

DOI 10.2478/doc-2025-0002

This is an open access article licensed under the Creative Commons AttributionNonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>)

Alexandru Casian

University of Paris 8, France

alex1992universty@gmail.com

ORCID ID: 0000-0002-0438-0237

Einführung: Tracing the Personalisation of the Herderian Concept of Culture in American Academia

Article history:

Received 06 January 2025

Revised 04 March 2025

Accepted 07 March 2025

Available online 10 June 2025

Abstract: In today's world, the idea of culture has an inherent plural character. The conceptual pluralisation may occur at different levels. We witness a growing

number of cultural manifestations through the complex dynamics between individuals and their multicultural communities. The post-modern human being interacts with cultural artefacts and philosophical notions in an increasingly personalised manner. Franz Boas and Johann Gottfried von Herder are two key figures in the pluralisation and personalisation of the concept of culture through the implicit ideas of *Einfühlung*. Conventionally associated with other philosophers, this complex notion can be traced back to Herder. The idea of “feeling into” creates powerful meanings out of numerous divergences articulated in the individuals and their interaction with the world. By using the historical epistemology approach, significant continuities emerge from anthropological and psychological narratives. German-American transfers involved a meaning metamorphosis in anthropology that expresses the human drive to personal significance and development. Despite being relatively unknown outside German-speaking circles, the concept of *Einfühlung* has continued to evolve and to change cultural representations in contemporary societies.

Keywords: *Einfühlung*, Herder, Boas, culture, personalisation

Introduction

In today's world, the notion of culture replaced many other words such as society, practice or style (Bartosch, 2022). Its tight links with the concept of *Einfühlung* were consolidated by the creator of the contemporary dominant concept of culture, Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803). The need to perceive and analyse other cultures and historical periods influenced the idea of *Einfühlung* (Curtis, 2014). Herder was one of the first philosophers to consciously use the notion of culture in its plural sense. His groundbreaking idea of *Volksgeist* (people's spirit) significantly broadened the interdisciplinary perspective on cultural phenomena (Ackermann, 2016). The German-born American anthropologist, Franz Boas (1858–1942), adapted Herder's notions to twentieth-century realities. With the help of his students, Edward Sapir (1884–1939), Ruth Benedict (1887–1948), Margaret Mead (1901–1978), Alfred Kroeber

(1876–1960) and Alexander Goldenweiser (1880–1940), among many others, he laid the foundations for anthropology in the United States. By planting the seeds for the development of *Einfühlung* as a solid theoretical construct, Herder opened the way to a new conceptualisation of human feelings and individual experiences based on discourses of the psychological self and a growing interest for intersubjective phenomena (Romand, 2015).

Etymologically speaking, the German noun “*Einfühlung*” represents a derivation from the reflexive verb “*einfühlen*” through the substantival suffix “-ung”. The word “*einfühlen*” is formed from the verb “*fühlen*” (to feel, touch or examine) and the prefix “*ein-*”, used to specify direction. By accentuating the idea of “feeling into”, the term “*Einfühlung*” conventionally denotes the ability to detect other’s emotional states and to identify with them (Mietelski, 2022). Throughout history, this complex concept has accumulated numerous meanings. While Hackl, Märker and Doblmair (2024) define *Einfühlung* as “recognising someone’s feelings” (p. 142), Juvekar and Murali (2022) translate it as “aesthetic sympathy” (p. 143). It is in this richness of suggestive meanings that *Einfühlung* stands preeminent among the numerous notions in our contemporary highly psychologised vocabularies. This complex construct acquired new meanings that touch the challenges faced by the contemporary human beings. For example, identity and emotional struggles have important effects on individuals and communities that range from social disequilibria and income inequities to feelings of relative deprivation (Tehrani, 1998).

In the light of the renewed interest for the notion of *Einfühlung* in contemporary science and philosophy (Gallese, 2008), it seems important to trace its evolution. Feeling and experiencing cultural phenomena in a distinct way evokes the old dilemma between human nature and human variation. Shore (2000) notes that anthropologists study the group variation in order to detect biological, social and cultural differentiations depending on numerous anthropological subfields. Anthropology as a discipline celebrates human diversity. However, Shore (2000) argues that the study of human nature and the study of human diversity may sometimes lead to opposite research perspectives. The main aim of this article is to present the notion of *Einfühlung* from a new light and to give a new breath to conventional conceptual genealogies that develop around names of renamed

German philosophers such as Robert Vischer (1847–1933) and Theodore Lipps (1851–1914). By re-examining the Herderian-Boasian notion of culture and its epistemological basis, the often overlooked idea of *Einfühlung* emerges as a central component in contemporary frameworks.

Literature Review

In today's era, the concept of culture became inseparable from the idea of identity and its interiorised dimensions. Our identities are formed through three forms of culture: (1) primary culture—identification with other human beings; (2) secondary culture—language and cosmology, (3) tertiary culture—mediated communication. These three elements of cognition continuously interact to construct our ego identities (Tehrani, 1998). Preston (1966) defines culture as a construct to which the individual reacts and responds in a unique personal way. In American anthropology, the concept of culture plays a special role. The numerous sub-disciplines of American anthropology have allied themselves with almost every existing discipline. From this point of view, the concept of culture stands at crossroads of the debates on trans-disciplinary unification (O'Meara, 1999).

