

From Nationalization to Personalization: Towards an Historical Epistemology of the Concept of Culture in American Anthropology

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Abstract:

In the present days, culture has become a highly personal experience moving from its initial collective locus. As a consequence, the concept has undergone a process of unseen pluralization and expansion of meanings and interpretations. Herder is conventionally held responsible for coining the plural term ‘cultures’ by linking it with the eighteenth-century idea of nation. This conception evolved into a broader approach to look at cultural phenomena as national manifestations. Despite common assumptions, Herder did not ignore the role of the individual locus. Historical epistemology shows how, in the United States, a derivation of the Herderian notions took the pluralization of culture to the next level. By putting emphasis on the psychological and individual elements, the founders of American anthropology, Boas and his followers, revolutionized the conceptual frameworks in human and social sciences. It is possible to argue that personalization of culture is a secondary effect of Herder’s ideas. The Herderian-Boasian vision of culture mirrors the dichotomy between nationalization and personalization that activates strong conceptual mutations and reflects the dilemmas of the twenty-first century.

Keywords: culture, Herder, Boas, personalization, anthropology, historical epistemology

Introduction

In the twenty-first century the term ‘culture’ has become a big catchword. Almost every discourse and institution incorporated it as an integral part to their existence and overall activity (Bhatt 2020). The concept of culture reflects the historical and epistemological context within which it is located. Often used as synonymous for ‘society’, culture has expanded its conceptual powers. Interchangeable expressions such as ‘Western culture’ and ‘Western society’ have inundated our vocabularies. Moreover, culture has gradually replaced words such as ‘practice’ and even ‘style’. The expressions ‘strategic culture’ or ‘business culture’ do not seem so peculiar anymore (Bartosch 2022). Both subjective and abstract, culture has become an irresistible word (Steigerwald 2004). In this article I investigate how the concept of culture that was produced within a historical and epistemological context of the twentieth-century United States has deep Herderian roots. I put a special emphasis on Herder’s *Ideen Zur Philosophie Der Geschichte Der Menschheit* because Boas

made an explicit reference to this work as the foundational stone in the construction of the concept of culture. In fact, it is the only text in Herder's scholarly and literary oeuvre referenced by Boas.

The shapers of the American anthropology, the Boasians, were directly influenced by Herder (LaPolla 2020), who was the first to theorize the plurality of cultures, and to give us a formal concept that we use even today (Flett and Wrogemann 2020). In addition, Herder introduced the first definition of nation (Kulyk 2020). He has been conventionally held responsible for linking the notions of culture and nation. However, my argument is that Herder went further than the so-called nationalization of culture. By giving a great power to each human being in the construction of culture, Herder started a process of the personalization of culture that became much more visible thanks to the efforts of Boas and his students. We will end up finding elements that gradually begin to make sense in the analysis of the socio-political, historical and epistemological contexts.

Literature Review

Numerous academic disciplines and domains of knowledge have produced complex definitions of the term 'culture'. Over the centuries, the definitions have undergone a process of continuous redefinition and refining under the plurality and variability of contexts (ShawHong 2020). Research on this term has shown that the academic literature has not achieved consensus or a shared understanding. In 1952, the Boasian researchers, Kroeber and Kluckhohn had already detected and examined hundreds of definitions (Ciaudo 2021).

The academic literature on the concept of culture has experienced multiple shifts. The popularization of emotionalized and psychologized discourses has compelled researchers in diverse fields, from anthropology and sociology to medicine and economy, to take part in the emotional turn in science and humanities (Lerner and Rivkin-Fish 2021). This turn carries many obstacles and contradictions. According to De Vos (2011), even the mainstream psy-sciences have failed to achieve a comprehensive self-understanding. The structural failures that exist in the academia form a major paradox in the contemporary processes of psychologization.

