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# Expressive Enlightenment: Subjectivity and Solidarity in Daniel Garrison Brinton, Franz Boas, and Carlos Montezuma

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Expressive Enlightenment: Subjectivity and Solidarity in  
Daniel Garrison Brinton, Franz Boas, and Carlos Montezuma

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In September 1899, a German journal of geography called *Globus* published an obituary for the American ethnologist Daniel Garrison Brinton. It was one of a handful of signed obituaries that its author, Franz Boas, would write in his long career. Boas concluded his words on Brinton with the following evaluation:

The importance of his example for the development of American anthropology cannot be overstated. For many years, his voice was the only one that called us back from the excessive specialization that had begun to pose a threat to the general scientific point of view in itself. If anthropology is to find a firm footing in America, it is thanks in no small part to the labors of the deceased.<sup>1</sup>

Boas's memorial to Brinton is a statement of devotion, an homage to a colleague who inspired and defended a collective scholarly enterprise—an "us" with which Boas clearly identified. Yet his devotion has gone entirely unremarked in histories of American anthropology, and this is not just a matter of archival oversight. Although Brinton has long been dismissed by historians as a racist, he also began a momentous new movement in American anthropology, a movement that Boas himself would bring to fruition. Yet to understand the affiliation that linked Boas to Brinton, it will be necessary to think in new ways about anthropology at the turn of the twentieth

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<sup>1</sup> Franz Boas, "Daniel Garrison Brinton," *Globus: Illustrierte Zeitschrift für Länder- und Völkerkunde*, 76, no. 11 (1899): 166.

century and the social, moral, and discursive world within which this nascent discipline found itself.

For a long time now, scholars have agreed that Boas's relationship to Brinton was one of deliberate and successful supersession. Boas, the story goes, displaced Brinton and his methods on the way to becoming the preeminent anthropologist of his time.<sup>2</sup> Little evidence exists to suggest that Boas and Brinton understood their relationship in this way, but this has rarely bothered historians of anthropology. They relate the narrative of Boas's supersession of Brinton as part of a larger and more profoundly moralized story about how the American anthropological establishment learned to stop using race as an explanation for human difference and human behavior and to rely instead on the "modern, relativistic, pluralistic anthropological approach to culture."<sup>3</sup> These two narratives have become so thoroughly conflated, with Brinton playing the racist foil to the rise of the Boasian culture concept, that it has become all but impossible to understand why Boas would want to single out Brinton as the "lone voice" who put American anthropology on a "firm footing."

The difficulty facing us can be traced back to Boas himself. Recent research by Lee Baker has shown that by the turn of the twentieth century Boas had come to see the fight against racism as the decisive struggle of his age. That struggle required that he deal with Brinton—a powerful, indeed founding, figure in the profession who was also a vocal segregationist and anti-

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<sup>2</sup> On the displacement of Brinton by the Boasian "revolution" in Americanist anthropology, see Regna Darnell, *And Along Came Boas: Continuity and Revolution in Americanist Anthropology* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1998). George Stocking has been the most influential exponent of the view that modern anthropology came into being with Boas's pluralization of the culture concept. See George W. Stocking Jr., "Franz Boas and the Culture Concept in Historical Perspective," *American Anthropologist* 68 (1966): 867–82.

<sup>3</sup> Stocking, *Delimiting Anthropology: Occasional Inquiries and Reflections* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 23, cited in Lee Baker, *Anthropology and the Racial Politics of Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 8.

miscegenationist—extremely gingerly.<sup>4</sup> In the context of the struggle against racism, a public affiliation with Brinton would have introduced an unneeded twist into the moral narrative of racial inclusiveness that Boas was striving to construct. Yet Boas’s calculated effort to dodge any affiliation with Brinton in the North American press might also be seen, in light of his far-flung obituary, as an effort to protect his predecessor’s reputation by keeping him out of a fight that Boas knew he was doomed to lose. Boas recognized that history had drawn him into a global fight against racism and he embraced the challenge; but his homage to Brinton can be read as an acknowledgement that their conflict over race had made it impossible to actualize other scholarly possibilities, affiliations, and struggles. Boas’s memorial demands that these possibilities be brought to light. It compels us to ask: What intellectual projects had to be displaced or silenced in order for the culturalist critique of race to become the basis of American anthropology?

In this paper I want to recover one of these set-aside projects, the one that Boas saw Brinton as having fostered, thereby providing the “firm footing” he stood on throughout his career. This project, which Brinton referred to as “the philosophy of expression,” he first conceived as an intervention in the field of comparative philology inspired by Wilhelm von Humboldt’s axiom on the fundamental nature of language. “In itself,” Humboldt had proclaimed, language “is no product (*Ergon*), but an activity (*Energeia*).”<sup>5</sup> Language, Brinton learned from Humboldt, was not a ready-made object that could be looked upon from the detached perspective favored by natural scientists, for it was only by virtue of linguistic practice—people using

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., chap. 1, 3. On Brinton’s racism see, e.g., Stocking, “Lamarckianism in American Social Science, 1890–1915,” in *Race, Culture, and Evolution*, 234–270.

<sup>5</sup> Brinton ascribed the neglect of “linguistics” by anthropologists to “a strong aversion which I have noticed in many distinguished teachers of physical science to the study of language and the philosophy of expression.” Daniel Garrison Brinton, *Essays of an Americanist* (Philadelphia, Porter and Coates, 1890): 193. Brinton’s most sustained discussion of Humboldt and the *ergon-energeia* distinction is “The Philosophic Grammar of American Languages, as Set Forth by Wilhelm von Humboldt,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* XXII, no. 120 (1885): 306–331.

words—that different forms of human experience (including the experience of scientific knowledge) were constituted.

On the basis of this understanding, which came to be known as the “expressive-constitutive” dimension of language, Brinton departed from his American contemporaries. He elaborated in the 1880s a methodological critique of the ascendant “naturalistic school” of linguistic anthropology, a critique that he would soon apply to all those scientists who had fallen under the sway of “the positive philosophers, who insisted that events and institutions must be explained solely from the ... objective world.”<sup>6</sup> It was due to Brinton’s attempt to conduct the human sciences from a first-personal perspective—an intervention that began with his Humboldtian reconceptualization of language as “expression”—that Boas credited him with putting their common discipline on a “firm footing,” notwithstanding the fact—which Boas also saw—that Brinton never ceased to defend a theory of “psychic unity” that contradicted, even fettered, his most promising insights.

Boas took over Brinton’s philosophy of expression and reformed it by abandoning its naturalistic ontology of the human psyche. One outcome of this work of rectification was a thesis that might be read as a leitmotif of Boas’s entire career. “To the ethnologist,” Boas wrote, “the most trifling features of social life are important because they are expressions of historical happenings,” and not, as Brinton had thought, because those facts are “expressions of the general consciousness of Humanity.”<sup>7</sup> What is the difference between “history” and “the consciousness of Humanity,” and why did it matter to Franz Boas? And why, at the same time, was it important to him to retain the concept of expression? If we can come to some understanding of the stakes

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<sup>6</sup> On the “expressive-constitutive” view of language, see Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995): 109–112. Brinton, *An Ethnologist’s View of History: An Address before the Annual Meeting of the New Jersey Historical Society* (Trenton, 1896): 13.

