

# My Sisters Will Not Speak: Boas, Hunt, and the Ethnographic Silencing of First Nations Women

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## Abstract:

First Nations women were instrumental to the collecting of Northwest Coast Indigenous culture, yet their voices are nearly invisible in the published record. The contributions of George Hunt, the Tlingit/British culture broker who collaborated with anthropologist Franz Boas, overshadow the intellectual influence of his mother, Anislaga Mary Ebbetts, his sisters, and particularly his Kwakwaka'wakw wives, Lucy Homikanis and Tsukwani Francine. In his correspondence with Boas, Hunt admitted his dependence upon high-status Indigenous women, and he gave his female relatives visual prominence in film, photographs, and staged performances, but their voices are largely absent from anthropological texts. Hunt faced many unexpected challenges (disease, death, arrest, financial hardship, and the suspicions of his neighbors), yet he consistently placed Boas' demands, perspectives, and editorial choices foremost. The resulting cultural representations marginalized the influence of the First Nations women who had been integral to their creation.

## Note:

This research is part of a larger project tracing patterns of discourse and circulation that shaped the collection and representation of Indigenous material for museums during the era of salvage anthropology. As an anthropologist of Native American ancestry, I am particularly interested in re-examining the roles of Indigenous informants as procurers and cultural translators, and in recovering evidence of negotiations that have been heretofore overlooked. This restorative approach can also assist with repatriation claims, by locating, identifying, and contextualizing cultural heritage and object histories that may be otherwise "lost" in collections.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from the working paper, "My Sisters Will Not Speak: Boas, Hunt, and the Ethnographic Silencing of Indigenous Women." Paper presented November 21, 2013 in the session "Research and Partnership: Old and New Lessons for Anthropologists from Native America," at the American Anthropological Association Conference in Chicago. This article is based on a book in progress, titled *Consorting With Savages: Indigenous Informants and American Anthropologists* (forthcoming from the University of Arizona Press).

## Introduction

*This [story] comes to us from the origin legend that at the end of the great flood, the raven flew to our origin site at what is now Hardy Bay. He looked around for other creatures to settle with, when he couldn't find any he transformed himself into a human being. —Verna Hunt-Chartrand (n.d.)*

During the 1840s, Anislaga (also called Anaian, Ansnaq, and Mary Ebbetts), a Tlingit woman of the Gaanax.adi clan, Raven phratry,<sup>2</sup> from Tongass, Alaska, was accompanying her father, a highly ranked chief, on a trip to Victoria. At Port Simpson, on the Nass River in Vancouver, British Columbia, she met Robert Hunt from Dorsetshire, England, chief factor at the Hudson's Bay Company post (Barbeau 1950, 651; Berman 1994, 484). The details of their courtship are vague, but marriages between high-ranking First Nations Native<sup>3</sup> women and Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) employees were encouraged as a strategy to facilitate trade and ensure peace (Barbeau 1950, 651). Anislaga (1823-1919) and Robert (1828-1893) shared a life together that was explicitly bi-cultural. Their wedding was a traditional Tlingit ceremony with a potlatch give-away of blankets and trade goods, and their homes were HBC company houses at Port Simpson and Fort Rupert (Barbeau 1950, 651).

Anislaga retained connections to her Tlingit relatives and culture, including practicing Chilkat blanket-weaving (a secretive skill reserved for high-status women), and keeping possession of engraved bracelets, coppers, and other family treasures (Barbeau 1950, 654; Hunt 2013). Among Northwest Coast peoples, the communal treasures and property associated with regional clans and families included physical material (land, houses, canoes, clothing, masks, crests, coppers, and so on), performative activities (songs, dances, rituals), names (personal names and house names), and dreams (Bell 2005; Boas 1930). Traditionally, women inherited and exercised rights of control over many forms of this tangible and intangible heritage, including representations of clan ancestors (Barbeau 1950; Bell 2005; Berman 1994). Anislaga's Raven clan people (like other Northwest Coast First Nations people) traced their origins to a non-human animal, bird, reptile, or other creature that, according to traditional narratives, had chosen to transform itself into human form (Boas 1925, 229-230). These narratives were (and still are) recounted during Winter Festivals, telling "how the ancestors long ago met with tribulations and adventures; how they were harassed or rescued by spirits and monsters . . . how benevolent spirits appeared in visions and invested their protégés with charms" (Barbeau 1930, 260). Totem poles carved to record these transformative relations were stood up at significant locations (Barbeau 1950; Swanton 1905). Anislaga contracted master carvers to sculpt her clan origin story onto two totem poles. One was placed over her mother's burial site in Tongass, and a copy (named Tlakwegem) was erected in Fort Rupert (Barbeau 1950, 651).

The Hunts had seven daughters and four sons: George, Eli, and William married Native women; their sisters forged cross-cultural marriages with other newcomers to the territory. Annie (1856-?) married H. Spencer, a Canadian fur trader who set up a salmon cannery at Alert Bay.

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<sup>2</sup> In his early publications, Boas erroneously suggested that the Kwakiutl did not organize themselves into phratries, although he did recognize the existence of such clans among the Tlingit, Haida, Tsimshian, Heitsu, and Xa-isla' (Boas 1897, 323).

<sup>3</sup> First Nations, Native, and Indigenous (with a capital I) are used here as all-encompassing terms for the aboriginal peoples of the North American continent, who are also commonly referred to as Native Americans or American Indians, and are also known by their many distinct tribal names.