Poetics of culture are often associated with anecdotes of ethnology. Excessive abstractions and discourses of otherness emerge from the lack of a deep historical view (Kroeber 1992). The dominance of the Herderian concept of culture did not secure its stability. The ideas that Herder introduced were subsequently developed and suffered significant mutations in the nineteenth and twentieth-century anthropology. In some cases, there were significant misunderstandings (Taylor 2011). Accusations of nationalism remain a constant element in the academic debate on Herder's work. In the article 'Hands off Herder: The New Right's Appropriation of an Eighteenth-Century Cultural Theorist', Speltz (2018) notes that Herder did not advocate nationalism. As a matter of fact, the interplay between the nation and the individual forms an important basis on which Herder constructed his theories.

Methodology: Historical Epistemology

I propose to clarify the mystery behind the concept of culture by restoring its historical and

epistemological context. In the twentieth century, this concept supplied the means for the astonishing rise of the human and social sciences. As each context produces a different meaning, a unitary concept of culture seems an impossible goal. Studying conceptual mutations assumes difficult and complex proportions (ShawHong 2020).

Concepts belong to the historical and epistemological context in which they emerged and evolved. Historical epistemology offers the space to bridge the dichotomous distinction between society and science. For historical epistemologists, knowledge has a dyadic character that forms a complex combination between science and common sense (Weir 2008). This dichotomy has obtained a renewed importance with the historical evolution of scientific research. According to Kasavin (2020), historical epistemology produces a special philosophical discourse and aims to construct historical knowledge adapted to the contemporary reality and the intersection of science and society. The flourishing of the Herderian concept of culture in the American anthropology does not have serendipitous, spontaneous qualities. In the rise of the culture and personality school, one can find valuable evidence, affinities and precedents for the actual content of anthropological frameworks.

Drawing on the works of Herder and the Boasians, the concept of culture will be analyzed and framed. This article is basically built around a comparison of two historical and epistemological realities that present a set of intertwined continuities. The critical potential of historical epistemology allows the study of complex phenomena such as self-reflection and psychologization of sciences. The epistemology of self-reflection unlocks the understanding of the phenomena of psychologization (De Vos 2011). Each researcher and scientist brings a unique vision of the studied subject, adding new paths for reflection and discussions. The gradual psychologization of scientific and intellectual paradigms during the twentieth century underpins the transformation of the interplay between science and society.

Results and Analysis

Boas' heavy Herderian heritage (Koerner 2000) cannot pass unnoticed. One has to gather the appropriate information, and situate it within the proper historical and epistemological context. Herder renewed and fortified the Herodotean concept of ethnic specificity, and gave scholars the plural concept of cultures, as an alternative to the classical concept in its singular form (Taylor 2011).

Herder's cultural nationalism is relatively well known. However, it is essential to position his ideas in their scientific, historical and epistemological context, to consider what it can teach us about the value of concept of culture. Scientists and researchers can no longer rely on simplistic interpretations of Herder's approaches.

What seems important to highlight is that latent in the Herderian concept was the premise of the autonomy of culture (Taylor 2011). One could state that Herder largely anticipated what would much later, in the twentieth century, be called 'cultural anthropology' (Voelz 2021). Inspired by Herder's works, Boas reshaped the entire character of American anthropology. He linked individual actions, thoughts and views with collective dimensions, contextual and environmental factors (Benton 2020). The emphasis on individual variables carries important implications in regard to

anthropological conceptions of culture, as it will be further explored in the following chapters of this study.

Boas and American Anthropology

The Boasians gave us the modern conception of culture (Kroeber 1992). This evolution needs to be traced with an overview of its broad historical and epistemological context. The twentieth century represents a turning point for conceptual frameworks.

Franz Boas and his students laid the basis for the full elaboration and widespread adoption of cultural relativism by redirecting American anthropology away from evolutionary approaches and the nineteenth-century racial theory (Brown 2008). Focused on the link between language and culture, and leaving race out of discussions, anthropologists, such as Boas and Sapir, began to give an increasing importance to cultural relativity (Everett 2013).