In academic literature, the links between the notions of culture and *Einfühlung* are not always obvious. Given the great variety of translations, its history is difficult to trace (Nowak, 2011). The idea of *Einfühlung* incorporates many meanings that globally turn around the concept of empathy (Juvekar & Murali, 2022). Jakupi (2018), for example, translates it as “to feel as a one” and “walk in another's shoes” (p. 318). According to Montag, Gallinat and Heinz (2008), the German philosopher, Robert Vischer coined this term in 1873. He influenced other major intellectual figures, including Theodore Lipps and, subsequently, Sigmund Freud. Besides the conventional translations of “feeling into” nature, works of art, cultural phenomena or emotional experiences of other cultures and individuals (Nowak, 2011), Matthiesen and Klitmøller (2019) add the definition of “projecting oneself into something else” (p. 184). It seems important to highlight that the kinaesthetic meanings have predominantly German sources (Lanzoni, 2012).

Greatly inspired by Vischer, Theodore Lipps actively promoted the notion of *Einfühlung*. His definition emphasized the idea of an instinctive mimicry of the Other, rather than a simple projection onto an object. He highlighted the importance of empathetic experiences with both inanimate objects and living organisms. Robert Vischer, on the other hand, concentrated his attention on the construction and the expansion of the self by transforming *Einfühlung* into a means of union (Curtis, 2014).

While the majority of the literature attributes the emergence and theoretical consolidation of *Einfühlung* to Robert Vischer (Matthiesen & Klitmøller, 2019) and Theodore Lipps (Pais, 2024), the Herderian legacy is generally overlooked (Curtis, 2014). In the academic literature, the links to Herder, Boas and their notions of culture tend to fade throughout history. Historical epistemology has the potential to fill theoretical gaps. This methodological tool recreates the history of philosophy and of epistemic concepts by mapping the history of scholarly *personae* (Simons, 2023).

Methodology

The complexity of the concept of *Einfühlung* calls for interdisciplinary methodological approaches. Historical epistemology lies at the intersection of the history of science and the history of concepts. Through a unique perspective on the history of scholarly *personae*, this interdisciplinary methodological approach can reveal itself particularly useful in many academic scenarios. Philosophers such as Gaston Bachelard, Léon Brunschvicg and Michel Foucault actively connected considerations of subjectivity and mental constitution with the general perception of science. In addition to trace the evolution of concepts, researchers become able to analyse the scientific mind behind them. In other words, historical epistemology allows a better understanding of the scientific and philosophical self (Simons, 2023).

The principles of historical epistemology do not contradict the Herderian tradition. For Herder, specific concepts and ideas could be examined only in relation to the cultural units of which they were a part (Trigger, 2004).

The concept of culture represents an illustrative example. All the ways to use the term “culture” must acknowledge the original meanings of culture and its true conceptual intensions. Otherwise, this essential notion can become a potentially superficial construct (Bartosch, 2022).

Historical epistemology fuses temporal and spatial boundaries to produce a new picture of knowledge formation. From this perspective, Boasian anthropology recovered the temporal and spatial specificity of cultural events and processes through the development of systems of editorial and rhetorical analysis highly dependent upon European social and psychological conceptions (Kroeber, 1992). The process of psychologisation reinforced the central position of Boasian anthropology. Psychologisation celebrates the human beings and their lives. Focusing only on biological factors, such as genes and neurotransmitters, does not secure the core information that researchers need. The danger of an exclusively biogenetic paradigm is falling into a depsychologising of subjectivity (De Vos, 2011). Franz Boas and his students were aware of these risks and their triggers. The followers of the Boasian tradition examined human behaviours in order to detect imposed structures and conceptions (Preston, 1966).

The links between historical epistemology and psychology are very tight. Simons (2023) argues that historical epistemology can be used “to map a set of psychological traits and virtues that it prescribes to scientists and philosophers” (p. 296) and to produce an interdisciplinary analysis “in terms of a history of a diverse set of *ethea* of the self” (p. 306). The present study does not aim to provide a psychological portray of Herder, Boas and his students. The article looks closely at the historical contexts and epistemological trends that affected their research motivations and interests. As Simons (2023) notes historical epistemology enables the study of how the researchers create an ideal scholarly self.

Analysis

Placing every question in its historical and epistemological context represents an essential research step. Contrary to common beliefs, the concept of *Einfühlung* had a heavy influence not only on Romanticism and pantheism but

also on the twentieth-century artistic and theoretical movements (Curtis, 2014). The influence on the concept of culture produced important continuities. Jaspers (2016) points our attention to the tight theoretical links between the Herderian and the Boasian conceptualisations. Their visions of cultural dynamics have shaped scientific and social representations. Today the concept of culture acts within academia and society as an essential autonomous determinant of individual, group, ethnic and national behaviours (Scupin, 2018).

Historically and epistemologically speaking, the Boasian conceptual frameworks created the foundation of contemporary anthropology. His own intellectual debts to Herder transformed culture into group and individual possessions. Starting from the idea that behaviours are culturally determined, Franz Boas consolidated a highly pluralistic concept of culture in social studies (Webster, 1997).

Herder's Legacy

The notion of *Einfühlung* has its source in the Herderian philosophy and the mystical union between the subject and the object. In his *Treatise on the Origin of Language* (1772) and *This Too a Philosophy of History for the Formation of Humanity* (1774), Herder started to use *Einfühlung* as a tool to interpret texts, cultures and their complex histories. He heavily influenced many other influential philosophers, such as Friedrich Schelling and Wilhelm Dilthey (Nowak, 2011).

