their own societal outlook. This allowed for the recognition of ethnocentrism on part of scholars that their ‘objectivity’ is shaped by their subjective and Western standpoints. Carol Greenhouse (2017, 1063) discussed how these ideas spread further through the publications of his students, especially Ruth Benedict (2019), wherein they presented a ‘challenge to the boundaries of adjacent disciplines – particularly history and psychology, but also philosophy and literature.’ Recently, Wade Davis (2021) has emphasized that Boas’s turn to relativity was momentous, a paradigm shift, changing the way many see the world:

‘As a scholar, Boas ranks with Einstein, Darwin and Freud as one of the four intellectual pillars of modernity. His core idea, distilled in the notion of cultural relativism, was a radical departure, as unique in its way as was Einstein’s theory of relativity in the discipline of physics. Everything Boas proposed ran against orthodoxy. It was a shattering of the European mind, the sociological equivalent of the splitting of the atom’ (Davis 2021).

The comparison Davis makes is worth considering. Each of these were momentous as revolutions, but also as decentrings. Nicolaus Copernicus shifted our view of ourselves in the solar system, that the sun does not revolve around the earth, rather the earth revolves around the sun. Charles Darwin upended the notion that we as humans are the most important biological species, whereby instead we are an outcome of natural selection that does not teleologically favour humans at the top of an earthly chain of being. As well, Sigmund Freud toppled over our view of ourselves as individuals that were in command of our own minds; his notion of the unconscious and the death drive fundamentally altered how we see humans as subjects in the world. Here, we can add Boas (chronologically before Einstein and Freud) to a list of those that have subverted our thinking in paradigmatic ways. He decentred Western European colonial culture as not being at the apex of human societies, as the ‘civilized’ presiding over ‘barbarians’ and ‘savages’; indeed, it is this notion in Morgan (1964) that he challenged the most.

Often not much is made of this coincidence of interest in the relativity of our perceptions. Some, like Patrick Wolfe (1999, 58) minimize the parallel here between Einstein and Boas as just ‘superficially noticeable,’ arguing that Einstein’s theories merely ‘shared nomenclature’ with Boas, as physical relativity rested on an ‘ultimate invariance’, the speed of light, while cultural relativity had a ‘fragmentary structure’. Yet, both Boas and Einstein maintained that our views of reality are affected by our vantage points within the world: for Einstein, it is our physical standpoint relative to other objects from our position in space and time; for Boas, it is our social perspective relative to other cultures from our experiences with the environment and history.

In 2020, a conference session was held precisely to discuss this link between Einstein and Boas. Called ‘Com-

2 It is known that the two had communicated at least once. Einstein wrote to Boas in April 1938 seeking his help in getting a professor’s visa for a colleague, Hugh Ilts, who needed to escape Austria as Hitler had annexed the region the month prior. He wrote:

‘In such troubled times as these, in which all men of influence are deluged with letters and appeals for help, it pains me doubly to annoy you with the affairs of a single man. In the case of Professor Ilts of Bruü, however, I must make an exception… I believe that it is our duty to do our best to rescue this man while there is still time.’

With the help of colleagues, Boas was able to comply, offering access to positions at Washington State University and later Fredericksburg School in Virginia (American Philosophical Society 2006).
Comparative Relativities’, they focused on the ‘significance of multi-scalar relativising practices of perception, interpretation and valuation’ in the early 1900s. An orienting question for the session concerned ‘How was a “commonplace relativism” instrumental in bringing Boas and Einstein to...their conclusions about relations between human beings, and time and space?’ (Hayes 2020). Such sessions indicate that not all follow Wolfe’s diminishment of the similarities of relativity between Boas and Einstein.

No doubt, the influences of Boas’s study over the years helped this transition to cultural relativism. He had studied Immanuel Kant and his philosophical anthropology, Johann Gottfried von Herder and his discourses on language and folk cultures and Alexander von Humboldt and his accounts of travels throughout the world. This original and revolutionary insight, with its origins with Boas among the Inuit, has fully become integrated as part of the anthropological perspective. George Stocking (1966) emphasizes that Boas’s relativization of the culture concept into something that is pluralistic in its possibilities established modern anthropology. As Regna Darnell has put it, succinctly with her book title, And Along Came Boas (Darnell 1998), indicating how substantially he changed the field thereafter. This is so much the case that our understanding is complicated by how deeply Boasian ideas are simply considered common anthropological ideas now, hardly requiring attribution.