The Boasians conceptualized cultural difference horizontally based on the idea that people cannot be inferior or superior to one another. By experiencing distinct realities, people tend to form different notions for the good or the beautiful. Boas and his students critiqued earlier interpretations of culture of the twentieth century. Boas (re)initiated the trend of speaking of ‘cultures’ in the plural form. He fiercely denied the existence of a universal system valid for all human beings in which ‘culture’, in the singular, was the prerogative of the elite occupying the highest positions in evolutionary hierarchies (Bargués and Schmidt 2021).

Classical cultural relativism has a characteristically American flavor. One cannot forget that the concept of culture acquired an unseen power in North America which was far greater than elsewhere. In addition, the American legacy of multiculturalism and the efforts to assimilate unseen numbers of immigrants into a hybrid eclectic society, cultural relativism, and emerging issues such as intercultural tolerance, gained a strong political resonance that frequently lacked in most parts of the world, including Europe, until relatively late in the twentieth century (Brown 2008).

Herderian Heritage: Nationalization versus Personalization

Just like Herder, Boas’ work features a combination between atomism and holism (Verdon 2007). According to Boas (1904), in *Ideen zur Geschichte der Menschheit*, Herder created the first solid notion of culture. In Herder’s revolutionary analytical structures, culture did not represent a universal progress of humankind. Conceptualized in plural rather than singular, it inspired the Romantics to (re)discover folk culture, to collect and study the numerous elements of national folklores. The genetic make-up that forms plurality and the uniqueness of human cultures attracted the attention of scientists and philosophers (Voelz 2021).

According to Taylor (1991), Herder’s *Ideen* represents a milestone in the notion of originality of each human being. “Mankind, both taken as a whole and in its particular individuals, societies, and nations, is a permanent natural system” (Herder 1800, 451). The Herderian tradition positions individuals and nations as equivalent components in a complicated network of ‘living forces’ (Herder

1800, 451). Without dismissing the value of each individual, Herder insisted on searching the essence of beauty and truth in history and cultural experience. The study of individuality creates an important instrument in his theoretical arsenal.

Despite a heavy accent on collective aspects, Herder conceived culture as an embodied experience (Solanki 2022). Personalization of culture is a secondary effect of Herder's ideas which became the basis for the most influential American anthropological school. The Boasians gave a renewed meaning to the Herderian legacy. "In contrast to English anthropology and the chief American variety it superseded, the Boasian school had a taproot leading back to Germany, its ultimate origin to be found in traditions of which Johann Herder was the most important articulator" (Kroeber 1992, 12). The dichotomy between individual and nation represents a pillar of the Herderian arguments which will be analyzed in the next subchapters.

Nation and *Volksgeist*

"Time, place, and national character alone, in short, the general cooperation of active powers in the most determinate individuality, govern all the events that happen among mankind, as well as all the occurrences in nature" (Herder 1800, 348). Following the Herderian postulates, Boas recognized the role of the 'genius of a people' in culture formation, art, and meanings (Verdon 2007). Herder conceptualized *Volk* as a profoundly humanist idea (Speltz 2018). His idea of *Volksgeist* reflected a complex interplay between culture and invisible psychic processes. Boas inherited this legacy by studying the psychology of the visible habits and traditions, and the invisible *Volksgeist* (Verdon 2007).

Psychological thinking intersects the Herderian conceptualizations of art. Herder compared the process of cultural production with a human being. "The production of an art, as of a human being, was an instant of pleasure, an union between idea and character, between body and spirit" (Herder 1800, 240). With Herder, cultures acquire a body and a spirit that accentuate their plurality.

One of the most important pillars of the twentieth-century American anthropology, cultural relativism, has many similarities with German idea of nation. Despite common assumptions, Herder's deeply relativist stance toward nation made him and his followers able to observe and study cultural differences in an inclusive and non-chauvinist manner. In the hands of Herder, national identity became a tool for fusing social and aesthetic ideas. He did not aim to use national identity as a political tool (Quinn 2014).

The Boasians elaborated the cultural relativist axioms by considering the unique quality of culture to create a total social world that can reproduce itself through enculturation. In this process, the members of one generation transmit their psychological and emotional dispositions, embodied behaviors and values to the members of the next generation (Brown 2008). The intergenerational links make the idea of *Volksgeist* historically more relevant and useful.