Herder reconceived culture as *Einfühlung*. As a matter of fact, many notions were greatly transformed by his ideas. For example, Herder reconceived the notion of progress through *Bildung*, a formative process of learning from the past. Without promoting absolute and deterministic views, he emphasised the historical continuity of experience and the inheritance of traditions. By arguing against a common standard for the occurrence of progress, Herder insisted on the singularity of each culture and the richness of crosscultural commonalities (Chrostowska, 2021). The pluralisation of the concept of culture was facilitated by a systematic rethinking of the synchronic and diachronic conditions of human learning. The essence of the Herderian

legacy is that all cultures are precious because of their diversity and uniqueness. For him, the notion of culture could not be assimilable into an essentializing, unitary definition. Herder vigorously rejected simplistic views that reduced the meanings of culture down to its abstract contrast with nature (Kroeber, 1992).

Herder's idea of the autonomy of cultures was cognate with Kant's view on the autonomy of the aesthetic. Given the fact that post-Darwinian explanations of differences in human practices and lifestyles became increasingly rooted in biological models, the adoption of the approaches developed by Herder marks an important turn in historical epistemology. By refusing the idea of large-scale, continent-wide forms of human cultures and the conception of historical traditions as simple outcomes, Herder was able to explain major and minor cultural differences that exist among and within societies across the globe (Taylor, 2011).

Herder's project consisted in finding the German vernacularism, purifying it, and restoring the unity to the German nation. He created an organic model of the nation based on unified constructions of not only language, literature, art, and history, but also worldviews (Briggs, 2005). Herder advocated an introspective view on cultural production. "The production of art, as of a human being, was an instant of pleasure, an union between idea and character, between body and spirit" (Herder, 1800/1784, p. 240). The pluralisation of the concept of culture occurred not only through a more detailed examination of historical conditions but also through a reinterpretation of the role of human feelings. For Herder, history had a revolutionary character, and liberation was the *telos* of history. In his view, complex tumultuous feelings became the key to liberation (Voelz, 2021). This specific equation expands the theoretical grounds of the notion of *Einfühlung*. In the analysis of culture, Herder gave a greater importance to emotional aspects than to cognitive ones (Scupin, 2018). Herder elaborated a complex approach for the interpretation of emotional elements and feelings by paying a special attention to the diversity of cultural contexts (Bassi, 2023).

Einfühlung as a Multifaceted Theoretical Lens

"The concept of *Einfühlung*—or perhaps it would be more accurate to say the verb *empfinden*—is first encountered in the writings of Herder" (Curtis, 2014, p. 360).

This philosopher was the great prophet of the pluralisation and personalisation of culture. The emphasis on the concept of *Einführung* and the adjacent processes profoundly marked the way we perceive cultures and the surrounding world. “Our minds feel inward satisfaction, when they not only perceive the balm, which flows from the laws of human nature, but see it spread, and make its way among mankind, even against their wills, form its natural force” (Herder, 1800/1784, p. 446). The idea of inward satisfaction and the links with natural forces creates powerful images and representations. “Herder considered the act of empathizing (*sich-Einführen*) as a way of imaginatively evoking the affective situation and perceptions of people in foreign cultures and past epochs to such an extent that their worlds could be adequately discussed” (Curtis, 2014, p. 373).

By conducting a conceptual history study, modelled on Reinhart Koselleck's *Begriffsgeschichte*, Edwards (2013) argues that it was Johann Gottfried von Herder who invented the concept of *Einführung* and used it as a scientific method. This multifaceted notion carries aggressive absolutist–relativist disputes. Similarly to the present study, the analysis conducted by Edwards (2003) includes original eighteenth-, nineteenth- and twentieth-century academic texts. The author concluded that conflicting perspectives on human nature and political systems changed the representations and interpretations of the concept of *Einführung*. In the United States, this construct was translated as empathy and (re)emerged as a psychological notion that described personal characteristics and that aimed to promote relativist perspectives by eliminating longstanding methodological disputes (Edwards, 2013).

The concept of *Einführung* is implicitly present in our representations and imaginaries through the contemporary psychologised vocabularies. Its power remains intact throughout centuries. The psychologised language came to dictate not only our sense of self but also all ranges of interpersonal relations. The romantic, familiar, social and professional spheres received new definitions and meanings from psychological perspectives (Lerner & Rivkin-Fish, 2021). Edwards (2013) argues that even though most academic literature credits Robert Vischer for creating the term *Einführung*, it was Herder who laid the basis for its emergence as term and methodological tool. Commonly translated as empathy, the notion of *Einführung* has deeper meanings that reflect

the idea of “feeling into” and that destroy the boundaries between the object and the subject. During the twentieth century, German emigrants brought this concept to the United States and revolutionised the conceptual frameworks of American anthropology and science in general:

... The most general and necessary sense is that of feeling: it is the basis of the rest, and one of the greatest organic preeminences of man. It has conferred on us dexterity, invention, and art; and contributes more perhaps to the formation of our ideas, than we imagine. But how different is this sense, according as it is modified by the way of life, climate, application, exercise, and native irritability of the body (Herder, 1800/1784, p. 446).

Herder's philosophy depicts subjective sensory experiences from a first-person perspective (Mathäs, 2013). The Herderian relativistic views can be found even in his conceptualisation of the idea of feeling. He created long-lasting links between art, cultural phenomena and highly particularistic notions of feeling. “The internal feeling of an existence” (Herder, 1800/1784, p. 254) forms the basis for the interpretation of the surrounding world.