Elizabeth (1870-?) married a Scottish Lowlander, Daniel Wilson. Jane (1873-1940) married a Welshman, Henry Cadwallader (Barbeau 1950, 651-652). George (1854-1933) appears to have made the most strategic marriages. He married twice, first to Lucy Homikanis (who died in 1908), and then to Tsukwani Francine 'Nakwaxda'xw (who outlived him). Both wives were Kwakwaka'wakw (also called Kwakiutl) *Wi'oma*, women of noble families and high rank (Bell 2005). With the assistance of his mother, his missionary school education, and his wives, George Hunt developed fluency in Tlingit, English, and Kwak'wala, and a unique level of exposure to First Nations traditional knowledge (Berman 1994, 484-485).

George Hunt was serving as an interpreter for Commissioner Israel Powell when he met with Franz Boas. Often credited as the father of American anthropology, Boas was a professor at Columbia University and the first curator of anthropology at the American Museum of Natural History (Stocking 1966). Hunt was perfectly positioned to become Boas's field agent among the Northwest Coast Indians. Hunt was recruited to manage the Kwakwaka'wakw camp and performances at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893 (Raibmon 2000), and he assisted during the Jesup Expedition to the Northwest Coast, initiating a partnership that would last more than four decades (Berman 1994; Briggs and Bauman 1999; Glass 2006). Boas occasionally characterized his Indigenous field agent as "hard to deal with" and "lazy" (Cole 2011, 156), but Hunt's productivity is amply documented. The archives at the American Philosophical Society, American Museum of Natural History, and Columbia University retain tens of thousands of hand-written manuscript pages that Hunt filled with observations of traditional activities, narratives of oral traditions, descriptions of sacred practices, sketches of family crests and coppers, diagrams of houses, maps, and linguistic notes.<sup>4</sup>

The nature of the collaboration between Hunt and Boas, while expansive in scope, was not unusual for the time. During the salvage era of museum anthropology, anthropologists who sought to collect Indigenous cultures were dependent upon savvy Indigenous individuals who were willing to serve as gatekeepers and procurers. Informants like George Hunt—born into a high-ranking First Nations family, fluent in English, instinctively bicultural, with social access to tribal traditionalists—were ideal. Fieldwork was not, however, a straightforward process. Native informants were compelled to engage in complex on-the-ground social relations and cultural negotiations that are rarely well-represented in anthropological literature. Social dramas and insights that escaped publication are sometimes found in unedited source materials (such as field notebooks, illustrations, conversations, or snippets of oral tradition). Correspondence can be a particularly rich source of contextual discourse. Letters—among collectors, dealers, museums, state agents, and Indigenous informants—reveal some of the social undercurrents that shaped the circulation of both symbolic and real capital, and illuminate the logistical challenges of collecting Indigenous material.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Since Boas was paying Hunt by the page, each page was meticulously numbered and catalogued. They negotiated the parameters of research projects and payments by exchanging thousands more pages of correspondence. Hunt also kept field notebooks and account books of his own. Data was collected from a survey of the Franz Boas Papers housed at the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the American Museum of Natural History in New York, and Columbia University. Most of this material was edited and published by Boas (for example: Boas and Hunt 1905), but approximately 2,400 pages remain unpublished (see Boas n.d.).

<sup>5</sup> The conclusions regarding Indigenous informants result from my detailed survey of private correspondence in the following collections: the Franz Boas Papers, William Fenton Papers, and Frank Speck Papers housed at the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; the Arthur Parker Papers housed at the New York State Museum in Albany, New York; the Mark Raymond Harrington Papers housed at the Southwest Museum in Los Angeles, California; and the correspondence among various anthropologists and informants housed at the National Museum of the American Indian in Suitland, Maryland, among others.

Hunt, like other Indigenous collaborators, drew upon his kin and community relations and tapped into local knowledge sources to access the information and artifacts that Boas desired. Hunt idolized Boas and curried favor, seeking income and status, but the depth and tone of Hunt's communications suggest more than a mere working partnership. Boas's friendship filled a deep intellectual and emotional need. Boas, in a sense, invented Hunt, by enticing him to do Boas's bidding without restraint. Hunt willingly responded to any request, from stealing icons to excavating graves to dismantling buildings, often knowingly violating cultural protocols to do so. He promoted himself as the primary (if not sole) interlocutor of Northwest Coast culture, denouncing the reliability of other sources, even his own kin. He assured his patron that whatever he did not know, he could find out, given sufficient time and money and the right informants. Although their partnership has been touted as a positive example of cross-cultural collaboration (Darnell 2000), their correspondence shows that they crossed ethical boundaries. They also intentionally marginalized the influence of non-literate Indigenous female sources by privileging scientific approaches and male perspectives. The ethnographic material that entered Boas's hands was, in effect, gendered and filtered in ways that obscured the female authorities in Hunt's own household.

### Negotiating Terms and Translating Kwakwaka'wakw Culture

*[T]hey say here is he who is finding out all our Dances then he goes and tell it to Dr Boas. —*  
George Hunt to Franz Boas (March 4, 1898, APS)<sup>6</sup>

Hunt's mother, Anislaga, was Tlingit, but little of his research was centered in that community. Instead, his work for Boas largely focused on the Kwakwaka'wakw people of the Northwest Coast, a region that drew the attention of multiple collectors and museums (Ames 1992; Cole 2011; Darnell 2000; Glass 2006; Umist'ta n.d.). Members of this tribal group knew Hunt from childhood, and allowed him to participate in regional potlatches and ceremonies, but never considered him as a tribal member or a potlatch chief in his own right (Berman 1994, 483). Hunt was a participant observer, rather than an originator, of Kwakwaka'wakw culture and Kwak'wala language. Although his wives were equally (if not more) knowledgeable, Hunt assumed the role of cultural gatekeeper. This may have reflected a gendering of status and intellectual authority that was routine during the early twentieth century, an era when Euro-American anthropologists tended to favor male fieldworkers and invested authority in university-trained men (Krech and Hail 1999; Stocking 1966). Northwest Coast Indigenous societies, in contrast, accorded high rank and distinction to women as carriers and inheritors of tradition and discouraged men from interfering with female roles and vice versa (Berman 1994; Bell 2005; Boas 1897). Among the Kwakwaka'wakw, certain categories of gender-specific knowledge were largely inaccessible to outsiders, with a few exceptions; one was George Hunt.