Individual and *Selbstheit*

Despite being famous for his reflections of *Volksgeist*, for Herder, the notion of *Selbstheit*

played an essential role (Holzhey 2006). Selfhood became a central priority. According to Theobald and Wood (2009), the emergence of the modern state, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, became tightly bounded to the demands of securing the free pursuit of not only prosperity but also of happiness. The political and economical changes produced a powerful effect on the notion of *Selbstheit*. “Herder, further refined the liberal view of identity formation along individualist lines by popularizing the idea of selfhood as something singularly unique. For Herder, there is only one me and, further, only one original way to be me” (Theobald and Wood 2009, 12). This infinite variation separates human beings from animals. “No beast has the form, clothing, habitation, arts, unfettered mode of life, unrestrained proprieties, and fluctuating opinions, which distinguish almost every individual of mankind” (Herder 1800, 67).

In the twentieth century, the Herderian legacy found a new shelter. Going beyond formal appearances, Boas produced a complex psychological anthropology (Verdon 2007). Discussions on psychological elements and cultural relativism gradually acquired a distinctly North American character. By crystallizing the relativistic thinking in American anthropology, the Boasians produced strong ties with the European social theory of the eighteenth century. Herder’s cultural relativism produced a powerful effect that has continued for centuries. Adolf Bastian refined many elements of the Herderian tradition and transmitted them to his student, Franz Boas. North America was especially receptive to Herder’s ideas but this transfer took much more time in the other parts of the world. British anthropology, for example, maintained a closer contact with academic philosophy than its North American counterpart. British anthropologists aimed to clarify the transcultural status of rationality, and to identify different modes of thought, an idea originated in the works of Malinowski, Lévy-Bruhl, and Evans-Pritchard (Brown 2008). German-American transnational transfers induced changes at multiple levels and scales. Herder argued for uniqueness of not only of each culture/nation but also of each individual:

Western nations, particularly the United States, have so completely adopted this view that it is widely believed to be a self-evident truth rather than a cultural predisposition. Further, we believe that individuals are to find this “one way to be me” only by looking within themselves, not in the world around them. Conformity to social institutions began to be seen as a threat to one’s originality and an impediment to the authentic realization of one’s true self. Thus, in the development of contemporary thought, the importance of the community’s role in shaping identity suffered a further blow. After Herder, modern selfhood was defined almost exclusively by the exercise of rational choice in the pursuit of one’s “unique” identity. (Theobald and Wood 2009, 12)

The Boasians took the innovative Herderian arguments on human senses and impressions as a starting point. “It is truly refreshing to find Herder, in the age of neatly pigeon-holed faculties, boldly asserting these to be but more or less convenient abstractions; to Herder the human ‘mind’ is an indivisible entity” (Sapir 1907, 12). The great resonance of Herder’s notions should not astonish us. Besides fortifying the idea of nation, he touched the very core of philosophical inquiry by

rethinking human subjectivity. According to Holzhey (2006), discussions on subjectivity can be traced back to Plato. However, it was arguably only with Herder that the formation of subjectivity through a complex set of imaginary relations as felt existence starts to acquire a clear and solid conceptualization. This specific mode of subject constitution critically informs the existence within the symbolical order that transcends empirical one.

Psychologization of American Culture

Franz Boas had a special interest for psychology that was inherited by his students. Margaret Mead promoted the adoption of critical and reflexive perspectives. While Ruth Benedict's work evolved around the idea of human values across cultures, Paul Radin argued for the existence of a universal cognitive template (Brown 2008). The Boasians catalyzed the process of psychologization of culture. But how can one define this process? For example, by psychologization, Parker (2010) means "the reduction of social processes to the level of the individual subject and the induction of that subject into an understanding of themselves in which psychological explanations take precedence" (Parker 2010, 26). The individual subject became the nucleus of the Boasian anthropology, and psychology became an indispensable tool to achieve its aims.