<sup>7</sup> Boas, “The Aims of Ethnology,” in *Race, Language and Culture* (New York: Macmillan, 1940), 632; Brinton, citing Albert Hermann Post, in “An Ethnologist’s View of History,” 13.

of this highly abstract disagreement—which is also a moment of concurrence and continuation—we can begin to make sense of Boas’s *Globus* memorial and, more importantly, reconstruct how Boas built upon Brinton’s “firm footing” a viable discipline, universal in scope and possessed of a moral vision of knowledge as a collective practice of symbolic self-becoming.

The mode of expressive enlightenment in which Boas and Brinton both took part, far from being limited to the pages of journals, was an ethical attitude distributed far and wide across turn-of-the-century American culture. Anthropologists participated in it, but they were not its inventors. What we risk failing to see, if we consider Boas’s understanding of human language solely from the perspective of Euro-American intellectual history, is that circulating media like the Yavapai physician Carlos Montezuma’s activist newspaper *Wassaja* and the NAACP’s *Crisis*, edited by W. E. B. Du Bois, also drew upon and fulfilled a “philosophy of expression” that bore a family resemblance to, but was not wholly descended from, the kind of disciplinary knowledge put into practice by Boas himself.<sup>8</sup> Instead of positioning Brinton and Boas as adversaries, stand-ins for race and culture, we can understand both better when we recognize their mutual imbrication in this wider discursive field—a rhetoric of expression that charged the cultural politics of race with philosophical urgency, inspiring a social project to understand the symbolic activities of humans and make use of them to bring into being new transcultural futures.

## I. “Speak!”

Although the term “expression” has a long Euro-American history, it took on a new significance following the emergence in Europe of a self-consciously modern form of

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<sup>8</sup> See Robert Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois: Afro-Modern Political Thought in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009): 1–65.

subjectivity that the philosopher Charles Taylor has referred to as the “disembedded” or “buffered” self. This new kind of self found itself possessed of new “powers of moral ordering” that enabled and encouraged an attitude of holding oneself apart from the natural world and the extra-human influences that, in a previous era, had penetrated the “porous” self as part of that world.<sup>9</sup>

The newness of this situation manifested itself in a new kind of philosophical inquiry into the history of the human faculties, an inquiry whose classic question—How did human language originate and develop from pre-history to the present?—inspired a richly variegated genre of speculative history. This genre of philosophy was about more than language considered objectively. By inquiring into the origins of language, the *philosophes* of the eighteenth century were engaged in a process of self-interpretation, a coming-to-terms with the mysterious sources of their own peculiar form of experience. How one answered the question of language’s origin carried high stakes because variant answers entailed different attitudes about how one ought to live one’s life in the present day.

This was the ethically charged context in which an expressive theory of language emerged in the modern West, most decisively in the writings of Johann Gottfried Herder. Herder’s impact on American anthropology has been discussed in many ways, but what I want to trace here, following Taylor, is the way Herder took it upon himself to theorize and model a whole style of modern self-comportment.<sup>10</sup> Like other philosophers of his time, Herder celebrated the buffered self’s new powers of self-definition. Yet he worried that the people of his

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<sup>9</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 27.

<sup>10</sup> For a different view of Herder’s influence on American anthropology, see Gerald Broce, “Relativism and Discontent: Herder and Boasian Anthropology,” *Annals of Scholarship* 2 (1891): 1–13, and George W. Stocking Jr., *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology* (New York: Free Press, 1968), 214. For Taylor’s reading of Herder, which I’m largely following here, see “Language and Human Nature,” in *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers, Volume 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press): 215–247, and “The Importance of Herder,” in *Isaiah Berlin: A Celebration*, eds. Edna and Avishai Margalit (London: Hogarth Press, 1991): 40–63.

age were morally lost, set adrift from one another in a vast and increasingly confusing world from which older forms of belonging and certainty had vanished. Herder exhorted would-be philosophers of his day to consider the demands placed upon reason by their historical predicament. “You can no longer have effect like Socrates—for you lack the small, narrow, active, compressed *stage!*” he exhorted in a 1774 essay, *This Too a Philosophy of History for the Formation of Humanity*. “*A citizen of the earth, and no longer a citizen at Athens, you naturally also lack the perception of what you should do in Athens, the certain feeling of what you do, the sensation of joy at what you have accomplished.*”<sup>11</sup> Herder’s preeminent concern, given the eclipse of this older moral universe, was to discern how modern experience might give rise, in a fundamentally new way, to “a perception of what you should do . . . the certain feeling of what you do.”

The trouble with modernity, as Herder saw it, was that its ways of organizing social space could no longer provide an obvious path to older “feelings” of moral certainty. The flip side of the buffered self’s new powers of moral ordering was that such feelings could no longer be seen as immanent in pre-defined roles and relationships, as they had been in ancient Athens. “The feeling of what you do,” if you are Socrates (or, more precisely, Herder’s imaginary Socrates), is bound up with the fact that it’s a common practice to talk about metaphysics over a six-hour dinner, or to cajole one’s neighbors on their way home from the marketplace. Herder saw that he inhabited a much larger and more impersonal world, increasingly mediated not by face-to-face interaction but by infrastructures of communication—newspapers, scholarly institutions, the state. These media abstracted speech from its scenes of utterance and reproduced discourse as an objective social fact, what would later be called “information.”

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<sup>11</sup> In *Philosophical Writings*, Michael Forster, ed., *Philosophical Writings* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 342–43, Herder’s italics.



This state of affairs could not simply be rejected. Herder's powerful new idea was to associate the "feeling of what you do" in modernity with the very practice that modern life seemed to have rendered obsolete or at least invisible—the act of speech itself, undertaken against all odds and even with no interlocutors present at hand. As he urged his modern Socrates,

The *scope* of your sphere perhaps compensates for the *less determinate* quality and *lacking* quality of your beginning! A hundred people will read you and not understand you, a hundred read and yawn, a hundred read and despise, a hundred read and slander, a hundred read and prefer to have the dragon-chains of habit and remain who they are. But keep in mind that perhaps a *hundred* still remain left over with whom you bear fruit – when you are long since decayed, still a *world of posterity* which reads you and applies you better. *World* and *world of posterity* is your Athens! *Speak!*<sup>12</sup>

What's remarkable about this passage is the way it enacts what it's trying to describe. Herder communicates to his readers with a kind of speech capable of demonstrating how speech itself can be experienced as answering to a moral imperative. He thinks speech can be made intelligible to his readers in this way because they are buffered selves living in a social world that has closed down certain "feelings of what to do" but opened other ones up—above all, the feeling that, by being brave enough to "*Speak!*" to a world of strangers, one might give rise to a kind of enunciation that circulates with an unprecedented range, beyond this "*world*" and into a "*world of posterity*." Herder's text is a foundational elaboration of the constitutive picture of language that would soon become associated with the term "expression."

Herder's early formulation of the expressive-constitutive dimension of language would have profound ramifications in Germany and beyond. Kurt Müller-Vollmer and others have shown, for instance, that Wilhelm von Humboldt's picture of language as an *Energieia* rather

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 343.

than an *Ergon* was indebted to Herder's notion of speech as a medium of world-making.<sup>13</sup>

Herder's understanding of what Sean Kelly has called "perceptual normativity"—his sense that the "feeling of what you do" is given not by some impersonal moral law but by one's embodied experience of a specific situation—might also be seen as a source of Humboldt's insistence that the historian has a moral obligation to "enliven and refine our sense of acting on reality" and to shun "metaphysical" forms of inquiry that require an "abstracting from all experience."<sup>14</sup> Herder, and Humboldt too, thus developed one way of coming to terms with the historicity of the buffered self and its powers. But it was not the only way.