In letters and field notes, Hunt's mother, wives, and sisters are acknowledged as primary informants; yet, in the publications, they are accorded neither authority nor authorship. Boas may be responsible for these erasures, given his preconceived notions about Indigenous knowledge, gender, authenticity, and cultural evolution. For example, during an early trip to Victoria, Boas disdained multilingual Native people who dressed "in European fashion" and gathered in "gay, sociable gatherings"; he believed that authentic Indians could only be found in isolated locales, at the far reaches of civilization (Boas 1889, 5-6). Although he recognized matrilineal descent, he believed the

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<sup>6</sup> These dated quotes are excerpted from letters between George Hunt and Franz Boas archived as "Correspondence: Hunt, George," in the *Boas Papers*, Ms. Coll. B.B61, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

inheritance system among the Kwakwaka'wakw to be "an abnormal development," suggesting that the passing of rank from mother to son (bypassing her husband) evidenced an imperfect evolutionary stage in the "transition of a maternal society to a paternal society" (Boas 1897, 335). He downplayed the value of women's knowledge of food-gathering, cooking, and marriage rites (Boas 1921, 45). Even after he gained fluency in Kwak'wala, he made little effort to communicate directly with Native women (or with ordinary people) about everyday life (Nielsen 2001, 77). Instead, he solicited data coded by rank and gender, with men's activities and perspectives taking prominence.

To collect data on these traditions and treasures, George Hunt traveled widely, using small (easily concealed) notebooks to record interviews and cultural performances. He collected multiple renditions of oral tradition, writing in Kwak'wala, and edited these before translating them into English (Berman 1994, 491). At home, he discussed his findings with his wives, who provided additional insights. He also wrote lengthy explanatory letters. Agnes Cranmer, Hunt's granddaughter, recalled Hunt's writing habits: "When he was writing at his table and could not think what to put down next he would get up and take a long walk fast to get it clear in his head" (Codere 1966, xxix-xxx). These methods raise interesting questions: Was Hunt recalling, or constructing, stories? Did he blend oral tradition with narrative invention? Boas wondered the same: "Do you get these meanings from the old people, or do you translate them from your own knowledge of the language?" (Boas to Hunt, September 17, 1918). Hunt admitted that it was difficult to procure straightforward answers: "[I]f you ask ten Indians about one History not two of them would speak it the same" (Hunt to Boas, November 5, 1895). He patiently explained his method of devising comprehensive narratives:

[T]hat is why I go first to the story owner family then I go next to the Enemee [enemy] family, and I always find lots of Defference Between the two, and very little more talk with some of the other People then I get the whole thing Right (Hunt to Boas, June 10, 1918).

He reiterated this methodology in subsequent letters: "I Don't go to and take these stories from one man." When there were known rivals, he would collect a version from each side before going to a "third man and ask him to tell me the same story. then I get the whole story" (Hunt to Boas, November 21, 1926). In some cases, Hunt reported, it was difficult to discern the owners of particular traditions, stories, and objects. He sought out knowledgeable old women, "for they seems to know more about the old times then the Men Do" (Hunt to Boas, March 21, 1906).

Hunt was instrumental, not only in composing stories, but in inventing the "Kwakiutl" culture as it appeared in staged performances, on film, and in the museum (Berman 1994; Cannizzo 1983; Glass 2006; Raibmon 2000). Hunt convinced family members and traditionalists to stage potlatches, Winter Dances, and Hamat'sa (a ritualistic cannibal dance) for Boas's benefit, despite the fact that these activities were explicitly banned by the Canadian government (Cole and Chaikin 1990).<sup>7</sup> Hunt and his neighbors were fully aware of the potential theatrical impact and transgressive power of these representations. Their wild performance at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, for example, was more than just a tourist attraction; it was an act of resistance to Canadian authorities who had banned Indigenous ceremonies (Glass 2006; Raibmon 2000). Hunt policed his authority by denouncing other representations of Northwest Coast culture. In 1907, for example, he informed Boas that Charles F. Newcomb, photographer and collector for the Chicago Field Museum, had been duped

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<sup>7</sup> The Hunt family was already known for having flaunted strictures imposed by Reverend Hall and the Anglican Church Missionary Society (Raibmon 2000).

by his Native models: “How they Dressed themselves, that kind of Dressing is never seen here sence the world was made”; he said they “got it from the Bible for that is the way the Romens use to Dress themselves in war.” Hunt circulated Newcomb’s photographs to other Indians, who “only laughed and say that white men is Esely [easily] foold” (Hunt to Boas, March 21, 1907).