Herder's Einfühlung in Boasian Anthropology

Following a highly introspective approach, Franz Boas and his numerous students carried out a multidisciplinary research agenda in anthropology, archaeology, psychology and linguistics. They created the foundations for the systematic investigation of culture in the twentieth century. Generally speaking, the Boasian perspective on culture intersects human behaviours and emotions (Scupin, 2018). Conventionally considered as the founder of American anthropology, Franz Boas had a rich intellectual biography marked by many disciplinary and territorial transitions from Germany to the United States and from geography to anthropology. His participatory studies of indigenous populations mirrored an increasingly multicultural American context marked by immigration and globalisation. He built a name for himself as an interdisciplinary scholar with an eclectic academic background from physics and geography to linguistics,

anthropology and psychology. As a German-Jewish immigrant, trained in German universities in the late nineteenth century, Boas came to the United States with an intellectual baggage that included the works of many European thinkers including Johann Gottfried von Herder and Adolf Bastian (Espagne, 2002).

Greatly influenced by German philosophers, the Boasians triggered the silent renaissance of the concept of *Einfühlung*. In an attempt to describe the psychological reality of cultural phenomena, scholars such as Edward Sapir personalised the concept of culture (Preston, 1966). This approach should not surprise us. Since human beings act differently when they are isolated or in group, one must examine individual and collective patterns of behaviour (O'Meara, 1999). Sapir wanted to explore personal meanings and individual personality dynamics that motivate culturally defined thoughts, feelings and actions (Preston, 1966).

It is essential to note that the Boasian conception of culture lies on Herder's idea of psychic unity of mankind promoted by Adolf Bastian who mentored and guided Boas throughout his training (Scupin, 2018). The triad Herder-Bastian-Boas has a special epistemological importance. Boas (1887) argued that "the origin of every science we find in two different desires of the human mind—its aesthetic wants and the feelings" (p. 139). This statement finds echoes in the Herder's notion of *Einfühlung* and the definitions proposed Juvekar and Murali (2022) who define it as aesthetic sympathy. In his exploration of psychological phenomena, Franz Boas was not interested in the study social actors and their interactions. Instead, he gave more priority to internal mechanisms of the human mind in order to analyse emotional associations to activities and habits in different cultural contexts (Verdon, 2007). Even collective phenomena, such as "the strong feeling of nationality" (Boas, 1901, p. 10), were analysed through psychological lenses. The descriptions of artistic and cultural phenomena, provided by Boas, showcased a great emphasis on emotional dimensions and subjective interpretations. To describe indigenous cultures, Boas noted that "it may be that their art is quite contrary to our artistic feeling" (Boas, 1901, p. 5). His students inherited this culturally sensitive perspective. The psychological and emotional dimension penetrated the field

of anthropology through a strong and long-lasting appeal and persuasion intensified by the solidified values of American anthropology. After Boas, Edward Sapir developed his approach based on personalised perceptions of the complexity and uncertainty of the surrounding world. This strategy served to direct and focus the anthropological inquiry towards actual acting, thinking and feeling individuals (Preston, 1966). Since culture shapes our conceptions of self (Tehrani, 1998), the personalised approaches unleash the full potential of anthropology and cultural studies.

Among the most remarkable effects of the Herderian-Boasian vision upon North American scholarship is the re-conceptualisation of intercultural relations and relatively small cultural units. One should remember that an important feature of indigenous life was the extraordinary number of distinct cultural groups within the same population. In the light of cultural narratives, Herder privileged distinctiveness over size or physical power of a determined culture (Kroeber, 1992).

Via the German *Einfühlung*, American anthropology acquired new configurations. Boas relied on Herder's notion of *Einfühlung* to create the basis of the anthropological method (Özyürek, 2018). Despite its explicit emphasis on introspection, this notion promotes the cultural analysis and the respect for the otherness. Empathy became a moral and scientific value (Nowak, 2011). Through a Herderian view on cultures, Boas and his followers reinforced their arguments and secured a central place in American Anthropology. The Boasians canonised the notion of cultural relativism. Thanks to their efforts, relativism has broken new grounds (Brown, 2008). In addition, the link between the notion of culture and the idea of belonging or fellowship obtained more solid configurations. "The feeling of fellowship in the horde expands to the feeling of unity of the tribe, to a recognition of bonds established by a neighbourhood of habitat, and further on to the feeling of fellowship among members of nation" (Boas, 1901, p. 10).

Another important consequence of Boasian anthropology was the focus on the culturally devastated and isolated. American anthropologists repeatedly recorded indigenous languages and stories. They also produced rich descriptions of cultural practices from the last survivors of tribal peoples. Since a genuinely Herderian approach inhibits simplistic idealisations of primitive

cultures, American anthropologists centred their attention on particular individuals and their stories (Kroeber, 1992). One can observe a progressively narrower focus. In American anthropology, the individual gradually became a key element. Large collective variables lost their research supremacy. It was Boas who warned the anthropologists not to blend the similarity of behavioural patterns with the similarity of causes (O'Meara, 1999). Through culture, the individual defines and expresses unique personality structures and continually extends them. Culture and personality structures interact very tightly. The everyday experiences and distinctive responses show the unique structures of the subconscious of each individual. Using their re-interpretive and creative abilities, cultural actors respond to the micro-milieus that they perceive (Preston, 1966). It seems important to emphasise that from this perspective, each individual represents an active cultural actor. Through an intensely personal study of small societies, the Boasian anthropology provided grounding for the later resurgence of Native American self-awareness. Many Native Americans were able to recover a considerable body of knowledge about their tribal roots and heritage thanks to the aid of Boasian scientists (Kroeber, 1992).