Today, the best-known account of the origins of humans' linguistic powers is Étienne Bonnot de Condillac's *Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge* (1746). Like Herder, Condillac had both a theoretical story about language's relation to modern experience and a moral vision of how that story pertained to the scientist's "task." Whereas Herder argued that forms of subjective experience vary throughout history, Condillac insisted that human experience is the transhistorical process through which we take in sensory data and organize them into thoughts. We do this by means of the "operations of the mind," chiefly language, since "ideas connect with signs."<sup>15</sup> Condillac's idea of language can be understood as a naturalistic philosophy of experience, since the fact that "ideas connect with signs" is in the first instance a fact about nature, not about human beings.<sup>16</sup> According to Condillac, our cognitive faculties never fundamentally change, even though we learn over time based on trial and error. History, in this

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<sup>13</sup> Mueller-Vollmer, "Thinking and Speaking: Herder, Humboldt and Saussurean Semiotics. A Translation and Commentary on Wilhelm von Humboldt's "Thinking and Speaking: Sixteen Theses on Language," *Comparative Criticism* 11 (1989): 159–214; Taylor, "Language and Human Nature," 232.

<sup>14</sup> Sean Kelly, "Perceptual Normativity and Human Freedom," accessed at <http://philpapers.org/rec/KELPNA>; Humboldt, "On the Historian's Task," translated in *History and Theory* 6, no. 1 (1967), 61, 60.

<sup>15</sup> Condillac, *Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge*, Hans Aarsleff, trans. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 4, 5.

<sup>16</sup> In Eden, Condillac tells us, Adam and Eve lived human life to its fullest without ever having recourse to language (see *Essay*, 113). But when humankind was cast out into the fallen world, language was there, waiting to be discovered. God didn't have to invent it at the moment of the fall; it was already part of the plan.

view, is the story of our coming to a better understanding of the limits we've been placed under by nature. And since we already have a good sense of how nature works from mechanical sciences like physics, we can get more certain about who we are by trusting the same methods.

While claiming to avoid the “confusion which now prevails in metaphysics and moral philosophy,” Condillac conferred an implicit moral duty upon the buffered self. He insisted upon humans' obligation to live within nature-determined limitations on what it is permissible to think about oneself and one's place in the world—a view that would later be called the “ethics of belief.”<sup>17</sup> What distinguishes this ethical project of the buffered self from Herder's is that it understands our “feeling of what to do” as the result of objective laws, not as a historically emergent activity arising from the contexts of particular forms of life. It is a scheme of moral improvement designed for the buffered self, and only the buffered self, to excel at.

While Herder's philosophy of language, through the mediation of Humboldt, found its way into the learned institutions of Prussia, Condillac's found fertile ground in the young United States, where it would captivate the imagination of American linguists until well after the Civil War.<sup>18</sup> In the generation leading up to Brinton's entrance onto the scene, its most up-to-date articulation was William Dwight Whitney's theory of languages as “institutions.” For Whitney, to say a language was an institution meant that it was collectively invented or “instituted,” and not discovered. This was a significant departure from Condillac's conception of language as a naturally endowed faculty, but it reproduced his view that language had a purely instrumental role in human betterment. Whitney saw languages, like “steam-engines,” “tubular-bridges,” and

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<sup>17</sup> Condillac, *Essay*, 80. For the “ethics of belief,” see Clifford, “Ethics of Belief,” *Contemporary Review* 29 (1877): 289–309. Like Condillac, Clifford's essay aligns our improvement as moral beings with our aptitude at coming to terms with the cognitive limitations that nature has put us under. For one contemporary version of this position, see Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (New York: Mariner Books, 2008).

<sup>18</sup> The best accounts of the influence of Condillac on early American philologists in the first half of the nineteenth century are Hans Aarsleff's introduction to Humboldt, *On Language* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001): xi–xxxix, and Sean Harvey, “‘Must Not Their Languages Be Savage and Barbarous like Them?': Philology, Indian Removal, and Race Science,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 30, no. 4 (Winter 2010): 505–32.

“Brussels carpets,” as an “instrument of thought, the machinery with which the mind works; an instrument by which its capacity to achieve valuable results is indefinitely increased, but which, far from being identical with it, is one of its own products; with and by which it works with freedom.”<sup>19</sup>

Central to this understanding of language is the supposition that the human mind can abstract itself from the flow of experience, bringing the “freedom” of a third-personal perspective to bear upon itself. It is only from this detached standpoint that human freedom can be imagined to exist in a purely “negative” relation to its products—indeed, so much so, that it would seem to diminish human freedom to argue, as Herder had done, that language is in some way constitutive of our “feeling of what to do.” Whitney dubbed linguistics a “historical” discipline because its object of study was a human invention; yet by construing language as an invention—a product, an *Ergon*—he did what Humboldt said the historian should never do. He considered historical phenomena in abstraction from experience. “The facts of language,” Whitney famously remarked, “are almost as little the work of man as is the form of his skull.”<sup>20</sup> One can understand why the founder of semiology, Ferdinand de Saussure, whose linguistics course was premised on the regimentation of the diachronic and experiential by the synchronic and systematic, spoke of Whitney as “l’Américain Whitney que je révère.”<sup>21</sup>

Shortly after his return from graduate school in Europe, Brinton dedicated himself to articulating a Humboldtian “philosophy of expression” capable of standing up to the “naturalistic school” that predominated in the human sciences of his time. He did everything he could to play Herder to Whitney’s Condillac. Whereas Whitney insisted that language was an internally

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<sup>19</sup> William Dwight Whitney, *Language and the Study of Language* (New York: C. Scribner & Co., 1867), 420.

<sup>20</sup> William Dwight Whitney, “Are Languages Institutions?” *Popular Science Monthly* 7 (1875): 142–160, 51–2.

<sup>21</sup> Cited in John Joseph, *From Whitney to Chomsky: Essays in the History of American Linguistics* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2002), 19.

coherent formal system that obeyed natural laws, Brinton saw each language as a “thought world in tones” shaping our experience such that it couldn’t be analyzed in a purely objective fashion.<sup>22</sup> Whereas Whitney cautioned his readers against “metaphysical” theories of language coming out of Germany—theories that could only constrain human freedom by misidentifying it as one of its “institutional” creations—Brinton insisted that language, “which will perish only when intelligence itself, in its highest sense, is extinguished,” was indistinguishable from human cognition and thus from freedom itself.<sup>23</sup>

Brinton made his neo-Humboldtian project relevant to late-nineteenth-century Americans by emphasizing dimensions of language that could only be characterized from the first-personal point of view of a historical subject. These dimensions had been utterly effaced by naturalistic linguistic methods, which approached language as an *Ergon*—not as a creation of God, necessarily, but as something that existed in nature as a complete and coherent system. To say language is complete and coherent is to assume that there exist clear boundaries that separate it from other entities in the order of Nature. It was owing to Brinton’s sense of the inadequacy of this parceling-out of the precincts of Nature that Boas would later remember him as having “called us back from the excessive specialization that had begun to pose a threat to the general scientific point of view in itself.”