When Boas first arrived in the territory, the Kwakwaka’wakw were curious about this stranger who had so many questions. Was he a government agent? Boas assured them that he wished to observe ceremonial practices, not interfere with them (Rohner 1969, 33), and insisted that he would advocate for the tribes. In a letter to Chief Hemasaka, he said, “The Kwakiutl have no better friend than I. Whenever I can, I speak for you . . . I have told the chiefs in Ottawa and the chiefs in England many times, that the potlatch and that the dance are not bad” (Boas to Hunt, February 3, 1899). Despite their avowed support for tradition, Hunt and Boas collected vast quantities of Kwakwaka’wakw intellectual property (secret knowledges, ritual practices, oral traditions, and so on), and coordinated the removal (through both theft and purchase) of thousands of religious, cultural, and patrimonial items, including human remains. This museological collecting contributed to the fracturing of traditional continuity. Metaphorically and literally, Boas promised to preserve Kwakwaka’wakw treasures by capturing them in more durable boxes. Although he likened this process to the traditional carved wooden boxes made by Northwest Coast peoples to preserve cultural treasures (Briggs and Bauman 1999, 480), there was a key difference: Boas’s boxes would be taken away to museums.

### Unexpected Consequences

*[Y]ou will see that the Faith he Had in this thing of eka [evil spirit] and the Dream he Had about the eqaye [medicine box] that nearly killed him . . . now as for myself I Don't Belive in the eka, that is How this eg!enux [medicine men] cant kill me. —Hunt (n.d.)*

Hunt faced many unexpected challenges: disease, legal woes, financial hardship, physical losses, and the suspicions of his neighbors. On reading through his correspondence year by year, project by project, one sees that a surprising number of accidental deaths coincided with ritual disturbances—staging of forbidden ceremonies, thefts of objects, grave robbing, for instance. Among Northwest Coast peoples, Indigenous religious beliefs (including fears of witchcraft) perceived causal links between ritual breaches and personal troubles, and called for ceremonial responses to significant deaths (Boas 1930). Although Hunt made no explicit associations between his actions and the losses that surrounded him, his neighbors may have perceived more than mere coincidence.

Deaths were frequent. Hunt lost several children, his brother, and other relatives to accidents and disease within a few years of starting to work for Boas. Yet ethnographic research was profitable. The pay he received for providing a single manuscript could be more lucrative than an entire season of working in the canning factory. A few weeks after he delivered 20 pages describing the last Winter Dance at Fort Rupert, Hunt’s brother Robert drowned. Not long afterwards, a cholera outbreak hit Fort Rupert. In April, his daughter died, and a few months later, his wife was desperately ill with dysentery. Epidemic disease was, sadly, routine. In 1917, Hunt witnessed the deaths of more than 30 people during a collecting trip. At Blunden Harbor, he reported, “I found lots of them sick with the Lagrip and the same women I wanted to see Died and I help Buried her.” At Revers Inlet, he found the same sickness, and “on the way Home I call into xomtasbe, also there got the sickness, and when I came Home, I got sick and I stay in Bed over two weeks” (Hunt to Boas, May 31, 1917). A similar outbreak in Fort Rupert in 1918 killed Hunt’s granddaughter and grandson (Hunt to Boas, August 5, 1918). In 1923, during a smallpox outbreak, Hunt wrote, “it was wonder I Did not get it also. for some

of the People who Had the sickness stay in my house” (Hunt to Boas, September 7, 1923). In the aftermath of every loss, Hunt only asked for more work, “for you know that I got a large family to work for” (Hunt to Boas, July 23, 1899).

The Hunt family’s propensity for hospitality extended to other scientific collectors. During the Jesup Expedition, George’s sisters Sarah and Jane provided free lodging for Harlan Ingersoll Smith, who was excavating graves to collect crania for scientific study (Smith 1899). The sisters were subsequently outraged by an interview that appeared in the Victoria newspaper (accompanied by sketches of the women), portraying Northwest Coast Indians as backward cannibals. Hunt’s sisters “went and Report to the Indians, What Mr Smith Done to there Daid [dead], and that I was helping” (Hunt to Boas, January 10, 1899). Boas insisted that Mr. and Mrs. Smith were “full of praise for your sisters and your mother,” and reminded George that it was especially crucial to remain on good terms with Anne and her husband, Mr. Spencer:

I do not think it is right that on account of this matter you should be on unfriendly terms with Spencer or your sisters, even for a short time. And I believe it would be better for you to keep in touch with Spencer’s work in the cannery, because you are sure that it will go on all the time, while there may be times during which I cannot do any work; at least I think that will be best for you and your family (Boas to Hunt, February 3, 1899).

Boas frequently asked Hunt to secretly excavate sacred sites and cemeteries to collect materials for the museum. In 1900, Hunt stole seven human skulls and a large collection of funerary objects (hats, images, dishes, masks) from graves in Koskemo (Hunt to Boas, October 10, 1900). In 1906, he discovered a Praying House at Nootka and a Whaler’s Shrine/Washing House, each with human skulls and sacred objects (Hunt to Boas, March 21, 1906). Hunt informed Boas that the best time to collect would be in-between the whaling and fur seal seasons, when no one was around (Hunt to Boas, March 21, 1906). Hunt was well suited for this kind of work, in part because he believed himself immune to supernatural forces and witchcraft. In an early, unsolicited recollection, Hunt told Boas that as a young man, while searching for a lost ox, he had discovered two *eglenux* (medicine men) who had bewitched Chief Henak!alaso. Hunt crept into their camp, stole a box they were crying over, and brought it to the chief. Chief Henak!alaso recovered his health only after destroying the box and sending it away to be sunk in the ocean. The chief, Hunt told Boas, had been saved by his faith in the supernatural, but “as for myself I Don’t Belive in the eka, that is How this eglenux cant kill me,” even though they had tried on several occasions. “That,” he told Boas, “is How I was Well liked By the old chiefs” (Hunt n.d.).