Einführung and Psychoanalysis

The idea of *Einführung* represents an essential element for the development of psychoanalytic theories (Gallese, 2008). There are tight links between the notion of *Einführung* and “the projection of one's own unconscious feelings and inner imagined movements” (Pais, 2024, p. 65). This interdisciplinary notion emerged in the eighteenth century as tool for the analysis of the human psyche (Nowak, 2011) and was defined by German scholars as a subconscious process (Patoine, 2022). In his teachings and research work, Boas put the stress on the significance of culture and on the conscious and unconscious structures of mind for individuals within specific historical and geographical contexts (Scupin, 2018). Discussions on the new psychoanalytic models began very early within the Boasian circle. Alexander Goldenweiser, for example, wrote a book on Sigmund Freud's totem (Murray, 1981).

The notion of *Einfühlung* strongly matches Freud's take on empathy (Gallese, 2008). He discussed cultural experiences in terms of psychoanalysis. His view of culture always implies a continuous struggle between *Eros* and the death instinct. According to this approach, cultural systems regulate interpersonal life. Freud did not fully apply his psychoanalytic approach to culture because for him culture represented a public matter, not an element of the psychic life of each individual (Kwon, 2005). It was in the United States that the psychoanalytic approach of culture started to be properly applied. In American anthropology, the notion of the self, as the showcase of a larger collective harmony, provided a potent model for studying the relation between the individual and culture. This complex model is most popularly illustrated in Ruth Benedict's book *Patterns of Culture* (Schrempp, 1989). Benedict produced a complex vision of culture and its intersections with history and psychology:

⋮ The difficulty with naive interpretations of culture in terms of individual
 ⋮ behaviour is not that these interpretations are those of psychology, but that
 ⋮ they ignore history and the historical process of acceptance or rejection of
 ⋮ traits (Benedict, 1934, p. 168).

The emphasis on psychology has specific epistemological goals. According to De Vos (2011), the psychologising of subjectivity carries the promise of a harmonious approach in science and research. The concept of *Einfühlung* represents an intersection between philosophical aesthetics and psychology (Curtis, 2014). The Boasians took full advantage of the new theoretical movements of the twentieth century. They employed psychoanalytic notions to describe cultural phenomena, traditions and behaviours. For instance, Boas (1901) argued that “customary actions which are of very frequent repetition become entirely unconscious” (p. 9). As a matter of fact, the Boasians took psychoanalysis to the next level. While psychoanalytic theory has seen the individual's personality as largely determined by early childhood events, anthropologists such as Edward Sapir, acknowledged the shortcomings of this view and tried to find the balance between pre-cultural and cultural influences on personality (Preston, 1966). “The circulation of psychoanalytic representations of the self is part and parcel

of this process of psychologization” (Parker, 2010, p. 26). Just like psychoanalysis, the gradual psychologisation of science and culture touches the very core of human subjectivity (De Vos, 2011). In psychoanalytic models, the individual transcends its status of passive and repressed member of a given cultural group. The individual becomes a powerful mechanism of cultural webs by actively creating and influencing mental and collective representations (Kwon, 2005). The view that ideas guide human behaviour and that every culture represents a unique expression of the human spirit has its roots in the works of Herder who deeply influenced, the father of American anthropology, Franz Boas (Trigger, 2004). The Boasians and his followers conducted complex fieldworks that aimed to discern the subconscious motives and psychological processes and their impact on culture (Bronner, 2021).

Individualism in North American Anthropology

As shown in the previous subchapters, the concept of *Einfühlung* had a great impact on American scholarship. Of course, nowadays the term “empathy” is a lot more frequent. Anglophone scientists captured the sense *Einfühlung* but used a word with Greek origins (Lanzoni, 2012). The German notion emanates a special aura. Even when the word itself is not explicitly used, numerous authorial intentions and epistemological contexts reflect a striking resemblance to its main principles (Curtis, 2014). While American individualism and personalistic approaches have deep roots in many European philosophical traditions, Herder’s contribution remains constantly overlooked (Curtis, 2012). We often forget that the Herderian approaches secured the basis for anthropological perspectives not only on culture but also the idea of individuality. Herder emphasised the central role of the link between feelings and selfhood. “The simple, rooted feeling of existence, for which there is no equivalent, is happiness” (Herder, 1800/1784, p. 221). Through Herder’s relativistic concept of culture, the Boasian anthropology gave a special importance to the study of individual and collective behaviours. “Boas’ social outlook was organized around a theory of democratic individualism” (Stern, 1943, p. 317). His postulates gained prominence through powerful discursive parallels. “It is the task of

education to teach that every individual should be appraised according to his(/her) personality” (Boas, 1937, p. 232). Learning from the interactions between individuals remains a common idea behind the dominant definitions of culture (O’Meara, 1999). From this point of view, the role each and every individual received a much firmer and clearer focus.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, the concept of *Einfühlung* actively circulated within the walls of American academia (Lanzoni, 2012). The German *Einfühlung* influenced American and European art and philosophy (Patoine, 2022). The analysis of this notion provides a new perspective on humanities and social sciences (Curtis, 2014). Generally speaking, it opened the way for a more personalistic and individualistic perspective on culture and cultural phenomena. O’Meara (1999) suggests that casual individualism emerged as a strategy to unify North American anthropology. In order to overcome fragmentation and conflicts between schools, the multiple subfields of American anthropology have taken organic human beings rather than superorganic systems as their main subject matter. By doing so, anthropologists become able to describe what people individually and collectively believe, think and do. This perspective brings to light personal decisions, actions, meanings, motivations and moralisations. Individual development and experiences came to operate as indispensable elements for understanding social facts.

The Western culture of the autonomous self has created strong internalised representations (Kwon, 2005). From a historical and epistemological point of view, individualism became one of the greatest pillars of contemporary knowledge systems. O’Meara (1999) defines individualism, more particularly, casual individualism, as “the empirical claim that understanding why human affairs occur as they do requires and is limited to causal-mechanical explanations of the operations of and interactions among individual human beings and other physical entities” (p. 107).