And yet, despite Brinton’s avowed allegiance to the Humboldtian way of looking at language, in key respects he departed from the Humboldtian historian’s task of refining “our sense of acting on reality.” Boas put his finger on this problem in his obituary, where he wrote that “Brinton’s strengths and weaknesses were conditioned by his intellectual disposition, which

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<sup>22</sup> Brinton, “Philosophic Grammar,” 311.

<sup>23</sup> Whitney, “Are Languages Institutions?” 144; Brinton, “An Ethnologist’s View of History,” 10.

saw in all particularities above all the verification of the universal law.... Hence the richness of his stimulating thought and the lack of penetrating analysis of individual phenomena.”<sup>24</sup>

Boas’s identification of Brinton’s shortcoming as an inattentiveness to “particularities” is more than just a question of scale, of Brinton being interested in big things and Boas being interested in small things. What’s at stake here is Brinton’s oscillation between the two styles of being a buffered self that I identified earlier with Condillac and Herder. Thus the unresolved conceptual tension—reflected in Brinton’s famous slogan, “Man is everywhere different, and everywhere the same”—between the constitutive power of human language on the one hand and, on the other, what Brinton called the “psychic unity of man.”<sup>25</sup> The question that repeatedly arises in Brinton’s work is whether this “psychic unity” does not itself possess the character of an *Ergon*, something coherent and complete that we step into when we are born—in which case the “sense of what you do” that manifests itself to particular people in particular situations would have little relevance to a general characterization of human experience. A similar question can ultimately be raised about the way Brinton understood the term “expression,” as for instance in the slogan I cited earlier, that “the facts of ethnology must ever be regarded as the expressions of the general consciousness of Humanity.”<sup>26</sup> Are the members of humanity giving rise to these “facts” to be understood as constituting historically variable forms of life, or does “expression” merely refer to the mechanical process through which behavioral tokens are reproduced from a fixed “psychic” type?

Boas’s worries about Brinton’s ideas about language were borne out in the way Brinton imagined the anthropologist to engage with the world he studied. Unlike Herder and Humboldt,

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<sup>24</sup> Boas, “Daniel Garrison Brinton,” 166.

<sup>25</sup> Daniel Garrison Brinton, *Notes on the Floridian Peninsula* (Philadelphia: J. Sabin, 1859), 26. For a discussion of Brinton on “psychic unity,” see Regna Darnell, *Daniel Garrison Brinton: The “Fearless Critic” of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania, 1988), 87–92.

<sup>26</sup> “Ethnologist’s View of History,” 13.

Brinton's study of subjectivity entailed a radical decontextualization of the self. He held that everything important about our experience is reducible to the contents of our consciousness. "Men," Brinton wrote, "do not live in material things, but in mental states; and solely as they affect these are the material things valuable or valueless."<sup>27</sup> Neither our unconscious bodies nor the world beyond the buffered self can provide us with any moral guidance about the kinds of beings people essentially are. For Brinton, the most successful strategy for coping with the "milieu" beyond the mind was to withdraw from it entirely. "The progress of man," he declared, "is his progress of gaining independence from nature, of making her forces his slaves and not leaving them his masters."<sup>28</sup> The metaphor of "mastery" here is not unrelated to Brinton's investment in scientific racism. The downfall of the non-white races, Brinton proposed, was that they remained too embedded in environments that, over time, corrupted their bodies and minds. "The peculiar traits of races can with entire propriety be considered pathological; for the more completely they adapt a group to one environment, the more do they unfit it for any other."<sup>29</sup> Brinton's inclination to blame the environments that non-whites inhabited for their racial "pathologies" thus worked hand-in-hand with his investment in a certain picture of what it is to be a buffered self, a sum of "mental states" utterly cut off from one's environment, the more cut off the better.

The longer one spends with Brinton, the more difficult it becomes to determine whether the ethics of belief Brinton deployed to police his theory of "psychic unity" is best interpreted as an inconsistency in a fundamentally Humboldtian way of looking at the world, or whether Brinton's entire "philosophy of expression" was just a way of sugarcoating the deflationary

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 14

<sup>28</sup> Brinton, "The Factors of Heredity and Environment in Man," *American Anthropologist* 11, no. 9 (September 1898): 271–77, 276.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 275.

pessimism that followed from his erection of an unbridgeable “psychic” barrier between the world and the self’s experience of it. Ultimately, the best way to make sense of Brinton is to see him as attempting to rise to the challenge of self-interpretation that Taylor associates with modern selfhood, a project that is as much about coping as it is about coherence. Undoubtedly, Brinton was attuned to something unsatisfying about the intellectual world of his day. He saw in the Humboldtian tradition a theoretical solution to some of the problems posed by that world; but as a matter of practice, the third-personal, policing attitude gave him a clearer sense of moral purpose.

Boas, in “The Limitations of the Comparative Method of Anthropology,” recognized this attitude in Brinton when he interpreted his predecessor’s notion of psychic unity as a consequence of having adopted the position that “anthropological studies *must be confined to* researches on the laws that govern the growth of society.”<sup>30</sup> By maintaining that stance, Brinton left open a possibility—a way out of his “confinement”—that he himself was not able to realize. The question left open for Boas was, What else could anthropology be?

## II. Expressions of Historical Happenings

The epochal insight that Boas brought to American anthropology—the insight that, as we shall shortly see, made him a great if sometimes unwitting affiliate of the many projects of collective self-determination taking shape at the outset of the twentieth century—was that knowledge could be a means of affiliating oneself with the world and its people. In formulating this insight, Boas drew on many intellectual sources, including experiences with indigenous

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<sup>30</sup> Boas, “Limitations of the Comparative Method,” *Science* 4, no. 103 (n.s.): 901–8, reprinted in *Race, Language and Culture*, 270 (my emphasis).



collaborators.<sup>31</sup> His first major statement of it was “The Study of Geography” (1887), written shortly after Boas’s return from Baffinland, in which Boas concluded of the “effort to delineate the earth’s surface” that “every step that brings us nearer the end gives ampler satisfaction to the impulse which induces us to devote our time and work to this study, gratifying the love for the country we inhabit, and the nature that surrounds us.”<sup>32</sup> As Matti Bunzl has argued, Boas showed himself in this essay to be engaged in a scholarly project closely aligned with that of that of Humboldt and Herder.<sup>33</sup>

If Herder and Humboldt worked out a certain style of being a buffered self, one that seeks “to enliven and refine our sense of acting on reality” (Humboldt) and to seek the “feeling of what you do” (Herder) by turning outward and confronting one’s particular historical predicament, it was Boas who advanced this modern mode of self-interpretation by showing how the “feeling of what you do” derives from the affective solicitation presented by the objects one studies. Boas advanced a new form of science that paid homage to the ideas of Alexander von Humboldt’s *Cosmos*, and which Boas named cosmography—science that “has its source in the personal feeling of man towards the world, towards the phenomena surrounding him.”<sup>34</sup> Whereas the “physicist” or “naturalist” seeks to gratify an “aesthetic impulse” driving him to systematize the chaos of experience, the force of the “affective impulse” drives the research of the cosmographer. Whereas Brinton thought that humans refine their psychic faculties by insulating themselves from their environment, Boas reimagined anthropological knowledge as a process of directing oneself outward, into the world.