"The contrasted goods which different cultures pursue, the different intentions which are at the basis of their institutions, are essential to the understanding both of different social orders and of individual psychology" (Benedict 1934, 165). As we can observe, Benedict (1934) explicitly uses the term 'cultures' in its plural form. The clear emphasis on individual psychology introduces a new set of variables. In contrast to its plural form, the unitary conception of culture operated in a monilinear style to achieve a theoretical betterment. Singular conceptions promote a superficial perception of human differences based on simple variables, such as the color of the skin and technological abilities. In Herder's plural conception, human beings were compared to different animal species. The Herderian view assumed that while one may perceive multiple animal species inhabiting the same environment, each species had, in fact, its own environment framed internally by abilities, inherited instincts, and habits. In other words, each culture had its own unique ungraspable *Umwelt* (Taylor 2011). By looking from exterior to interior, Herder transformed culture into a highly embodied and individualized element. Following a similar logic, Boas became increasingly interested in studying the power of each organism's surroundings. By defining these surroundings as a cumulative product of the history of the people, the influence of the regions and the interactions with other people during the migratory processes, Boas postulated a relativist model of culture and cautioned against absolute interpretations. In his view, an anthropologist must always look at an individual in relation to its surroundings. Moreover, Boas argued that the thoughts and world views of individuals may vary according to their surroundings (Benton 2020).

The Herderian legacy seems to have an enigmatic, obscure character. Authors tend to not acknowledge its power and influence. The conflict between Herder and Kant may be at the origin of this tendency. Kant classified Herder's theories as a mere romantic psychologization rather than

an empirical statement of human nature (Gilman 2014). However, Herder developed complex arguments and hypotheses. By extending the concept of *Umwelt* from animal species to human cultures, Herder argued that each culture creates its unique psychological and behavioral patterns. Exterior stimuli shape human beings and human cultures. For Herder, at birth, human beings lack sufficient instincts to behave. Only through the process of enculturation and interaction with the surrounding world, an individual becomes complete. Each culture creates its own unique cultural *Umwelt*, which acts in relation to the values of each individual (Taylor 2011). This complex interplay between cultural and individual variables was captured by the Boasians to bridge a link between psychology and anthropology:

Both psychology and anthropology could well begin to lay as much stress upon the similarities in all human beings as they have, quite properly, upon the differences. The anthropologist, looking at psychology, must express some fear lest “human nature” go the way “mind” has gone. (Kluckhohn 1948, 442)

We need to frame the concept of culture within the broader historical and epistemological context of the twentieth century. Parker (2010) associates psychologization with the birth of capitalism and the exchange of labor time for money which has encouraged competitive individualism as a technique for maximizing profit. Transcending the economical realm, psychologized anthropology provided new models and alternative analytical approaches that stressed the mediating role and expressive value of each individual (Spindler 1978). Psychological thinking came to dominate institutions of cultural production. With psychological and therapeutic logic infiltrating social life, new meanings and values emerge (Lerner and Rivkin-Fish 2021).

Culture and Personality School

The term ‘culture’ gained massive and worldwide popularity only from the beginning of the twentieth century (Ciaudo 2021). The Boasians instrumentalized this concept and set American anthropology on a path of psychologization. By creating the culture and personality school, Boas and his students became the emblems of a new anthropological thinking. They reinterpreted the Herderian concept of culture(s) and stressed its subjective dimension. In her revolutionary book *Patterns of Culture*, Ruth Benedict set down the foundational principles of the culture and personality school by describing human cultures as a very fluid yet cohesive patterns of thought and behavior (Robbins 2018).