Individualism would be impossible without a deeper examination of psychological factors. The notion of *Einfühlung* contributed to the gradual development of more complex approaches of understanding and appreciation of psychological variables, such as feelings and intentions. Researchers started to contemplate the specificity of particular cases and the importance of considering

individual dimensions. The introvert turn into the individual self creates new learning opportunities by promoting self-knowledge and self-reflection. This turn did not exclude the idea of openness to the other and respect for the difference (Nowak, 2011). This unique combination between interiority and exteriority found a special resonance in the United States. Individualism lies at the heart of the American concept of culture and anthropology in general. Despite common assumptions, casual individualism implies a deep sociological perspective. American anthropologists agree that culture guides human behaviour. In fact, from an anthropological point of view, society and culture would have no existence or meaning without individual people (O'Meara, 1999). Preston (1966) labels the methods in the Boasian tradition, particularly the tools developed by his student, Edward Sapir, as a personalistic social psychology because the main tasks of anthropologists is not only to observe social interactions, but also to extract the meanings that individuals create from their interactions. Sapir's focus on the individual *locus* of culture opened the possibility to understand the great variety of individual cultural experiences (Stern, 2022).

During the early twentieth century, the reintroduction of the notion of *Einfühlung* came as a consequence of an increasingly strong interest in the psychology of perception (Nowak, 2011). One can explore an individual's culture through the lens of both individual and collective representations. All human beings participate in the process of creating and interacting through different modes of representations. Detailed descriptions of public spheres cannot adequately illustrate neither collectivistic nor individualistic cultures. There is a mutual interdependence. Cultures are represented in people's psyches, which are in turn constantly shaped through cultural dynamics (Kwon, 2005). The focus on the individual in American anthropology is classified by Preston (1966) as a profoundly humanistic orientation that has a major impact on the study and representation of cultures.

Personalisation of Culture via Einfühlung

With the rise of new forms of arts and the development of cinema during the twentieth century, individuals started to contemplate and experience space

and cultural dynamics in a more multidimensional manner. In this context, the concept of *Einfühlung* remerged with a greater power and fulfilled the growing need to examine complex phenomena such as immersion and abstraction (Curtis, 2012). *Einfühlung*, as a theoretical tool, improves our understanding of the prelinguistic dimension of human intersubjectivity (Gallese, 2008). Debates on the notion of *Einfühlung* open interdisciplinary discussions (Curtis, 2014).

Boas positioned his notion of culture not only in relation to science and cosmopolitanism but also in relation to consciousness (Briggs, 2005). Reintroduction of the idea of *Einfühlung* into contemporary philosophy and historiography has complex configurations (Nowak, 2011). The Boasians made the personalisation of culture faster and more robust. Their approach reduced the distance between the individual and social factors in the analysis of cultural processes. "In reality, society and the individual are not antagonists. His culture provides the raw material of which the individual makes his life" (Benedict, 1934, p. 181). This vision evolved into a renewed concept of culture and idea of subjectivity that we use in the contemporary era:

There is a cultural imperative for a constant quest for the "inner Self", its cultivation, examination, and, of course, realisation, as necessary for 'success', 'happiness' or even just 'wellbeing'. An endless reflection on emotions, their interpretations, and actions to manage them is encouraged (Lerner & Rivkin-Fish, 2021, p. 6).

Today the idea of culture and the idea selfhood became fused in collective representations and practices. The Herderian notions naturally evolved into a personalised approach. Herder not only introduced the plural term "cultures" but also rethought the notion of subjectivity and selfhood. His philosophy revolutionised the idea of selfhood by constructing a complex theoretical network between emotions, identity, cultural representations and imaginary relations. Herder did not underestimate the importance of understating the uniqueness of each human being and what ensures selfhood (Holzhey, 2006). For him, the individuals cannot dissolve themselves in romantic unions, group formations, cultural or national networks. The idea of selfhood and

the theoretical links to *Einführung* represent an often forgotten milestone in the Herderian legacy. Through the notion of *Einführung*, philosophers and scientists can achieve a dynamic harmony between the need for immersion and the study of the other (Nowak, 2011). The Boasians continued the Herderian legacy, spreading his conceptual frameworks throughout their careers. Edward Sapir's personalised approach displays the full potential of the concept of culture and its plural nature. He used a personalistic method for the multidimensional study of individuals-in-culture (Preston, 1966). In the contemporary era, the personalisation of culture via Herder's *Einführung* unfolds as a multi-faceted process with identifiable historical characteristics. Its significance invites a critical questioning of traditional conventions and representations of culture.

Conclusion

Despite its numerous meanings, the concept of *Einführung* most often implies the existence of a dynamic component, whether overt or inner (Lanzoni, 2012). The idea of *Einführung* contributed to an ecological shift not only in literary studies but also in the general scientific life (Patoine, 2022). Throughout centuries, this construct did not lose its power and appeal. As a theoretical tool, *Einführung* has a great potential in contemporary research (Curtis, 2014) because today's society reflects major identity struggles that need a multi-layered cultural analysis from community and individual perspectives (Tehrani, 1998). In this complicated conjuncture, the Herderian-Boasian notion of culture helps us understand the complex interactions between individuals and cultural phenomena. It is essential to note that Boas understood cultural processes as mental ones (Verdon, 2007). Psychologisation served as an essential ideological element not only in mainstream psychology but also psychoanalysis (De Vos, 2011). Heavily influenced by psychoanalytic perspectives, the field of psychology has expanded to embrace the nuclear role of culture in the gradual construction of self and representational experiences (Kwon, 2005).