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<sup>31</sup> See Isaiah Lorado Wilner, “A Global Potlatch: Identifying the Indigenous Influence on Western Thought,” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 37, no. 2 (2013): 87–114.

<sup>32</sup> Originally published in *Science* 9, No. 210 (1887): 137–141; reprinted in *Race, Language and Culture*, 647.

<sup>33</sup> Bunzl, Matti. “Franz Boas and the Humboldtian Tradition,” in *Volksgeist as Method and Ethic: Essays on Boasian Ethnography and the German Anthropological Tradition*, ed. George W. Stocking (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 17–78..

<sup>34</sup> Boas, *Race, Language and Culture*, 644.

We are now in a position to understand the difference between Boas's interest in historical happenings and Brinton's interest in the "consciousness of Humanity." For "The Study of Geography" might profitably be read as a theorization of the historian's responsibility, as imagined by Wilhelm von Humboldt and his followers, to "enliven and refine our sense of acting on reality." Boas viewed cosmography (and later anthropology) as a "historical science"—not merely, as Brinton had assumed, an effort to discover causal laws that history may bear out but never change.<sup>35</sup> At this early phase of his career, Boas was concerned dramatically to expand the scope of who and what an intellectual might care about. "To the ethnologist," Boas wrote, "the most trifling features of social life are important because they are expressions of historical happenings."<sup>36</sup> What makes these happenings expressive is not their emanation from humanity's "universal consciousness," but their existence as part of an affective exchange between the world "we inhabit" and the inquiring self.

Boas's continuation of Herder's project raises two questions. First, how could a vision of anthropology's task that is so focused on the particularities of experience aspire to the universality and progressiveness of modern science? Second, in what way is Boas's affective account of anthropological knowledge not—as the "philosophy of expression" might ultimately have been for Brinton—a just-so story told to render the alienation of the modern subject more bearable? Answering these questions in the right way can forestall a common misinterpretation

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<sup>35</sup> Bunzl explores the likelihood of Boas having encountered Humboldtian texts in "Franz Boas and the Humboldtian Tradition," 24. Douglas Cole has argued that Boas initially pursued universal causal laws in his historical investigations but that over time he lost interest in this goal; see Cole, *Franz Boas: The Early Years* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999), 261–75.

of Boas's project, which holds that he was engaged in a project of "Counter-Enlightenment."<sup>37</sup>

This view sees Boas as part of a long intellectual movement traceable to Herder's teacher Johann Georg Hamann, who abandoned the imperious claims of modern reason in favor of a relativistic celebration of the primal attachments of the "Volk." Such an abandonment would amount to a reenchantment, or "unbuffering," of the modern buffered self: it would solve the predicaments of modern truth-telling by demystifying modernity itself.

But this isn't at all what Boas wanted, for himself or anyone else. Boas shared in the characteristically modern aspiration to advance science, an endeavor which he believed "helps free us from the errors of the past."<sup>38</sup> Boas's understanding of scientific progress was somewhat unusual, since he did not think the correction of scientific error developed from the replacement of bad "explanations" with better ones. Instead he followed Goethe in holding that "a single action or event is interesting, not because it is explainable, but because it is true."<sup>39</sup> If one approaches a phenomenon with an idea that it is a piece of data to be explained, one has already ceased to act as a world-oriented scholar and become something else: a "naturalist" governed by an internal "aesthetic impulse."<sup>40</sup> Unlike Brinton, Boas wanted to get back in touch with the phenomena of the world. He sought not only explanations but a heightened feeling of connectedness.

As in the case of Brinton, Boas's idea of the scholar's proper relation to the world connected to his understanding of language. In his "Introduction" to the *Handbook of American Indian Language*, Boas grounded his career-long inquiry into human symbolic activity in a

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<sup>37</sup> On the influence on Boas of "Counter-Enlightenment skepticism," see Bunzl, e.g. 56. This view is implicit in George Stocking's influential formulation of the Boasian culture concept; he writes in *Race, Culture, and Evolution* that "Boas's thinking on ethnic diversity was rooted in the same soil" as Herder's "organic diversitarianism" (214).

<sup>38</sup> Boas, "An Anthropologist's Credo," in *I Believe*, Clifton Fadimon, ed. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1939), 23.

<sup>39</sup> Boas, *Race, Language and Culture*, 644.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

theory of what he called “secondary” understandings<sup>41</sup>. Secondary understandings are reflexive linguistic phenomena: they comprise our explicit self-understanding of our experience in all its dimensions. And yet, despite our modern aspiration to cognitively master our experience, Boas argued that secondary understandings are subject to contingencies of unconscious experience that are largely beyond our control. “Even our scientific views, which are apparently based entirely on conscious reasoning,” Boas explained, are formed “under the influence of strong emotions.” To square the “Introduction” with “The Study of Geography,” our views are responsive to the “affective impulse” governing our experience, according to which the self finds itself ineluctably drawn into the world without knowing why ahead of time.<sup>42</sup> In order for one’s secondary understandings to become better attuned to one’s environment, one has to get into the right relation not just with the world, but with oneself. One has to recognize oneself as the kind of being whose picture of the world is changeable.

Boas’s theory of secondary understandings showed the attitudes of scientific experts to be subject to the very same “impulses” as the people whom they typically studied. This motivated his departure from Brinton on the question of how to respond to modernity and of who could take part in that response. In “The Aims of Ethnology,” Boas wrote that “the same kind of struggle that the genius has to undergo among ourselves in his battle against dominant ideas or dominant prejudice occurs among primitives and it is of particular interest to see in how far the strong individual is able to free himself from the fetters of convention.”<sup>43</sup> Moments like these, which recur throughout Boas’s writings, reveal their author’s enthusiasm for a certain project of

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<sup>41</sup> Boas, “Introduction,” *Handbook of American Indian Language* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1911), 67, 70. My reading of this text is indebted to Michael Silverstein, “Language Structure and Linguistic Ideology,” in *The Elements: A Parasession Linguistic Units and Levels*, Paul R. Clyne, William F. Hanks, Carol L. Hofbaue, eds. (Chicago: Chicago Linguistic Society, 1979): 193–247.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 70; *Race, Language and Culture*, 642.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 638.

enlightenment, a freeing of humanity from superstition. But in order to understand the modes of relation to the people Boas persisted in calling “primitive”—that is, colonized people—that his version of that project made possible, it is important to grasp the term “enlightenment” in its full dimensionality.

One understanding of the Enlightenment, Enlightenment with a capital E, holds that it was a period of intellectual and cultural history. Those who see Boas as part of the “Counter-Enlightenment” tend to assume that he looked backwards upon the Enlightenment as a discrete period of history that was already complete, or that had proven itself incapable of completing itself, such that a new kind of inquiry, the Counter-Enlightenment, had to be initiated. It’s true that Boas, in his 1904 essay on the “History of Anthropology,” traced the origins of modern anthropology back to the classic Counter-Enlightenment figures—to Rousseau’s voicing of “the deep-seated feeling that political and social development was the result of a faulty development of civilization,” and to “Herder’s *Ideen zur Geschichte der Menschheit*, in which, perhaps for the first time, the fundamental thought of the development of the culture of mankind as a whole is clearly expressed.”<sup>44</sup> There is a real sense in which everything Boas accomplished, his whole updating of the Humboldtian philosophy of expression, can be seen as the unfolding of a possibility emergent in this late-eighteenth-century moment. This raises the question of whether Boas did not take up a project that was anachronistic—or, worse, intellectually imperialistic—from its very origin: what right did Boas have to recreate “primitive man” in the image of a Galileo or Spinoza, engaged in a “battle against dominant ideas or dominant prejudice”?