So, in his first stint of fieldwork as an accidental anthropologist, through interactions with his local guides, Boas gained a new perspective that altered his outlook and indeed that of anthropology thereafter. His later work with other collaborators, such as George Hunt, in the Northwest Coast of North America would continue to influence his thinking.

Collaborating with George Hunt among the Kwakwaka’wakw

George Hunt was born with the heritage of two cultures. Initially raised in the fur trade outpost of his father, he later lived among the Tlingit communities of his mother (Fig. 3). He even did the long training required to become a shaman. Eventually, he married into a noble Kwakwaka’wakw family (Berman 1994, 484–485). Hunt had helped Boas acquire masks for an exposition in Chicago in 1893. Hunt then invited him to attend a potlatch in his adopted community, at Fort Rupert, B.C., which Boas accepted. To proceed in studying the Kwakwaka’wakw, Boas himself potlatched the chiefs with molasses and hardtack biscuits, outlining his plan of study. In the process, he acquired a name, Heiltsakuls, which translates as ‘The One who Says the Right Thing’ (Wilner 2013, 90). Indeed, the Kwakwaka’wakw wanted him to say the right things about them to the world (Wilner 2013). That invitation led to a decades-long collaboration between the two. Hunt would himself record over 10,000 pages of notes for Boas to work with. Boas initially just acknowledged Hunt’s contributions in such publications, but he would later publish with him as co-author. In fact, around 80% of Kwakiutl Texts, both series (Boas/Hunt 1905; Boas et al. 1906), were actu-

Figure 3: George Hunt in 1898. Photo: Wikipedia Commons.

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3 As Charles King (2019, 19) remarked, ‘Kiel turned out to have a particular focus on the practical application of these ideas’ from these thinkers.

4 In the literature, Kwakwaka’wakw peoples have been called Kwakiutl, as named in Boas’s work. Yet, he was working with a smaller group within the broader community, and so the name was misapplied to the whole. In recent decades, the literature reflects the proper title of Kwakwaka’wakw.
ally written by Hunt. This collaboration of Boas and Hunt ultimately contributed to the Kwakwaka’wakw being one of the most well-documented and studied cultures of anthropology.

Most accounts of this history focus on Boas and the work he produced. Yet, Isaiah Lorado Wilner (2013) has argued how George Hunt and the Kwakwaka’wakw chiefs were not simply passive recipients agreeing to Boas’s requests to study their culture. Rather, they saw Boas as an opportunity to more carefully present their culture to others. As Wilner (2013, 98) put it, phrasing Hunt’s efforts in shamanic terms, Hunt had a ‘power’ to bring Boas to the Kwakwaka’wakw and initiate this collaboration:

‘Hunt’s gift – Hunt’s power – was the ability to find a receptor, to reach out through the world and grasp hold of one man who, for once, came to listen. Boas was Hunt’s friend on the other side. He held the potential to receive Hunt’s point of view, relaying the message to the West.’

Wilner regards Boas as a cultural relativist at this point, given his ethnographic experiences with the Inuit, and makes the case that the ideas of Boas transformed even further by engaging with Hunt (Fig. 4). The Kwakwaka’wakw received him as a cultural relativist, but ‘They sent him home as a universalist’ (Wilner 2013, 98):

‘Boas transmitted to the West an Indigenous vision of human life as a state of transformation. Whereas previous anthropologists saw Native people as drones copying an outdated code, Boas portrayed them as innovators of their own modernity. Turning from culture as a finished product toward culture as an ongoing process, Boas broke the boundaries of Western thought, offering a global vision of a dynamic humanity’ (Wilner 2013, 99).

The culmination of this trajectory of thought finds expression in *The Mind of Primitive Man* (Boas 1911), a major book that challenged many white supremacist notions and the rationalizations of eugenicist thinking. He showed how all cultures are expressions of a common humanity. In so doing, Boas disrupted the prevailing categories of difference in his time:

Boas broke out of this binary. He depicted humanity as one, moving Western thought away from its obsession with difference toward an embrace of diversity. This was a vision of a global humanity for a global age, and it shared more in common with Hunt than with Herder’ (Wilner 2013, 100).