Although Hunt was well liked by some elders and traditional leaders, he frequently ran afoul of both Indigenous gatekeepers and Canadian authorities. During an 1898 trip to Alert Bay, Hunt reported, “as soon as the Indians found out that it was me [they] all came and some of them looked angry . . . and they say here is he who is finding out all our Dances then he goes and tell it to Dr Boas” (Hunt to Boas, March 4 1898). In 1900, he was arrested while observing ritual performances: “I am taken Prisoner in alert Bay for going to see Lawitsis tribe Winter Dance . . . and I was sent to Vancouver to be tried.” When he was fined \$500, his brother-in-law Spencer bailed him out (Hunt to Boas, March 15, 1900; also see March 27, 1900; April 28, 1900).

Unexpected deaths sometimes also resulted in the loss of potential museum collections. In 1910, Hunt had contracted with an artisan named Mago to make a traditional broad box canoe, paying \$15 in advance. After the canoe was finished, however, Mago accidentally drowned. Hunt learned that

Mago had hocked the canoe for \$15, and it would cost an additional \$15 to recover it. Making matters worse, while he was negotiating for the recovery of the canoe, he learned that the boxes and dishes collected from Koskemo for sale to George Gustav Heye had been stolen (Hunt to Boas, March 29, 1910).

In December of 1908, Hunt attended a large gathering of Kwakwaka'wakw people at Beaver Harbor. He had hoped to collect ritual data; instead, he was witness to the sudden and shocking deaths of 27 chiefs from a fast-moving virus (apparently influenza). To grapple with this loss, the communities staged a Winter Dance at Fort Rupert that included the appearance of a Hamat'sa dancer and the ritual death and resurrection of a tox'wet Dancer:

[S]ome tox'wet Dancer that was thrown into the fire and after she was Burnt up her Bones was taken off the fire and Put into another Box. which they carried into the wood and there the 12 men Had to stay four knights singing all the time ontill she came to life again (Hunt to Boas, May 14, 1909).

The extremity of this ceremony echoes the extremity of grief expressed in Hunt's letters following sickness and death. Ritual dancers could be resurrected, but humans who had died could not be brought back. When reporting such losses, Hunt would close his letters by calling Boas "his only hope" and "his only friend in the world," while begging forgiveness for his temporary incapacity due to grief.<sup>8</sup>

### Depending Upon Wi'oma

*The story told about this [totem pole] is the familiar northwest coast tale of the being at the head of Nass, who kept daylight and the moon in boxes in his house, and of how Raven stole these by assuming the form of a hemlock needle, letting himself be swallowed by that chief's daughter and being born again through her. —Swanton (1898, 110).*

In 1898, George Hunt provided folklorist John R. Swanton with an interpretation of the iconography of the totem pole that Anisлага had erected at Fort Rupert. This particular traditional tale, however, also provides an apt metaphor for Hunt himself. Like Raven, he was intent on capturing treasures; not content with having been born to a chief's daughter, he also set out to marry one. Hunt's work was enabled by his ready access to his mother Anisлага and his wives. His 1872 marriage to his first wife, Lucy Homikanis, from Hope Island, was instrumental in ensuring his access to Kwakwaka'wakw knowledge. As the daughter of a high-ranking chief, Lucy was heir to several chiefs and crucial bodies of knowledge; their children inherited access through their mother's family (Berman 1994, 486). David, the eldest son, became head chief to the Sint'lam group of the Gwitala and the highest ranked Hamat'sa dancer at Fort Rupert (Hunt to Boas, October 4, 1913; Boas 1921, 788-792, 976-1002). George was permitted to conduct potlatches and deliver occasional speeches as an auxiliary to his sons, but the Kwakwaka'wakw still regarded him as a cultural outsider (Berman 1994). Hunt's position had actually inspired the re-naming of an entire Kwakwaka'wakw tribal division as *Gwitala*, meaning "Northerners, Foreigners" (Bell 2005; Berman 1994, 487).

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<sup>8</sup> On one such occasion, in 1911, Hunt requested the museum return a life cast the museum had made of a beloved elder, G'omkenes (one of Hunt's "true friends" who had just died), so he could keep his face close at hand (Hunt to Boas, November 19, 1911).



Franz Boas was also a foreigner, but of a different sort. His social position was mediated, in part, by tribal perceptions of his relationship with Hunt, and he was assigned the Kwak'wala name *Heiltsakuls*, "the one who does the right thing" (Boas 1896, 232). This apparently derived from his efforts to convince Canadian authorities to permit the practice of potlatch (Rohner 1969, 33).

Boas only made 12 trips to the region over the course of 44 years (Darnell 2000, 34), and on these occasions, he was often hosted by the Hunt family. Hunt descendants recall that Hunt's daughter Emily and granddaughter Margaret Wilson would serve the anthropologist his tea and do his laundry (Everson n.d., 7-8). Boas paid visits to George's sisters, and brought personal gifts for the Hunt women: shawls for Lucy and Emily (Hunt to Boas, October 10, 1900), and copies of his books for Annie, Sarah, and Jane (Hunt to Boas, April 12, 1908).