If we take Boas seriously, such a question, which casts colonized peoples as an object (or Ergon) of scientific inquiry, examination, and explanation, misconstrues anthropology’s significance as a modernizing practice of enlightenment. For Boas, as for Herder, modernity

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<sup>44</sup> “The History of Anthropology,” *Science* 20, no. 512 (1904): 513–24, 514.

named a moral crisis that required a new receptivity to the constraints and possibilities emergent within a given form of life. Over time, Boas came to study colonized peoples not to understand modernity's pre-history, but to explore the variety of ways in which human beings attune themselves to the crises of the present. As he wrote in his preface to *Race, Language and Culture*:

Growing up in our own civilization we know how we ourselves are conditioned by it, how our bodies, our language, our modes of thinking and acting are determined by limits imposed on us by our environment. Knowledge of the life processes and behavior of man under conditions of life fundamentally different from our own can help us to obtain a freer view of our own lives and of our life problems.<sup>45</sup>

In turning back to Herder and Rousseau, Boas's purpose was not to locate himself within a grand narrative of intellectual history, but to specify a problem that emerged in his own experience. Boas saw in these eighteenth-century figures the germ of an account of "our life problems" as "historical" in the particular sense with which he used that term, the sense of being solicited by a world toward which the self has to get in the right relation.

Enlightenment, then, can also be understood in the lower-case, not as a closed moment but as a continuing process, a coming-to-terms with history through the cultivation of a certain style of being a buffered self. We find a cognate understanding expressed in Michel Foucault's later formulation of enlightenment as an "ethical attitude" as a mode of relating to the present times and to oneself as a modern subject. "To be modern," Foucault writes, "is not to accept oneself as one is in the flux of the passing moments; it is to take oneself as object of a complex and difficult elaboration. ... This modernity does not 'liberate man in his own being'; it compels

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<sup>45</sup> *Race, Language and Culture*, v.

him to face the task of producing himself.”<sup>46</sup> It is this style of being a buffered self, this reckoning with today that culminates in the discursive constitution of a self with “a freer view,” that I want to understand as expressive enlightenment.

This form of expressive enlightenment—self-enlightenment through affective exchange with the world surrounding the buffered self—could only be achieved through an interaction with a world that was always already social, a world comprised of other selves possessed of other secondary explanations, all—Boas hoped—striving to get themselves attuned to the world in a way that gratified their “affective impulse” toward it. For Boas, expressive enlightenment was a mode of discursive affiliation that would connect the members of the human community with time. Toward the end of his life, he wrote, “It is my conviction that the fundamental ethical point of view to be taken is that of the in-group which must be expanded over the whole of humanity. This leads naturally to the conclusion that the individual must be valued according to his own worth and not the worth of a class to which we assign him.”<sup>47</sup> To recognize individuals according to their “own worth” is to presuppose in those individuals themselves a capacity for self-production. Boas did not hesitate to say that this was the way he looked at the world and the way he sought to empower others. “My whole outlook upon social life is determined by the question: how can we recognize the shackles that tradition has laid upon us?” he wrote. “I consider it the duty of those who are devoted to the study of social problems to become clear in regard to these questions and to see to it that through their influence the intellectual chains in which tradition holds us are gradually broken.”<sup>48</sup>

Boas looked for allies in this project of enlightenment wherever he could find them, in other societies (where he found “primitives” engaged in the “same kind of struggle that genius

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<sup>46</sup> “What is Enlightenment?,” in *The Foucault Reader*, Paul Rabinow, ed. (New York: Vintage, 1984): 32–50, 38, 42

<sup>47</sup> “An Anthropologist’s Credo,” 24.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

has to undergo among ourselves”) as well as in his own. To Boas, an enlightened attitude toward oneself seemed the only condition of modern belonging worth endorsing at a time when “secondary understandings” were creating new barriers between people. Boas, like Herder, saw that the modern creation of “the whole of humanity” followed from the unavailability of older forms of attachment. “On the whole in the history of mankind as the size of groups has increased, their solidarity has been weakened,” he wrote, “and with that the rights of the outsider have been recognized.”<sup>49</sup> What makes up for the weakening solidarity of these expanding groups is a mode of belonging facilitated through discourse circulating among those “outsiders,” those who never subscribed to the in-group’s traditions or who expressively defined themselves in opposition to them.

A solidarity constituted through the circulation of discourse requires peculiar protocols of mutual recognition through which members of expanding in-groups can manifest themselves to one another across time and space. One such protocol of mutual manifestation, for those committed to expressive enlightenment, was the term expression itself. As Foucault observes, Kant understood the Enlightenment slogan—*Sapere Aude!*—as a *Wahlspruch* or “a heraldic device, that is, a distinctive feature by which one can be recognized, and...also a motto, an instruction that one gives oneself and proposes to others.”<sup>50</sup> Near the end of the nineteenth century, expression became the *Wahlspruch* of a new mode of enlightenment. Brinton and Boas both had a role to play in bringing this to pass; whatever their theoretical differences, they used the term to convey a shared intention to deal with the world, and one’s ethical relation to oneself as a knower of that world, in a new and more receptive way. From Brinton’s slogan that the “facts of ethnology are expressions of the general conscious of humanity” through Boas’s maxim

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> “What is Enlightenment?” 35.



that “the most trifling events are significant because they are expressions of historical happenings,” we can witness the gradual refinement of a specific style of being a buffered self, one designed to cope with and contest a rival style of knowledge-making that looked upon the world as *Ergon*.

### III. Beckoning

Expressive enlightenment was not merely a form of scholarly knowledge, a Boasian strategy to build upon Brinton’s “firm footing” a viable scientific discipline. It was a relational form of becoming that gratified the “affective impulse” directing the inquirer outward, into affiliation with the world and its people. This activity of imagining new cross-cultural affiliations made a difference in twentieth-century America, but to appreciate its significance we need to look past the precinct of anthropology. Beyond the human sciences, the mode of expressive enlightenment was also discovered—simultaneously, as it were—by poets, philosophers, politicians, and social activists, who developed it in a diversity of inflections. Across American society, the *Wahlspruch* of expression, and the modern attitude of self-production that it signaled, facilitated the affiliation of disparate individuals who resolved to become themselves by speaking out in public.