Wilner (2013, 87) wrote that these new ideas ‘did not belong to Boas alone,’ but rather ‘emerged from his relationships with Indigenous Americans.’ To this, I would add that his collaborations with other Indigenous groups as well, such as the Inuit and Tsimshian, also helped to shape his perspective.6

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6 As part of the Jesup Expedition, Boas also initiated ethnographic fieldwork in Tsimshian territory, relying upon local Indigenous collaborators such as Henry W. Tate and later William Beynon. They focused on the mythology and legends of Tsimshian peoples of northern British Columbia. With Henry W. Tate, he produced two works, *Tsimshian Texts* and *Tsimshian Mythology* (Boas 1902; 1916; Maud 2000; see also 1989). Beynon had worked with Marius Barbeau earlier in collecting myths and legends, resulting in *Tsimshian Narratives*, volumes 1 and 2 (Barbeau/Beynon 1987a; 1987b). Beynon began working with Boas in 1932 to edit and improve upon the Tate materials, and he ultimately provided Boas with over 250 narratives from his ethnographic fieldwork (Halpin 1978; Winter 1984). So, in listening to critiques from Beynon, Boas broadened his understandings of Tsimshian oral narratives. These collaborations established Beynon as one of the major Indigenous scholars among the Tsimshian (e.g., Beynon 1941; 2000).
As Marianne Nicolson (2005, 1) emphasized, the information collected by Boas and Hunt, was a valuable resource to contemporary Kwakwaka’wakw, especially regarding efforts to overturn the federal ban on the potlatch. Colonial officials argued that the potlatch encouraged celebrations, especially taking time away from economic work at the canneries or hop fields. Moreover, they opposed the ‘giving away’ of various items and foods as opposing the Protestant values of work and thrift. Yet, the ban on the potlatch, a ceremony in which much of Northwest Coast governance occurs as well as other practices and arts, was detrimental to the Kwakwaka’wakw and other cultures throughout the Northwest. Through potlatch gifting and ceremony, they created bonds of social solidarity. In his early negotiations with the Kwakwaka’wakw chiefs, Boas promised to use his studies to present a deeper understanding of the practice to others in Canada and the world, with the hope that the ban might be lifted. Indeed, Boas (1897; quoted in Bracken 1997, 137) wrote opinion pieces in a major regional newspaper, the Victoria Province, advocating on behalf of Indigenous groups for the potlatch, stating: ‘Unfortunately the meaning of the potlatch [sic] has been much misunderstood by whites; else, I believe, the attempt would not have been made to abolish it by law...’ His efforts did not help lift the ban, which continued for several more decades, yet his activism for the Kwakwaka’wakw community is commendable. Plus, he and Hunt documented the potlatch deeply, such that it created a corpus of work ready for further study. Even while acknowledging Boas’s shortcomings, Irving Goldman (1980, 334) remarked that the ‘very authenticity of the Kwakiutl ethnographic materials has proved to be a barrier to accessibility.’ Meaning, their research into Kwakwaka’wakw language and culture was so deep and close to the Indigenous views that it constrained some broader understandings. That, in itself, is quite the example for scholars engaging in collaborations with any community.

It is worth considering the effect of deep collaboration here between Hunt and Boas. Their writing provided material for much Western philosophizing, especially about the potlatch. The Kwakwaka’wakw ceremony became emblematic of how elaborate gift-exchanges could be, in addition to their expressions of connections with social, economic and political aspects of their societies. These detailed descriptions launched numerous studies and theorizing about the nature of gifts and exchange relations. Boas and Hunt’s work influenced many, including Thorstein Veblen’s (2007) notion of ‘conspicuous consumption,’ Marcel Mauss’s (1990) theory of the gift exchange and David Graeber’s (2011; 2014) theory of the moral grounds of economic relations. Particularly due to Mauss’s study, the potlatch became of interest well beyond anthropology, influencing Georges Bataille’s (1991) work on gift exchanges with The Accursed Share. This body of research also influenced anti-capitalist perspectives of the Situationists like Raoul Vaneigem (2012) and Guy Debord (1994) (the latter even developed a French journal in the 1950s called Potlatch (Debord 1996)). These studies, still ultimately anchored in Boas’s and Hunt’s work, continued to be elaborated upon by philosophers such as Jacques Derrida (1992) and Jean Baudrillard (1993), as well as philosophical anthropologists such as Maurice Godelier (1999) and Marcel Hénaff (2019). This list is far from complete, but I allude to this history to suggest that Boas and Hunt’s influence resonated around the globe and has had an enduring impact on anthropological and philosophical thought.