The significance of cultural behaviour is not exhausted when we have clearly understood that it is local and man-made and hugely variable. It tends also to be integrated. A culture, like an individual, is a more or less consistent pattern of thought and action. Within each culture there come into being characteristic purposes not necessarily shared by other types of society. In obedience to these purposes, each people further and further consolidates its experience, and in proportion to the urgency of these drives the heterogeneous items of behaviour take more and more congruous shape. Taken up by a well-

integrated culture, the most ill-assorted acts become characteristic of its peculiar goals, often by the most unlikely metamorphoses. The form that these acts take we can understand only by understanding first the emotional and intellectual mainsprings of that society. (Benedict 1934, 33)

Just like Herder, in the search for distinctive characters and traits, Benedict compared whole cultures with individuals. During the 1920s, American anthropologists turned to psychological theories to study and explain cultural phenomena. The culture and personality school emerged in a historical context dominated by unique social and epistemological conditions of comparative intercultural inquiry (Srivastava 2013). The Herderian postulates found a new life in the culture and personality school. “Herder’s emphasis on the social genesis of the personality into an account based on the psychologizing of culture” (Jones 2020, 895) became instrumental in the Boasian anthropology. Edward Sapir refined many ideas that formed of the framework of culture and personality (Spindler 1978). In his personalistic approach, personality became more than a simple cultural microorganism (Preston 1966). Boas and his students elevated the study of the personality and the individual to a goal in itself. They fiercely defended the personalization of culture without dismissing the role of collective dimensions and the importance of social anthropology:

In that case “social anthropology” would resemble culture-and-personality, or personality-in-culture, which started out somewhat self-consciously as the revolutionary adding of a new dimension to the view of culture, but which seems now essentially to be contributing to the portrayal of culture a greater depth of personalization than was formerly thought necessary, possible, or meet. (Kroeber 1959, 402)

Both psychology and anthropology borrow concepts from each other. Closely examining human beings, the two fields share a similar ideological reservoir, despite using different research strategies. The period 1930-1960 witnessed growing intersections between cultural anthropology and social psychology that activated the mechanisms for the creation of the culture and personality school. Captivated by psychological processes of learning and socialization, American cultural anthropologists greatly encouraged these intersections. Individual behavior and culture gradually became two increasingly convergent dimensions (Srivastava 2013).

Personalization as a Theoretical Tool

The fusion between the notions of culture and personality induced a multilayered set of effects. Taking the Herderian approach as model, the Boasians exponentially amplified the plural nature of the concept of culture. “The pluralization move was made by Franz Boas and Ruth Benedict” (Dâmaso and Murray 2021, 160). This pluralization operated through a complex process of personalization. Benedict’s personalization of cultures (Guddemi 2005) has had a powerful effect. Thanks to her efforts, cultural theory underwent major modifications, transformations, and reformulations. Benedict argued that the complex multidimensional variables of culture carry valuable meanings, and insights that can be discovered in the patterned regularities of individuals within a determined society

(Brooks 1964). She did not conceptualize the individual and the cultural realities as two conflicting forces. On the contrary, Benedict combined the two notions in order to undertake her analyses:

The problem of the individual is not clarified by stressing the antagonism between culture and the individual, but by stressing their mutual reinforcement. This rapport is so close that it is not possible to discuss patterns of culture without considering specifically their relation to individual psychology. (Benedict 1934, 183)

Another of Boas's students, Margaret Mead, greatly stimulated the use of cultural notions in the study of individualities. By replacing heredity with cultural conditioning, in her theoretical models, Mead advocated that temperaments and individualities have pronounced cultural characteristics. As a matter of fact, she was the first anthropologist to closely look at specific human development processes through a multicultural lens (Benton 2020). Overall, the Boasian anthropology justified itself as an intensely personal, highly detailed study of small cultural groups. The Boasians celebrated the difference and cultural diversity by gathering and analyzing enormous amounts of ethnological materials and comparing archaeological and linguistic data (Kroeber 1992). In their hands, personalization became a methodological instrument and requirement. It secured a solid basis for interdisciplinary discussions and dialogues. Greatly dependent on the process of psychologization of culture, the personalization technique facilitated conceptual innovation and the introduction of new theoretical approaches.