We can begin to appreciate the breadth of this collective manifestation by briefly considering the field of philology, a field that, like ethnology, underwent a momentous transformation in the last decades of the nineteenth century. One can trace this transformation—closely connected to the emergence of the modern discipline of literary studies—precisely by following the etymology of “expression” in the published works of critics and rhetoricians around the turn of the twentieth century. Prior to the rise of the English department in America,

“expression” was a synonym for enunciation. It was part of a scholarly discipline through which teachers taught students to speak according to established rules of conduct. As late as 1887, J. H. Gilmore, Professor of Rhetoric at the University of Rochester, could hope to find an audience for his *Outlines of the Art of Expression*, a “little book,” as described in its Introduction, that “has grown, in the author’s class-room, out of an attempt to supplement the defective early training of his pupils ...[with] a knowledge of those particular elements of Grammar which are distinctively characteristic of the English tongue.” Gilmore’s vision for the progress of his students’ knowledge had nothing to do with the process of self-becoming I’ve been calling “expressive enlightenment.” Speech was always to be governed according to elocutionary protocols authored by experts who had foretold all possible scenarios of decorous utterance.<sup>51</sup>

By the 1880s, the days of Gilmore’s brand of prescriptive rhetoric were numbered. According to an influential cadre of ambitious young professors who taught English, not Latin, and who counted themselves as proponents of “modern” philology, the study of a literary text was to be imagined precisely as a mode of enlightenment. When Columbia professor Joel Spingarn, a leader of this new movement, insisted that great works of literature ought to be seen as exemplifying an “art of expression,” he explained at length that this phrase meant not that works of literature conformed better than other texts to certain prescribed “Rules,” but that the meaning of literature depended on its exemplary effect on the life of a reader. Like Brinton and Boas, Spingarn traced this understanding of expression across the Atlantic and backward in time to thinkers like Goethe, Herder, and Hegel. It was with them in mind that he wrote, in his 1910 lecture “The New Criticism,” that the basic objects and aims of literary inquiry were fundamentally expressive:

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<sup>51</sup> Gilmore, *Outlines of the Art of Expression* (Boston, Ginn & Co., 1887), 3.

What has the poet tried to do, and how has he fulfilled his intention? What is he striving to express and how has he expressed it? What impression does his work make on me, and how can I best express this impression?<sup>52</sup>

In modern philology as in Boasian anthropology, as witnessed later by Ludwig Lewisohn's *Expression in America* (1930) and F. O. Matthiessen's *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (1943), the *Wahlspruch* of expression came to serve as a watch-word for those who saw literature as *Energeia* rather than *Ergon*.<sup>53</sup>

Now, one could argue that this realignment of literature as a project of expressive enlightenment was not, in relation to anthropology, a “simultaneous discovery” so much as a parallel development derived from a common tradition—a separate branch of the same Romantic family tree. But this is not the path I want to pursue here, for two reasons: first, expressive enlightenment flourished even among peoples avowedly hostile to Euro-American intellectual traditions; and second, even among the scholarly elites we've been examining, expressive enlightenment was experienced not primarily as a set of theoretical propositions but rather as a way of re-imagining the social world in which they lived. The really important question raised by the ascendancy of expression in ethnology and philology is not how an idea travelled, in ways we might not have recognized, between one intellectual and another, but rather how, at this particular moment in time, expression became a discursive basis for a new kind of collectivity. This gives us a way of coming back to the historiographical question about collective identity with which we started, the question of why the cultural politics of race can be thought about as unfolding within, traveling alongside, or even surrounding the history of expression.

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<sup>52</sup> Spingarn, *The New Criticism: A Lecture Delivered at Columbia University, March 9, 1910* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1911), 20, 18.

<sup>53</sup> I have traced this development in “Towards a Genealogy of Americanist Expressionism,” *J19: The Journal of Nineteenth-Century Americanists* 3, no. 2 (2015), forthcoming.

One figure who can help us measure the scope of expressive enlightenment and its relation to the politics of cultural belonging is Carlos Montezuma, the Yavapai doctor, pamphleteer, and founding member of the Society of American Indians. Montezuma was a self-declared “abolitionist.” Throughout his career, he advocated the immediate dissolution of the United States Office of Indian Affairs, which he saw as the latest in a line of Euro-American institutions designed to keep Indian people in a state of political and moral dependency. The result of these institutions’ influence, Montezuma said, was the stifling of a people’s self-expression:

The aborigines of America have never been in a position to express themselves. The game of “the survival of the fittest,” competition of life in God’s appointed way, “by the sweat of the brow,” have been too one-sided. It has been an awful unfair play to speculate and weaken, to satisfy your aesthetic propensities.

To judge a race relative to their standard we must put ourselves in their place; better still, be one of them.<sup>54</sup>

One could be forgiven for mistaking this for a rumination of Franz Boas, yet no evidence exists to suggest that Montezuma ever read a word Boas wrote. Montezuma’s opposition between “expression” and enlightened self-interpretation on the one hand (“to judge a race relative to their standard we must put ourselves in their place”) and, on the other, an “aesthetic” picture of an orderly universe subject to natural laws (“the survival of the fittest’ . . . in God’s appointed way”) shows that he had found his own way to distinguish between “affective” and “aesthetic” speech, *Energeia* and *Ergon*. Throughout his career, Montezuma consciously modeled for his audience this expressive attitude—an attitude that he thought could help his

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<sup>54</sup> John W. Larnier, Jr., ed., *The Papers of Carlos Montezuma, M. D., Including the Papers of Maria Keller Montezuma and the Papers of Joseph W. Latimer, 1871–1952*, microform (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1983), reel 6.

people come to terms with the predicament from which, as he put it in another speech, “we Indians are struggling in the dark to find a way out.”<sup>55</sup>

We can begin to understand how Montezuma imagined Indian expression as a response to his people’s historical predicament by looking at his self-published newspaper, *Wassaja: Freedom’s Signal for the Indian*. *Wassaja* arose as a counter-publication to the official organ of the Society of American Indians, the *Quarterly Journal of the Society of American Indians* (later the *American Indian Magazine*), which *Wassaja* frequently upbraided for its conciliatory attitude toward the Indian Bureau. Despite this political disagreement, though, the papers shared a commitment to fostering a new pan-Indian public by adopting a deliberately ecumenical attitude toward Indian speech. In the first issue of the Society’s *Quarterly Journal*, its editors announced their intention to print “any expression on any Indian subject.”<sup>56</sup> What sets *Wassaja* apart for our purposes is the way it envisions the thematic open-endedness of Indian speech as an ethical attitude adopted at the level of the self. It wasn’t enough for Montezuma to publish “any expression on any Indian subject”; those expressions had to be loudly announced as historical events because Montezuma thought it was always politically significant when an individual Indian came into his or her public voice. “AN INDIAN EXPRESSING HIMSELF,” reads the headline over one letter to the editor, a letter that Montezuma framed in order to convey his understanding that expression was not merely a way of transmitting information about Indian affairs, but was itself the best kind of news. *Wassaja* modeled the attitude of expressive enlightenment that Montezuma wanted his readers to adopt. Not unlike Herder enjoining the

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<sup>55</sup>*The Indian Problem from an Indian’s Standpoint: An Address Delivered before the Fortnightly Club of Chicago, Feb. 10, 1898* (Chicago, 1898), 1.

<sup>56</sup> Anonymous (Arthur Parker [?]), “Think Upon These Things,” *Quarterly Journal of the Society of the American Indians* 1, no. 1 (April, 1913): 7–8, 7.

modern Socrates of his imagination to speak, Montezuma set out to enact and solicit the same kind of speech that he purported to describe.