For many theorists, the potlatch presented an alternate way to form economic relationships, beyond those viewed only in utilitarian terms or for calculations for self-gain. As Wilner remarked, ‘The potlatch challenged capitalism. Both were systems of exchange. Whereas capitalism exchanged everything up, the potlatch exchanged everything down’ (Wilner 2013, 92). Here, Wilner gets it right. Unfortunately, many accounts of the potlatch highlight the destructive forms of the potlatch and their enhancements of hierarchical relations among elites, while not considering the substantial effects of colonialism upon the practice. Most notably, one must account for the establishment of the fur trade, the influence of which long predated ethnographic observations of the ceremony (Masco 1995). In any case, such theorizings of the gift had their origins in the detailed descriptions resulting from the collaborations of Boas and Hunt.

**James Teit, ethnographer of Interior Plateau cultures**

Another important figure that Boas worked with was James Teit (Fig. 5). He provides an example of some limitations to Boas’s thinking, and a comparison of their methods highlights their contrasts. As a Shetlander, Teit was from the islands from the northeasternmost region of the British Isles, a people with Scandinavian ancestry...
that set them apart from nearby Scotland and England. In the mid-1800s, Teit immigrated to western Canada, living in the middle of Interior Salish territory, where he was part of a settler minority amid Nlaka’pamux, St’át’imc and Secwépemc peoples. He learned their languages, participated in their customs and even married into Nlaka’pamux community, having wed Lucy Antko. So, while James Teit was a collaborator that was also a settler, Teit was thoroughly immersed in the Indigenous cultures that he lived among. When Boas first met him, he wrote in his letters of 1894: 'The young man, James Teit is a treasure. He’s a red-headed Scotsman who is married to an Indian woman. He knows a great deal about the Indians and was especially kind. I engaged him right off' (Rohner 1969, 140).

Within two days of their meeting, Boas knew that Teit was capable of writing an ethnography about the Nlaka’pamux people. Indeed, Teit sent him basically half of the ethnography within five months. Over the years, Teit (1900; 1906; 1909) produced three major ethnographies, concerning the Nlaka’pamux, St’át’imc and Secwépemc, along with much other scholarship (see Sprague 1991). In a review, John Swanton (1907) referred to his first ethnography, *The Thompson Indians of British Columbia,* as ‘one of the very best monographs on any one single tribe’; further, Edward Sapir said that Teit’s three ethnographies were ‘models of their kind’ (quoted in Wickwire 2019, 160). Now, due to the work of Wendy Wickwire (2019; see also 1998; 2001), who has produced an excellent biography about James Teit, it is clear that he had actually engaged in ethnographic work before meeting Franz Boas, as part of his own interest in the peoples he lived among.

While they were collaborators, Boas’s methods were quite a bit different from Teit’s. Boas visited the Northwest Coast often, but episodically, usually during the summer months. Furthermore, Boas typically travelled to various places, going from community to community, interviewing multiple informants. Typically, Boas used Chinook Jargon to communicate, which was a regional trade language limited in vocabulary. In contrast, Teit was a part of the community and spoke their language. Teit also helped those communities by serving as a translator during their discussions with provincial and federal authorities.

In turn, Teit also helped to translate and explain settler concepts for the Interior Plateau chiefs. He explained Western notions of property and corresponding laws, and he aided them in their responses to various colonial claims. In this way, he was not just an anthropologist, but also an activist and working on behalf of Indigenous peoples (Campbell 1994; Wickwire 1998; 2019; Zumwalt 2022). With chiefs of the Interior Plateau, Teit travelled to Victoria, B.C., and to Ottawa, Ontario, to meet with governmental officials, to help the chiefs make their case for land claims and to relay their concerns about the reserve system.