Individualistic Concept of Culture and Personalistic Approach

The Boasians created a concept of culture whose value lies in its interdisciplinarity. According to Steigerwald (2004), since Sapir, the concept of culture has been interpreted as a bimodal formation, aesthetics and anthropology. Today this concept continues to reflect two traditions. Its rise to intellectual dominance in the recent years may be explained by this solid mix. From the aesthetic tradition, the concept of culture received the inherently subjective and highly personal quality of taste. On the other hand, from the anthropological tradition, it got a strong predisposition towards indefinable abstraction. The two features - subjectivity and abstraction - explain the universal power of the concept of culture today.

Culture is more than aesthetics and anthropology. The development of the twentieth-century aesthetics, anthropology, psychology, philosophy, and politics connected conceptual frameworks and models. In their writing, the Boasians, such as Ruth Benedict, demonstrate an impressive level of interdisciplinary effort that puts the concept of culture into its larger context:

To understand the behaviour of the individual it is not merely necessary to relate his personal life-history to his endowments, and to measure these against an arbitrarily selected normality. It is necessary also to relate his congenial responses to the behaviour that is singled out in the institutions of his culture. (Benedict 1934, 183)

As we can see, Benedict uses culture as a tool to understand the individual behavior. The Boasians reshaped this concept to fit it into a coherent personalistic approach. One's culture has become a matter of subjective imagination. Its abstract quality has made culture more useful and open to all sorts of views, interpretations, purposes, and influences (Steigerwald 2004).

The Boasians did not ignore the importance of history. For example, Boas argued that an organism's actions represented a direct or indirect implication of its whole distinctive history up to that specific point in time (Benton 2020). In this context, history becomes a useful instrument. The study of the concept of culture remains incomplete without considering its history. The conceptual dilemmas and paradoxes stem from the intellectual history of culture. At its origin, the aesthetic tradition elaborated on a body of thought determined by aesthetic judgment. One should be aware that aesthetic judgment is, put simply, taste which remains an inherently subjective question. It does not reflect one reality. Culture has become a mirror for an infinite number of realities. Reducing culture to taste produces powerful effects that lead to a high degree of subjectivity. At the same time, the science of culture, anthropology, tends to define its main concept as a way of life, which despite all the academic and scientific efforts, remains highly broad and abstract. The academic community has recognized these fallacies. Meanwhile, the concept of culture has spilled into common usage, and its fallacies have become even more pronounced (Steigerwald, 2004). The Sapirian concept of culture combines subjective and abstract features in order to create highly individualistic plural meanings. Conceptual precision and argumentative rigor elevated the importance of the Sapirian concept of culture:

The true locus of culture is in the interactions of specific individuals and, on the subjective side, in the world of meanings which each one of these individuals may unconsciously abstract for himself from his participation in these interactions. Every individual is, then, in a very real sense, a representative of at least one sub-culture which may be abstracted from the generalized culture of the group of which he is a member. Frequently, if not typically, he is a representative of more than one sub-culture, and the degree to which the socialized behavior of any given individual can be identified with or abstracted from the typical or generalized culture of a single group varies enormously from person to person. (Sapir 1932, 236)

Stressing the role of psychology, Sapir finds the locus of culture in the individual. While other researchers were suggesting discarding the concept of culture, he saw its enormous potential as an inclusive frame of reference and gave it a central position in social thought. With Sapir, the concept of culture acquired an unseen level of power and influence (Preston 1966). His distinction between authentic and false cultures criticized industrial scientific-driven cultures for lacking spirituality and harmony (Pupavac 2012). In the chase for authenticity, Sapir turned to psychology and the study of thoughts and feelings. Sapir's individualistic concept of culture provided an anthropological approach that challenged cultural determinism (Stern 2022).

Subjectivization and Personalization of Culture

Culture and personality studies emerged in a historical and epistemological environment dominated by a general interest for psychology and psychoanalysis (Frie 2014). The Boasians gave a new breath to the concept of culture through the process of personalization. Culture became constantly reinterpreted, highly mediated and individualized (Spindler 1978). The personalistic approach redefined culture into a product derived from the mutual interactions between all the personalities of a determined group. In this new formula, culture becomes the personalized construct made through conscious or unconscious selections of experiences that each individual perceives as significant (Preston 1966).