Today the term "culture" became related with the idea of distinctiveness (Steigerwald, 2004). Recognising our unique ways of understanding and

interpreting cultural phenomena opens new debates on the concept of *Einfühlung* which carries a heavy Herderian legacy and an amalgam of different disciplines and fields of study (Curtis, 2014). This eclectic construct creates interdisciplinary opportunities through an emotional perception of the world that goes beyond a purely intellectual reflection (Nowak, 2011). The idea of *Einfühlung* has tight links with the present-day notions of presence and immersion (Curtis, 2012) and left an impressive mark in science and philosophy. We became aware that knowledge of people's lives significantly adds to our appreciation of them as human beings. Therefore, the humanistic nature of anthropology can be observed in the continuous attempts to analyse people and their ways of life, and to explain individual behaviours (O'Meara, 1999). The study of the notion of *Einfühlung* improves the understanding of this tendency and reinforces our critical analysis of the cotemporary conceptual frameworks.

References

- Ackermann, A. (2016).** Wider die „Culturbrille“ – Versuch, Hartmut Böhmes „Perspektiven der Kulturwissenschaft“ auszuweiten. *Kulturwissenschaftliche Zeitschrift*, 1(1), 32–38. DOI: 10.1515/kwg-2016-0004.
- Bartosch, D. (2022).** Harmonic power or soft power? Philosophical reflections on culture and future globalization in view of classical wisdom from China and other ancient civilizations. *International Communication of Chinese Culture*, 9(1), 69–83. DOI: 10.1007/s40636-022-00245-5.
- Bassi, M. (2023).** From Herder to Strecker: Birth and Developments of the Anthropological Notion of Culture in Germany. In G. D'Agostino, & V. Matera (Eds.), *Histories of Anthropology* (pp. 127–155). Palgrave Macmillan. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-031-21258-1_4.
- Boas, F. (1887).** The study of geography. *Science*, 9(210), 137–141.

Boas, F. (1901). The mind of primitive man. *Science*, 13(321), 281–289.

Boas, F. (1937). Race and Race Prejudice. *Jewish Social Service Quarterly*, 14(2), 227–232.

Benedict, R. (193). *Patterns of Culture*. Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Briggs, C. L. (2005). Genealogies of race and culture and the failure of vernacular cosmopolitanisms: Rereading Franz Boas and W. E. B. Du Bois. *Public Culture*, 17(1), 75–100. DOI: 10.1215/08992363-17-1-75.

Bronner, S. J. (2021). The (Re) Cognition of Folklore: A History and Philosophy. *Western Folklore*, 80(3), 271–311.

Brown, M. F. (2008). Cultural relativism 2.0. *Current Anthropology*, 49(3), 363–383. DOI: 10.1086/529261.

Chrostowska, S. D. (2021). Progress: From Literature to History. *Common Knowledge*, 27(2), 262–279. DOI: 10.1215/0961754x-8906159.

Curtis, R. (2012). *Einführung* and abstraction in the moving image: Historical and contemporary reflections. *Science in Context*, 25(3), 425–446. DOI: 10.1017/s0269889712000178.

Curtis, R. (2014). An introduction to *Einführung* (R.G. Elliott, Trans.). *Art in Translation*, 6(4), 353–376. DOI: 10.1080/17561310.2014.11425535.

De Vos, J. (2011). Psychologization or the discontents of psychoanalysis. *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society*, 16, 354–372. DOI: 10.1057/pcs.2010.29.

Edwards, L. H. (2013). A brief conceptual history of *Einführung*: 18th-century Germany to post-World War II US psychology. *History of Psychology*, 16(4), 269–281. DOI: 10.1037/a0033634.

Espagne, M. (2002). La question des imbrications culturelles chez Franz Boas. *Revue Germanique Internationale*, 17, 147–160. DOI: 10.4000/rgi.892.

Gallese, V. (2008). Empathy, embodied simulation, and the brain: Commentary on Aragno and Zepf/Hartmann. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 56(3), 769–781. DOI: 10.1177/0003065108322206.

Hackl, J., Märker, M., & Doblmaier, M. (2024). Interpretation *With/Through/ Toward* Intersectionality: Difficulties and Opportunities. *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 17(2) 134–148. DOI: 10.1177/19408447241256051.

Herder, J. G. (1800). *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man* (T. Churchill, Trans.). Bergman Publishers. (Original work published 1784).

Holzhey, C. F. (2006). On the emergence of sexual difference in the 18th century: economies of pleasure in Herder's *Liebe und Selbstheit*. *The German Quarterly*, 79(1), 1–27. DOI: 10.1111/j.1756-1183.2006.tb00031.x.

Jakupi, A. B. (2018). Pyscosmogenic patterns: A premise for environmental harmony. *European Journal of Sustainable Development*, 7(3), 313–322. DOI: 10.14207/ejsd.2018.v7n3p313.

Jaspers, J. (2016). Crisis thinking, sensuous reflexivity, and solving real issues. *AILA Review*, 29(1), 199–213. DOI: 10.1075/aila.29.08jas.

Juvekar, J., & Murali, R. (2022). The role of empathy and vicarious trauma on wisdom and psychological distress among lawyers. *Indian Journal of Mental Health*, 9(2), 142–149. DOI: 10.30877/ijmh.9.2.2022.142-149.

Kwon, S. Y. (2005). “God may NOT be a Person”: A Case of Cultural Construction of God Representations. *Pastoral Psychology*, 53(5), 405–421. DOI: 10.1007/s11089-005-2584-z.