It is worthwhile to consider the major differences in the approaches of Boas and Teit. Whereas Boas emphasized cultural traditions,7 Teit recognized the contribution of individuals to their cultures. For instance, in his submitted writings, Teit identified individual storytellers, acknowledging which families or communities they were from. Boas, however, removed individual and family names for publication, as if they were unimportant. As well, Teit identified individuals in photograph captions, while Boas subsequently redacted those, substituting their self-identified names with generic terms such as ‘Thompson woman’ – essentially labelling the person as just a token example of their culture. Moreover, Teit had titled his ethnography, *N-kla-Kap-mugh* (Nlaka’pamux), which is their own name for their culture. Franz Boas retitled it *The Thompson Indians of British Columbia,* using instead

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7 This is in contrast to what he had learned about the diversity of individuals among the Inuit years earlier, as discussed above.
the name of the river to identify them.8 Another important distinction was that Teit emphasized the living, still ongoing culture, whereas Boas was more concerned with precontact traditions.9

One major difference concerns how to regard the ancestral dead of these communities. Teit refused to excavate their cemeteries to provide skeletal material for physical anthropological measurements and studies. Boas did excavate without permission, yet it is clear that he had some qualms about it, writing in 1888 that ‘it is most unpleasant work to steal from a grave, but what is the use, someone has to do it...’ (Thomas 2000, 59).

Boas had even paid George Hunt to collect skulls and funerary objects from cemeteries; in letters, Hunt would recommend the best times to do so, as during Nuu-chah-nulth whaling and fur-seal expeditions, since there would be fewer people around (Bruchac 2014, 160).10 Friedrich Pöhl (2008) argued that Boas maintained a separation between his ethics and his science, or that the importance of science overrode ethical concerns. This is clear from his thinking, quoted above, that for science ‘someone has to do it’.11

It might be common to think that Franz Boas was just a product of his time, that when excavating burials without permissions of Indigenous groups he just did not know any better. Yet, in the comparison with Teit, that argument does not hold. James Teit was also a man of that time. Yet, Teit knew that it was improper to disturb their cemeteries, especially without permission.

James Teit also relied heavily on multiple informants. While Boas interviewed many people, he did tend to concentrate on particular figures, such as Hunt and others; he also tended to off-load much of the data collection to his collaborators, as he did with Hunt for the Kwakwaka’wakw and with Henry Tate and William Beynon for the Tsimshian.

Franz Boas was an early exemplar of collaborative anthropology, and in the following I draw upon Boas’s and Teit’s experiences as well as those of collaborative anthropologists of recent decades to highlight best practices for collaborations among archaeologists. Collaborative archaeologies have been increasingly common since the new century. While noting it was an expanding aspect of archaeology, Stephanie Moser et al. (2002) noted early on that it ‘remains a vague concept, with many assuming that it [merely] refers to consultation with local communities.’ Yet, it requires more in-depth involvement with descendant communities and local publics than that. Several major articles, books and themed journal issues have focused on collaborative archaeologies, essentially outlining a set of best practices.12

First, when considering the practices of Boas and Teit, it is clear that their collaborations involved relationships with Indigenous peoples as part of scholarly work in the field, and it is not akin to the conditions of a laboratory. One cannot isolate cultural phenomena and test hypotheses in controlled settings in attempts to narrow down the factors involved, as is common with the methods of the natural sciences. The point is, archaeologists cannot separate themselves from the socio-political and cultural contexts in which they operate (Shanks/Tilley 1988; 1992). As Bent Flyvbjerg (2001) has well stated, the inability to attain full objectivity in the social sciences is not to be seen as a deficiency, but a potential strength. He referred to such social scientists, in a Freudian allusion, as having ‘physics envy’. Indeed, diversity of subjectivities is rather an advantage of social sciences, Flyvbjerg argued, which

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8 In 1808, Simon Fraser named the river after David Thompson, who was his colleague that had explored the Columbia River to the east. Thompson had never been to the river that bears his name. The Nlaka’pamux continued to be called the ‘Thompson Indians’ in anthropological and other literatures for decades since Boas’s editorial attribution.
9 These contrasts are drawn from Wickwire’s (2019) study of Teit, especially pages 171–79.
10 Boas had also wanted to remove skulls from the graves he encountered while with the Inuit in Pangnirtung Fjord, but they prevented him. He wrote in a letter that ‘Unfortunately I cannot take away the skulls that were in the two graves, because of my Eskimos’ (Zumwalt 2019, 118).
11 Boas further noted in his journal in 1888 that ‘Besides having scientific value these skeletons are worth money,’ as he sold those human remains to museums to further support of his research (Rohner 1969, 90).
requires a focus on multidimensional forms of social power, as opposed to the cause-effect relations of energy in the physical sciences. Similarly, for archaeology, collaborations with descendant peoples should not inhibit studying the past; instead, collaborations can strengthen our interpretations and even our connections with various publics, enhancing the relevance of archaeology for communities. Such aspects should be embraced, and collaborative archaeologies do welcome the interactions with descendant peoples. Teit provides an example of someone who is not trying to escape the context in which they operate in attempts to reach some imagined standpoint of actual objectivity. This should be central to how any archaeologists should approach their work, such that diverse standpoints are included in various aspects of interpretation (e.g., Cunningham/MacEachern 2016, 635).