To understand social processes, scientists and researchers use psychologized individual experiences as a theoretical template (Parker 2010). Psychologization and personalization represent two complementary processes. From a cultural perspective, personalization involves knowledge and identity dynamics. Hollins (1995) provides a comprehensive definition of the personalization process:

Personalizing culture refers to the act of developing knowledge of one's own culture that allows for the type of deep introspection that reveals its centrality in one's own life. This includes acquiring an understanding of the longitudinal influence of early socialization, making explicit one's own personal and group identity, identifying personally help perceptions of the world that are culturally framed, and describing participation in culturally sanctioned practices and values. (Hollins 1995, 71)

Each individual establishes a unique connection with cultural phenomena. The personalization process needs to be acknowledged and explored. Stressing the personal dimension of culture puts anthropology in a new light. Boas and his students adopted an explicit interdisciplinary position. As a consequence, the Boasian cultural relativism has spread very rapidly beyond the boundaries of anthropology (Brown 2008).

Nowadays we can witness an increasing psychologization of individual subjectivity (Parker 2010). The individual has become the central component in the discussions on authenticity and culture. The Herderian legacy resulted in multiple subtle shifts that affected this process. "Herder paved the way for the Romantic fascination with the idea of cultural authenticity to be found in the simple lifestyles of ordinary people" (Voelz 2021, 71). The simple individual was transformed into a cultural agent with significant power and autonomy. In fact, "Herder was the first to speak of authenticity as one's own measure of selfhood" (Hutflötz 2020, 54). He was fascinated by the great diversity of cultural manifestations and individual constructions. "The human species is such a copious scheme of energies and capacities, that, as every thing in nature rests on the most determinate individuality" (Herder 1800, 451).

Despite few direct references, the Boasians celebrated the Herderian legacy. For example, in 'Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions', Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) insisted on Herder's crucial importance for the creation of solid definitions of culture. The link is subtle, yet powerful. Boas and his students used Herder's individualistic concept of culture to reformulate American anthropological discourses.

Conclusion

The Herderian concept of culture emerged in the eighteenth century but it did not lose its resonance today. We examined the historical and epistemological context of the emergence of this concept, and its remarkable achievement in terms of scientific power.

As a signifier, culture carries the dichotomy between nature and nurture. What really matters in this question is the human being. The value of each individual remains at the centre of this dichotomy. Assuming the roles of the agent, participant, recipient and even catalyst, the human being actively creates and transforms cultural processes (Bhatt 2020). We can no longer legitimately use the terminology of culture without reference to their historical and epistemological context. As formulated by Herder, culture is a fluid multilayered matter. Each individual has an active role in cultural dynamics. The personalizing approach, proposed by the Boasians, pushes the anthropologists much closer to the subjects they are studying. The combination between the personalizing approach, sophisticated knowledge of psychic structure and meaningful participation allows a deeper understanding of personal relationships and personal meanings that create the cultural *milieu* (Preston 1966). As a matter of fact, culture manifests itself temporality and spatiality not only through collective but also individual norms, cognitive structures, beliefs, values and ways of life (Bhatt 2020).

Studying the phenomena of psychologization improves the understanding the modern subjectivity as such (De Vos 2011). In the plural and personalized conception, culture acquired a renewed power. “Cultures, like personalities, are in part unique” (Schein 1991, 311). The individuals experience the great multiplicity of cultures they interact with through a wide range of personally significant perceptions. Putting the individual in the centre of the question facilitates the study of cultures (Preston 1966). The personalization process has given us many possibilities. In its contemporary usage, the concept of culture has become an omnipresent device. It mirrors not only the variety of subjective interpretations but also the complexity of structures of power in era of globalization. Both abstract and highly subjective, the conceptual networks of culture carry the paradoxical burden of the present times (Steigerwald 2004). Despite a less extensive national focus, the Herderian legacy shines as brightly as ever through the contemporary processes of subjectivization and personalization. It continues to motivate the pluralization of the concept of culture and the openness towards infinite human diversity.

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