Kroeber, K. (1992). American Indian persistence and resurgence. *Boundary 2*, 19(3), 1–25. DOI: 10.2307/303546.

Lanzoni, S. (2012). Empathy in translation: Movement and image in the psychological laboratory. *Science in Context*, 25(3), 301–327. DOI: 10.1017/s0269889712000154.

Lerner, J., & Rivkin-Fish, M. (2021). On emotionalisation of public domains. *Emotions and Society*, 3(1), 3–14. DOI: 10.1332/263169021 × 16149420135743.

Mathäs, A. (2013). Building bridges: the importance of Johann Gottfried Herder's humanism for the humanities. *Humanitas*, 26(1/2), 94–128. DOI: 10.5840/humanitas2013261/26.

Matthiesen, N., & Klitmøller, J. (2019). Encountering the stranger: Hannah Arendt and the shortcomings of empathy as a moral compass. *Theory & Psychology*, 29(2), 182–199. DOI: 10.1177/0959354319828174.

Mietelski, T. (2022). Empathy and phenomenology. Edith Stein's theory of *Einführung*. *Bollettino Filosofico*, 37, 287–300. DOI: 10.6093/1593-7178/9678.

Montag, C., Gallinat, J., & Heinz, A. (2008). Theodor Lipps and the concept of empathy: 1851–1914. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 165(10), 1261–1261. DOI: 10.1176/appi.ajp.2008.07081283.

Murray, S. O. (1981). Sapir's Gestalt. *Anthropological Linguistics*, 23(1), 8–12.

Nowak, M. (2011). The complicated history of *Einführung*. *Argument: Biannual Philosophical Journal*, 1(2), 301–326.

O'Meara, J. T. (1999). Causal individualism and the unification of anthropology. In E. L. Cerroni-Lond (Ed.), *Anthropological Theory in North America* (pp. 105–142). Bergin & Garvey.

Özyürek, E. (2018). Rethinking empathy: Emotions triggered by the Holocaust among the Muslim-minority in Germany. *Anthropological Theory*, 18(4), 456–477. DOI: 10.1177/1463499618782369.

Pais, M. R. (2024). Function follows form: considerations on hard heritage facing the climate emergency. *Architecture*, 4(1), 46–72. DOI: 10.3390/architecture4010005.

Patoine, P. L. (2022). The role of empathy in literary reading: From *Einführung* to the neuroscience of embodied cognition, with the example of Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*. *Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies*, 58(1), 11–37. DOI: 10.3138/seminar.58.1.1.

Parker, I. (2010). The place of transference in psychosocial research. *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology*, 30(1), 17–31. DOI: 10.1037/a0019104.

Preston, R. J. (1966). Edward Sapir's anthropology: Style, structure, and method. *American Anthropologist*, 68(5), 1105–1128. DOI: 10.1525/aa.1966.68.5.02a00010.

Romand, D. (2015). Theodor Waitz's theory of feelings and the rise of affective sciences in the mid-19th century. *History of Psychology*, 18(4), 385–400. DOI: 10.1037/a0039797.

Simons, M. (2023). “Changing” one's mind: Historical epistemology as normative psychology. *Metaphilosophy*, 54(2–3), 295–308. DOI: 10.1111/meta.12616.

Schrempf, G. (1989). Aristotle's other self: on the boundless subject of anthropological discourse. In G.W. Stocking (Ed.), *Romantic motives: Essays on anthropological sensibility* (pp. 10–43). The University of Wisconsin Press.

Scupin, R. (2018). Culture: The use and abuse. In C. L. Frisby, & W. T. O'Donohue (Eds.), *Cultural Competence in Applied Psychology: An Evaluation of Current Status and Future Directions* (pp. 243–268). Springer. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-319-78997-2_11.

Shore, B. (2000). Human diversity and human nature. The life and times of a false dichotomy. In N. Roughley (Ed.), *Being Humans: Anthropological Universality and Particularity in Transdisciplinary Perspectives* (pp. 81–104). De Gruyter. DOI: 10.1515/9783110822809.81.

Steigerwald, D. (2004). *Culture's Vanities: The Paradox of Cultural Diversity in a Globalized World*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Stern, B. J. (1943). Franz Boas as scientist and citizen. *Science & Society*, 7(3), 289–320.

Stern, N. (2022). “Philology’s a Thing of God!”: Edward Sapir and the Jewish Subtexts of American Anthropology. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 95(1), 157–184. DOI: 10.1353/anq.2022.0004.

Taylor, T. (2011). The Brno effect: from culture to mind. *Journal of World Prehistory*, 24, 213–225. DOI: 10.1007/s10963-011-9052-8.

Tehranian, K. K. (1998). Global communication and pluralization of identities. *Futures*, 30(2–3), 211–217. DOI: 10.1016/s0016-3287(98)00028-7.

Trigger, B. G. (2004). Cross-cultural comparison and archaeological theory. In L. Meskell, & R.W. Preucel (Eds.), *A Companion to Social Archaeology* (pp. 43–65). Blackwell Publishing. DOI: 10.1002/9780470693605.ch2.

Verdon, M. (2007). Franz Boas: Cultural history for the present, or obsolete natural history? *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 13(2), 433–451. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-9655.2007.00435.x.

Voelz, J. (2021). Transnational dimensions of Romanticism. In P. Löffler, C. Spahr, & J. Stievermann (Eds.), *Handbook of American Romanticism* (pp. 55–80). DeGruyter. DOI: 10.1515/9783110592238-004.

Webster, Y. O. (1997). *Against the Multicultural Agenda: A Critical Thinking alternative*. Praeger Publishers.