Second, archaeologists bring expertise as part of their craft (sensu Shanks/McGuire 1996). Developing upon this point, Colin Grier and I have argued that archaeologists bring such proficiencies regarding theory and methodologies of excavation in addition to familiarity with the regional culture histories. Indigenous collaborators bring their sets of knowledges and skills, notably regarding their cultural practices, oral traditions and especially the protocols regarding proper treatment of their heritage. Both scholars and community members have knowledge about the Indigenous heritage in the past, and the boundaries between the two are porous. Archaeologists are one facet or perspective that can be brought to bear, and collaborative archaeologies recognize that there are other stakeholders in relationships to heritage from the broader community, especially the Indigenous descendants (Angelbeck/Grier 2014).

Third, collaborative archaeologies are best pursued as long-term or ongoing relationships. Authentic relationships are not a one-time connection that has been made, but authentic relationships are reciprocal, back-and-forth engagements that are ongoing over time (Angelbeck/Grier 2014). This is a key concept established by anthropologists such as Claude Lévi-Strauss (1971) and Marcel Mauss (1990) as derived from the study of numerous cultures, yet ironically reciprocal collaborations as a methodology for anthropologists and archaeologists have only become common recently.

Fourth, archaeological collaborations are important even long after the investigations have completed. This is especially the case for archaeological work that was done years ago without collaboration as part of the original set-up. The repatriation of such remains is essential to do for any artefacts of cultural value to descendant groups, but it is especially the case concerning the remains of individuals and any grave items that had been buried with them. Boas himself was responsible for the extraction of many hundreds of burials that had overseen the excavation or purchase; accordingly, he had collected the remains of 200 individuals by 1890, yet it continued thereafter (Cole 1995, 120–121; Pöhl 2008, 42). Such practices in the past are the result of a colonial powers used to trump any concerns of Indigenous peoples. The act of repatriation is one path of reconciliation to redress the wrongs of such archaeological acts. Case studies explicitly about collaborations for repatriation between archaeologists, Indigenous peoples, museum personnel and other stakeholders have become more common (e.g., Kerber 2006). In Sweden, for instance, the repatriation of Sami human remains was explicitly conducted as an act of collaboration, wherein a ceremony was held to repatriate and rebury the remains of 25 Sami individuals in 2019. Moreover, as Daniel Lindmark (2021) has described, the effort involved several relevant stakeholders – archaeologists, historians, museum curators, city and county officials and the Church of Sweden – all coordinating with the Liksjuon Sâmiensiäbrrie, an association of local Sami. The event was held symbolically on International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples, August 9th. Lindmark emphasized that the event of repatriation was in itself an act of reconciliation, an attempt to address such hurtful acts of the past. In so doing, he interpreted the event as a societal rite of passage, a ceremony marking the change in the structure of relationships between Indigenous peoples and colonial states (Lindmark 2021).

In our collaborative practices, we should not think that such relations are always going to be straight-forward. As put by Bonnie Clark and Audrey Horning (2019, 349), ‘Collaborative archaeology is not easy. Collaborative archaeology is divisive within the discipline, and challenging on the ground... [and] no project ever goes fully to plan.’ One should expect things to be somewhat challenging, as a real collaboration does not just regard intentions from one side, but reflects those of all involved. There should be deliberations over the aims and the methodologies; discussions about our word choices regarding the artefacts and features; dialogues about handling of recovered artefacts, features or any human remains; as well as conversations about the interpretations of the archaeological record. Indeed, it is precisely these negotiations that are the im-
portant aspects of a collaborative archaeology. So, I would argue that it is through Indigenous critiques (or those of other descendant peoples) in which archaeologists can be alerted to blind spots in their own perspectives. That is an outcome we can see from Boas’s work, which is to begin to approach things from the views of others. Boas began to do that with his first anthropological experiences among the Inuit, and then he developed it further with the Kwakwaka’wakw. Throughout those engagements, he was open-minded in those interactions, and this allowed for transformations in his thinking.