Lucy was fluent in Kwak'wala, and Hunt's letters suggest that she routinely reviewed the manuscripts he prepared for Boas—likely by hearing them read aloud. Sometimes, she insisted that George write about a particular topic. In 1906, for example, Lucy convinced her husband to send Boas a lengthy unsolicited manuscript on food harvesting, preparing, and cooking techniques. Boas complained, but Hunt defended Lucy's choice; this was just as valuable as anything he had written on ceremonial practices, and it was much harder than writing stories, "for I got lots of Questions to aske from the old Peoples of things that I Dont know any about" (Hunt to Boas, March 9, 1906). He chided Boas, "and now you think that its Easy thing to study all the Diffrent ways of the Indian getting food and cooking them. now it is a Hard on my Head to Do it in the Right way (Hunt to Boas, January 18, 1907). In his *Ethnology of the Kwakiutl*, Boas offered token credit to Lucy, noting, "Much of the information in regard to cookery was obtained by Mr. Hunt from Mrs. Hunt," but he dismissed her status by characterizing her merely as someone who was "thoroughly familiar with the duties of a good housewife" (Boas 1921, 45).

In 1908, disease struck the Hunt household yet again. Lucy lingered in sickness for months before passing away in April. Boas expressed his sympathy: "I have been thinking of you very often, and it must be hard for you to get accustomed to the loss of your dear wife" (Boas to Hunt, June 11, 1908). Hunt responded:

this is about the Hardest thing I Ever got, that is to lose my Dear loving wife, who was a great Help to Both you and me in the work I have to Do for you. it is a great lose to me and my Poor children . . . I am trying to get a tomb stone for her grave, for I want to work for her once more to get it. But I will never forget her (Hunt to Boas, June 18, 1908).

George was doubly bereft. He wrote to Boas that not only were he and his children emotionally adrift, but also he simply could not do the ethnographic work without Lucy's crucial assistance:

I am trying to Do the work for you, and I find that it is Hard without the Help I use to get from my Dead wife, for some times I would forget some thing in my writing then she would tell me. But now I got to get some one to tell me. and I have to Pay for it, so it come Hard for me (Hunt to Boas September 18, 1908).

It apparently surprised Boas to learn that Lucy had participated in recounting, recording, and translating traditions that were virtually unknown to her husband. Hunt traveled north for a while to escape the memory of his loss, and when he returned, he wrote, "But now I see it is no use to try to live

without working. so I made my mind to go to work for you again” (Hunt to Boas March 29, 1910). He began by finishing up his wife’s manuscripts on cooking.

At this juncture, if Boas had been more familiar with Kwakwaka’wakw culture, he could have turned to Hunt’s sisters. Given the lines of descent (reckoned matrilineally), and the tight relationships among Kwakwaka’wakw women, Hunt’s sisters apparently inherited greater rights to cultural traditions and transmission than did their brother George. Did they wish to serve as informants? Perhaps so. In some of his letters, George had complained of having to hide the books that Boas sent him from his sisters, who were quite keen to have them; he also noted that he felt compelled to hide his correspondence and the texts he was working on.

In 1916, Hunt gleefully reported that he had a new wife, Tsukwani Francine 'Nakwaxda'xw, to inspire a rebirth of research. With Tsukwani at his side, the letters flowed freely again. Like Lucy, Tsukwani was a *Wi'oma*, a high-ranking Kwakwaka’wakw woman. George was actually Tsukwani’s third husband in a chain of strategic couplings. She was first married, against her will, to an elderly uncle on her mother’s side, as a means of retaining his inherited rights. When he died, she took a younger man of lesser social standing. After finding him in love with someone else, she left him. “On the next day after that she was engaged to Mr. G. Hunt by his daughter” (Mrs. G. Hunt 1930). This relationship afforded access to secret societies, since, as Boas observed, “The right to become a member of a secret society is acquired by marrying the daughter of an elder member and by subsequent introduction . . . great pain is taken that the societies are sustained by the right marriages” (Boas 1889, 11). The Hunt women apparently had a hand in this choice, given Tsukwani’s recollection that George’s eldest daughter arranged the match.

Tsukwani became a crucial partner in Hunt’s most dramatic acts of cultural representation, his work for photographer Edward S. Curtis from 1911-1914. Hunt recruited, hired, and directed Native artisans and actors for Curtis’ popular documentary *In the Land of the War Canoes* (Curtis 1915).<sup>9</sup> Tsukwani constructed costumes and acted in several scenes, and Hunt’s daughter-in-law Sarah Abaya and granddaughter Margaret Wilson Frank (Emily Hunt Wilson’s daughter) both portrayed the lead female character of “Naida” (Holm and Quimby 1980). This production also captured images of the ceremonies surrounding a traditional wedding (although it is unclear whether it was an actual marriage or a re-enactment). Curtis photographed a wedding party arriving by canoe, with a be-winged husband standing at the prow. He captured poignant images of Tsukwani in her wedding garb, seated on the ritual platform constructed for a highly ranked chief’s daughter to be carried to her husband. Curtis also captured an evocative photograph of Margaret wearing her step-grandmother’s large abalone shell ear ornaments. (See the cover of this issue.) In print, the precise identities of all of these people were erased or obscured by the use of other tribal names. This “chief’s daughter” and “wedding party” were deployed to represent the generic culture, rather than specific individuals. Hunt told Boas that Curtis got the pictures, but only he was privy to the real stories behind them (Hunt to Boas, December 15, 1919; June 7, 1920).