**Implications for archaeological interpretations**

It is also significant to consider that there are other ways of interpreting archaeological sites. Collaborations with Indigenous peoples can expand our understandings of the archaeological history. Just as Boas allowed himself to be transformed by dialogues with his Indigenous collaborators, archaeologists can expand their interpretive scope by incorporating Indigenous views into the interpretation of archaeological sites. Chris Arnett and I (Angelbeck/Arnett 2017) have convened scholars to consider ways of applying Indigenous frameworks for archaeological interpretation. Our argument was that archaeologists should not turn to Western models alone. By implementing an Indigenous linguistic term, concept or other understanding from a culture, archaeologists can develop approaches that have Indigenous cultural conceptions as a point of departure and vantage point for analysis. This can help better interpret archaeological sites rather than just relying on normative practice in archaeology, in the sense of Thomas Kuhn (1962).

In developing Indigenous frameworks of interpretation, through the use of concepts and terms from Indigenous perspectives, we can better think outside our normative trains of thought. This helps us anchor our studies in the local context more thoroughly, and it is a way to help us become conscious of Western ethnocentric views that may be distorting our views relativistically, as Boas had emphasized. This is not to imply that anyone can fully remove ethnocentric views – that is likely not possible without becoming a member of another culture. However, it is important to attempt to be conscious of ethnocentric biases. Archaeology operates within a scientific discourse that is largely Western in origin, but Indigenous frameworks for interpretation allow for possibilities for broader understandings of the archaeological record. In this sense, I think this expresses Paul Feyerabend’s (1975) notion of theoretical experimentation as a way to expand the scope and possibilities of the sciences. He presented an epistemological anarchism, arguing that it is fruitful to think outside normative scientific theories and adopt and explore different ways of thinking about various phenomena; for archaeologists, this applies to theories and methods for interpreting the past.

It is perhaps through interpretations of the archaeological record that the effects of cultural relativity come into the starkest contrasts. To provide an example of an Indigenous view of the archaeological record, I will highlight how John Louie, a Sliammon Coast Salish counsellor, who had conducted the initial blessing for the archaeological investigations of an ancestral village on his reserve in coastal British Columbia. As he viewed the archaeological excavations throughout its course, he ultimately provided a distinctive view of the findings, stating that: ‘Seeing what you guys are digging up and being with you as you strip back the layers allows our kids to see that things have not always been the way they are.’ Louie then discusses the stratigraphic sequence of artefacts unearthed, layer by layer, beginning with: surface trash, including cigarettes and beer bottles to be cleared away; subsurface industrial logging debris, marking the clear-cutting of the reserve and surrounds; coins, highlighting the switch from Indigenous forms of exchange to colonial forms; a crucifix, remnant from the early missionaries attempting to convert their religion. Then, below the colonial layers, he noted, ‘From there on down, going back probably thousands of years, the ground is full of the remains of good food and good relations among people and their human and nonhuman relatives’ (Schaepe et al. 2017, 505–506).

For the archaeologists involved in the project, each of whom had been excavating sites in the Northwest Coast and elsewhere for over twenty years, John Louie offered a radically alternate perspective. Here, he was telling the archaeologists what they found, in ways they had not contemplated. Archaeologists saw the same artefacts in the same stratigraphic sequence, but did not consider it in Louie’s way. Frankly, archaeologists often view artefacts as isolated items; when viewed as connected, it is generally in relation to other artefacts and features as part of patterns. Louie, however, saw these artefacts not as parts of physically evident patterns, but as parts of broader relations with his contemporary community. He was holistically connecting the stratigraphic sequence of layers to their
colonial experiences as producing these artefacts and their patterns. Archaeologists view things typically through the Western standards of linear time, where quantitatively each moment adds further distance between the materials of the past and the present time. Louie instead viewed things in a cyclical way, in that these archaeological materials were ‘returning’ to the present, reappearing within social consciousness and providing a tangible connection between present and past, between descendant community and their ancestral heritage. This provided two distinctive ways to receive these materials, in which Mircea Eliade’s (1959) discussion of linear versus cyclical experiences of time has relevance (Schaepe et al. 2017, 509–512).

In the cases we examined, Indigenous peoples in the Northwest often employed different terms for the items recovered. Instead of ‘artefacts’, community members used terms such as ‘belongings’ or ‘heirlooms’; the latter term effectively conveying an inheritance from the past (Schaepe et al. 2017, 504–505); the employment of such words explicitly adds a dimension of connection. For Reese Muntean et al. (2015), the use of such terms helps to decolonize the stances of museums that exhibit and curate artefacts of Indigenous peoples. For Jordan Wilson (2016, xx-xxi), a museum curator from the Musqueam Coast Salish, ‘the term belongings – not artefacts or objects – ...signal[s] the ongoing connection our community has to both the place and the heritage taken from it.’ These are some examples of how collaborative archaeologies can lead to fruitful interpretations and understandings of the archaeological record, as well as provide greater relevance for descendant communities.

For an archaeological application, this implies that we need to consider applying Indigenous frameworks to the archaeological record. Why should only Western frameworks be considered for archaeological interpretation? To be universalist is to actually consider alternate frameworks for the interpretation of archaeological materials. For decades, in the Northwest Coast and elsewhere, people have asked Indigenous elders and community members about the interpreting the function of a tool, for instance, but it is important to move beyond asking about technical functions to pursue aid with interpreting social relations, political organization, religious perspectives or other aspects of culture that are higher on Christopher Hawkes’s (1954) ladder of inference. This is where Indigenous frameworks can be most beneficial for expanding our interpretations and our understandings.

**Conclusions: Theories, methods and relationships**

The legacy of Boas is complicated. To be sure, he expanded anthropological thought, especially with the concept of cultural relativity, the importance of which is clear by how thoroughly it has become just a core part of the anthropological perspective since. Wilner (2018) argued even further that Boas’s example takes anthropological thought towards a diverse yet universalist approach to human cultures. Indeed, his record of antiracist activism indicates such a thrust, so much so that Thomas Gossett (1963, 418) in *Race: The History of an Idea* has stated that ‘It is possible that Boas did more to combat race prejudice than any other person in history.’ This notion is both echoed and contested by Mark Anderson, in *From Boas to Black Power* (Anderson 2019), who found especially problematic the notion that Boas (1945) recommended miscegenation as the main way to settle racial tensions in the U.S. (see also Baker 2021). Further, Mohawk anthropologist, Audra Simpson (2018) critiqued Boas for perpetuating the notion that Indigenous peoples had no future, presuming their culture would decline under the increasing pressures of colonialism; hence, this sort of thinking led to a perceived need for salvage ethnographies. Even more problematically, Boas went against Indigenous wishes to excavate and collect Indigenous skulls and skeletons in a way that spotlights a stark contradiction to his theories of relativity and universality.

Still, we can honour his antiracist activism, his early example of a collaborative researcher and his messages of cultural relativity. He was a champion of the diversity of humanity and cultural possibilities; indeed, it has been recently emphasized by Todd McGowan (2020) that universality is the necessary aim for an emancipatory politics today. As Regina Darnell (2015, xx) has emphasized, ‘The foundations of contemporary Canadian Indigenous activism are firmly grounded in Boasian engagement with Northwest Coast individuals and communities’. She points to his examples in challenging federal policies and even his training of Indigenous individuals such as George Hunt, Henry Tate and William Beynon in anthropological fieldwork as prime examples of his anti-racism.

At the same time, as critics have highlighted, we must acknowledge where Boas fell short of his philosophy and values. Yet, we can learn from these mistakes as well. His colleague, James Teit, provides an example of an anthro-
ology that carries out much more fully the message of a universal humanity. Kwame Anthony Appiah (2006) referred to such ideas as ‘cosmopolitanism’, from the Greek for ‘citizens of the world,’ wherein concerns for people should not be restricted to our culture, class or country. This concept has been embraced by anthropologists (Werbner 2020) and archaeologists (Meskell 2009). These are the kinds of ethics that should underpin our relations as archaeologists with descendant peoples.

One key point from this recounting of Boas’s intellectual and ethical development is that Boas was open to learning from his local informants and collaborators. His experiences among the Inuit changed him from a physicist and geographer to an anthropologist, from a natural scientist into a social scientist. Through his interactions with the Inuit, he gained his realization of cultural relativity. Boas’s experiences with George Hunt and the Kwakwaka’wakw led to more profound understandings of cultural transformation and human universality. When they studied potlatches as ceremonies of transformation, Boas and Hunt in turn transformed anthropology and contributed much material for philosophers to ponder over in the decades that followed. For our collaborations in archaeology, we can learn much from Boas’s examples, from both his accomplishments and his limitations.

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