After working for Curtis, Hunt returned to Boas with the promise of previously unknown and inaccessible sacred knowledge. He told Boas, “all the names of the secret spirits was kept Back from

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<sup>9</sup> Hunt also collected and arranged props (including skulls and mummified human remains) and posed for Curtis’s Hamat’sa photographs (Glass 2009, 132-133; Graybill and Boesen 1986, 65-67). Hunt’s portrayals seem dangerously close to ritual transgressions, but he may have felt protected because the images and dances were creatively reinvented and removed from a traditional ritual context, or because his face was blackened; Curtis noted that Hunt explicitly asked him to conceal his identity when publishing the Hamat’sa images (Glass 2009, 133).

you and I” (Hunt to Boas, December 12, 1916). He boasted that he could even access Tsukwani’s knowledge while she slept:

now there is some of these spirits names I did not know any thing about. some times while we are sleeping. my wife would start up and sing her PExEla songs. then . . . she would talk to the spirit, and she seems to get answer Back. next time the spirit comes to her I will write what she say to it (Hunt to Boas, December 22, 1916)

He realized now that his knowledge was minimal, compared to Tsukwani’s, and he assured Boas, “the way things looks, she got lots of it yet to tell me” (Hunt to Boas, December 12, 1916). He repeatedly emphasized the role she played in securing this unique information: “I Dont think theres any man got this great story. I Dont think I could get this, if I Did not take this wife I got now” (Hunt to Boas, February 10, 1917). Heralding the discovery of more than 40 different “secret spirits,” Hunt fully acknowledged Tsukwani’s role: “all these story these Indians would not tell you or me about it. ontill I took my wife” (Hunt to Boas, January 31, 1917).

### Legibility, Accessibility, and Productivity

*If you are successful in getting good old material from out of the various places where the Indians used to hide it, we shall go on collecting; but if we cannot get the material, I shall not be able to get any more money for you. . . . So now, my dear friend, you know that the whole success of this work is in your hands, and that it depends only upon your efforts and your success in collecting and in writing, how long we are going to continue it. —Boas to Hunt (May 1, 1901, APS)*

The frequency and content of their correspondence indicate that Boas expected Hunt to be at his beck and call virtually every year, between work at the cannery, hunting, or other jobs (Jacknis 1991). Boas would demand explanations whenever more than a few months passed without a letter, even if Hunt was needed elsewhere. In July of 1899, Boas demanded a batch of anticipated stories. “I am trying to Write them as fast as I can,” Hunt said, but Mr. Spencer needed him at the cannery. Even so, he assured Boas, “after I finish my Days Work then I set Down and Write” (Hunt to Boas, July 23, 1899, APS).

Boas appreciated Hunt’s attention to detail, reporting that he had “taken pains to make his descriptions as accurate as possible” through repetition and re-checking (Boas 1921, 451). “On the whole, discrepancies are so few in number and the period of recording is so long that the information as such evidently deserves full confidence (Boas 1921, 467). Boas also appreciated the ease of reading Hunt’s handwriting. Hunt’s English spelling was inconsistent, but his fluency in Kwak’wala (the Kwakwaka’wakw language) was apparently excellent. Boas relied upon Hunt to draft manuscripts, compile linguistic data, and also to correct Boas’s texts.<sup>10</sup>

By the 1930s, Hunt’s productivity started to wane. When asked to provide more writings on dreams, shamanism, medicine, stars, and superstition, he complied, but he explicitly asked that his

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<sup>10</sup> Boas’s handwriting, in contrast, was dreadful, nearly impossible to decipher. Hunt insisted that Boas deliver his requests, “in Printed letter so as there will be no mistake Between you and me” (Hunt to Boas, April 21, 1907). As a result, most of Boas’s instructions were typed (Berman 1994, 511). Interestingly, Hunt and Boas learned their original orthography from the same source: Reverend Alfred J. Hall. Hunt had learned English at Hall’s missionary school; Boas had learned the Native language from Hall’s publication on “Kagiutl” grammar (Boas 1900, 708).

name not be attached to some of these particular writings. Hunt may have recognized, at this juncture, that he had outlived his ritual position as a sort of assistant potlatch chief, since both his mother Anislaga and his beloved son David had passed on (in 1919 and 1928, respectively). Both his mother's Tlingit and his first wife's Kwakwaka'wakw inherited rights had moved on. Since Hunt had no children with his second wife, the new delicacy of his social position may have alerted him to the dangers of violating ritual protocols.

George was jealous of other informants, like Charles James Nowell (1870-1956), another Native man of mixed blood married to a high-ranking woman (Ford 1941). He was insistent that Boas not interview his sisters, who had begun sharing data with ethnographer Marius Barbeau from the National Museum of Canada (Barbeau 1950, 651-60). Hunt insisted that only he spoke the "old-fashioned" version of the Kwak'wala language, and claimed, "my youngest sister [Mary] Pretend to know the [old] Fashion language But I am half afraid She Dont know much" (Hunt to Boas, June 9, 1930). Hunt was just as critical of other Kwak'wala speakers, claiming that few knew the "old-fashioned" ways of speaking. To illustrate his point, he observed that they typically used "one word for Every thing instead of using the Defferent word for the Defferent [things]," and that "lots of the Indians comes and ask me the meaning of the words" (Hunt to Boas, March 15, 1930; June 9, 1930). After hearing that Boas had visited a Kwakwaka'wakw woman, Ga'axsta'las Jane Constance Cook,<sup>11</sup> Hunt warned that she "knows lots of things, of what she hears People talk about," but "her kwagut language is very short." Cook charged that Hunt "made up lots of words," but, he told Boas, But I feels Proud that I know the old ways" (Hunt to Boas, February 17, 1931).

When George Hunt died in 1933, his son Johnnie wrote to Boas, requesting support for his mother Tsukwani and funds for erecting a monument to his father. His father "was [a] great man for writing the Indian stories," Johnnie wrote; you could not find another like him (J. Hunt to Boas, September 26, 1933). Boas expressed his sympathy, and offered to contribute a "small sum" to Mrs. Hunt, "if it is necessary," but he told Johnnie that he "could not possibly get the Museum or the University to help pay for the monument" (Boas to J. Hunt, October 5, 1933). Now that George was dead, Boas had no further interest in the family.

## Conclusion

A small collection of manuscripts buried in the archives of the Committee on Native American Languages suggests that, given the chance, the First Nations women at Fort Rupert would have had a great deal to say if only George Hunt and Franz Boas had gotten out of the way. In 1930, Julia Averkieva, a Russian exchange student, accompanied Boas during his final field trip to Vancouver Island. During her six-month sojourn, Averkieva was warmly welcomed by the Hunt family and invited to potlatches and other social events (Averkieva and Sherman 1992).<sup>12</sup> She interviewed George's wife Tsukwani (identified as Mrs. G. Hunt), his daughter Mary (M. Hunt), his sister-in-law (Mrs. Sam Hunt), and his granddaughter-in-law (Mrs. B. Wilson). The resulting manuscripts are brief, but tantalizing. Tsukwani described Kwakwaka'wakw marriage and inheritance, puberty ceremonies, and techniques for blanket weaving (Mrs. G. Hunt 1930). Mary spoke about Tlingit ideals of beauty, married life, and

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<sup>11</sup> Cook's contacts with Boas were brief, but she provided some insights into Kwak'wala grammar, and she parlayed her skill at cross-cultural communication into important service for Kwakwaka'wakw people, by serving as a court interpreter for tribal chiefs making land claims before the McKenna-McBride Royal Commission (Robertson 2012, 6).

<sup>12</sup> Julia Pavlovna Averkieva also compiled a detailed manuscript on the significance of the cultural beliefs and chants that accompanied the weaving of string figures (Averkieva and Sherman 1992).

superstitions surrounding twins (M. Hunt 1930). George's first wife Lucy Homikanis resurfaced in Mary's memory of her mother; she recalled that "My mother was taking care of me for one year after my marriage. She did all of the important work of my husband's household" (M. Hunt 1930). Mary also fondly recalled when her mother-in-law and sister-in-law both came to live with her, training her in the conduct of food preparation and hosting visitors in their community (M. Hunt 1930). This pattern of female cohabitation and sharing of tasks was not uncommon in the region. It is, however, key in restoring a more accurate picture of the social relations of the Hunt households. Multiple generations of women were witness to (and likely influenced) George Hunt's fieldwork. The failure to record their voices and perspectives is a serious oversight.

George Hunt and Franz Boas made a remarkable contribution to the ethnographic records of Northwest Coast cultures, but they also obscured the crucial roles of First Nations women as cultural agents and owners. Among these nations, cultural narrations, songs, dances, names, and other physical and metaphysical cultural expressions were (and are) regarded as inherited privileges, replete with ritual responsibilities (U'Mista n.d.). Individuals could be shunned for speaking traditions outside of their tribe or rank (Bell 2005; Berman 1994). Hunt's present day descendants are grateful for his efforts, yet they also readily admit that "Hunt made mistakes" (Berman 1994, 509). When Lucy Mary Christina Bell interviewed family members regarding the protocols for cultural transmission, she was "consistently told that my grandfather . . . said nothing without first being told what to say by my grandmother" (Bell 2005, 72).<sup>13</sup> Even today, the *Wi'oma* exercise control over family boxes of treasures and traditions by placing individuals with restricted access into the social category of *Witsatla*, meaning, "you cannot reach into that box of treasures" (Bell 2005, 42). In retrospect, among the Kwakwaka'wakw, both Boas and Hunt were actually *Witsatla*; their access to tradition was enabled and mediated primarily through their association with privileged female insiders.

Today, the transcultural union of Anislagwa and her husband Robert Hunt is recalled with pride by their descendants (Hunt 2013). The children of Lucy Homikanis and George Hunt, along with the progeny of George's sisters, remained in close contact with Northwest Coast traditions and many married into high-status Kwakwaka'wakw families (Barbeau 1950). Members of the Hunt family are prominent in Northwest Coast art and cultural performance; there are sculptors, painters, jewelers, storytellers, and Chilkat blanket weavers, as well as anthropologists and filmmakers (Bell 2005; Hunt 2013; Nielsen 2001). In July of 2013, more than 500 Hunt descendants gathered at Fort Rupert for ceremonies of reunion (Dodis 2013; Hunt 2013). They feasted on locally abundant seafood, prepared just as Lucy would have cooked it, and erected a magnificent new totem pole, made by master carver Calvin Hunt, decorated by other kin, and filmed by artist Corrine Hunt, to honor Anislagwa (Dodis 2013; Hunt 2013).

In sum, the Boas/Hunt publications should not be viewed as the primary authorities on Kwakwaka'wakw culture and language. Instead, these narrative reconstructions are rather like an open-ended shadow box, casting only partial light on the ethnographic encounter. Northwest Coast First Nations women can be seen, past the shadows cast by these men, living rich and complex lives outside of these reconstructions. Like Anislagwa's ancestral raven, they have the ability to transform themselves at will, and to reappear in subsequent generations, in ways that may not be recognized by one-dimensional observers.

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<sup>13</sup> Lucy Mary Christina Bell interviewed Ann Brotchie, Lucy Smith, and Colleen Hemphill at Gwa'Sala-Nakwaxda'xw Reserve, January 25, 2005 (Bell 2005, 72).

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