Montezuma signaled to his readers his intention to use print discourse differently from journals like the *Quarterly* by undertaking formal experimentation in his prose and, as Robert Dale Parker has argued, in his poetry. Consider, for instance, the long poem “I Have Stood up for You” (figure 2).<sup>57</sup> Thematically, the message of the poem seems relatively straightforward: the speaker wants his readers to know that they have a friend in *Wassaja*. “I have stood up for you,” he says, through all “your” struggles against the Indian Bureau and against what “the palefaces said.” But even as *Wassaja* gives his “you” the credit for surviving the antagonisms of civilization while offering encouragement by asserting his loyalty, a strange sense emerges at the end of the poem that *Wassaja* also wants to say the opposite. “You have proven yourselves to be / Whatever I have stood up for you to be,” he avers—as if Indians ought to see themselves as having been constituted as a collective subject by virtue of what *Wassaja* has said on their behalf. Here *Wassaja* presents itself as unconditionally committed to Indian people and responsible for Indians being what they are.<sup>58</sup> But how does this work? How can a paper stand behind—that is, follow—what it also claims to lead? More fundamentally, who stands behind—or leads—*Wassaja*?

*Wassaja*, it turns out, is the name Montezuma was given as a child by his Yavapai grandmother. The word may be translated into English as “signaling” or “beckoning,” which captures Montezuma’s sense of himself as a speaker to his people—and, as such, the creator of a

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<sup>57</sup> *Wassaja* 4, no. 3, 3. This poem has been anthologized in Parker’s *Changing Is Not Vanishing: A Collection of Early American Poetry to 1930* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011): 292–93.

<sup>58</sup> Julianne Newmark has observed a similar ambiguity in the way Montezuma deploys the persona of the doctor: “Montezuma established himself as simultaneously a member of the ‘race’ group suffering from a potentially fatal ailment and as a person who might potentially bring to this group a remedy ... in each issue of *Wassaja*.” Julianne Newmark, “A Prescription for Freedom: Carlos Montezuma, *Wassaja*, and the Society of American Indians,” *American Indian Quarterly* 37, no. 3 (2013): 139–58, 146.

new community. Montezuma gave his newspaper his name because he observed no distinction between his subjectivity and its discursive manifestation. He was committed to an ethical attitude of expressive enlightenment that required him to continually reconstitute himself in response to the exigencies of the present.

The verse form of “I have stood up for you” communicated this. Wassaja wanted to be a poet but, like Walt Whitman, he wrote most of his poetry in such a way that it sounded like prose when read aloud. Even today we recognize “I Have Stood Up For You” as a poem not because of its rhyme or meter but because when we look at the page we can see white space between the line-breaks and capital letters at the beginning of each line. *Wassaja*’s identity was bound up with the look and feel of print discourse, with speech spread over great distances into the hands and minds not only of associates but also of strangers. This is one way in which Montezuma modeled, in the content and form of his discourse, an ethical attitude committed to an ongoing project of self-production.

In the pages of *Wassaja*, we can begin to see what it means to say that the mode of solidarity engendered by expressive enlightenment is fundamentally *discursive*. It is made for a world in which the voices of individuals circulate among strangers: “the wrong concept of us Indians which the public entertains, is a phantom which can be cleared away only by education and by our personal contact with the masses of the country,” Montezuma wrote in *Wassaja* in 1916. “It therefore behooves us to stand together and to teach the public differently.”<sup>59</sup> The implication is clear: if Indians don’t start speaking for themselves in view of a broader public, then they can’t be free. Like Boas, Montezuma understood freedom to consist in the revision of secondary understandings—the “phantom” caricature of Indian-ness that “must be cleared

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<sup>59</sup> *Wassaja* 1.6.2.

away”—through a kind of proleptic speech that constitutes the “people” to which it repeatedly refers.<sup>60</sup>

Montezuma’s advocacy for expressive enlightenment in *Wassaja* has discomfited commentators of all persuasions because it served as the engine of an emancipatory project, the abolishment of the Indian Bureau and its colonial infrastructure. At the center of this project was Montezuma’s animus for the Indian reservation. “The reservation,” Montezuma declared, “is a demoralizing prison, a barrier to enlightenment, a promoter of idleness, gamblers, paupers, and ruin.”<sup>61</sup> Montezuma thought that Indians faced with the choice between the reservation and “enlightenment” should opt for enlightenment and leave the reservation behind. As reservations became sites of political and cultural mobilization, and ultimately homes and communities, many scholars came to see Montezuma as an “assimilationist.” After all, he seemed to advocate the abandonment of a distinctively Indian identity for a form of life imposed by a foreign power.<sup>62</sup> This view has its merits but it effaces Montezuma’s keenest insights into the mutual imbrication, in modern society, of power and discursivity. Montezuma attacked reservations because the government made use of them to squelch opposition. “There is a good reason why you do not hear from the Reservation Indians on freedom,” he wrote. “THEY ARE AFRAID to open their mouths.”<sup>63</sup> Notwithstanding his anti-reservationism, this was a powerful new way of soliciting a reconstituted and mass-mediated pan-Indian subject into being.

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<sup>60</sup> Scott Richard Lyons has argued that Indian intellectuals of the Society of American Indians generation “started a trajectory of Indian public formation” without which later groups like the American Indian Movement would have been hard to imagine. Scott Richard Lyons, “The Incorporation of the Indian Body: Peyotism and the Pan-Indian Public, 1911-23,” in *Rhetoric, the Polis, and the Global Village*, C. Jan Swearingen and David Pruett, eds. (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1998): 147–153, 153.

<sup>61</sup> Montezuma papers, Reel 2.

<sup>62</sup> Lucy Maddox (notwithstanding her dislike of the term “assimilationist”) has referred to a “willingness and ability” on the part of Indian intellectuals like Montezuma to “perform their public roles on a universal stage according to a script they did not write themselves.” Lucy Maddox, *Citizen Indians: Native American Intellectuals, Race, and Reform* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 14, 11.

<sup>63</sup> Montezuma papers, reel 5.



Montezuma's insistence on the need to speak was based on his notion of enlightenment as an expressive process of self-transformation. The reservation system, he insisted, produced a caricature of Indians by imposing a "script they did not write themselves." As he put it in a 1905 article for the *New York Daily Tribune*:

The reservation system has been a monument to the want of knowledge of human nature on the part of those who have been instrumental in perpetuating it. The failure to recognize the brotherhood of man in the Indian, that he was a multiple being, however ignorant he might be, and not more unified in his natural endowments and faculties than other men subject to similar conditions and environments, has been his greatest handicap.<sup>64</sup>

Indian identity, Montezuma insists here, must be seen as an instantiation of human nature as a whole. It is in human nature to be a "multiple being," not the cigar-store "phantom" (Montezuma's coinage) that stood in for Indians in the public eye. I understand Montezuma's idea of a "multiple being" to mean that Indians cannot, and must not, conform to the reductive and unilinear understanding of human development advanced by the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Far from seeking to abandon a distinctively Indian identity in favor of a scripted vision of civilizationist progress, Montezuma saw expressive enlightenment as a way for Indians to fulfill their multiple and protean selves, embedded in families, communities, tribes, and broader regional networks that government-imposed identities obscured. Montezuma's misrecognition of the reservation as the source of his people's troubles was a consequence—though not a necessary one—of his prescient search for a broader, self-determining Indian identity. But how could this more diffuse form of discursive solidarity be relevant or useful to American Indians living under a specific kind of settler-colonial repression?

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<sup>64</sup> "A Review of Commissioner Leupp's Interview," *New York Daily Tribune*, Sunday, 9 April 1905.

Montezuma's answer to the challenge of living Indian life globally paralleled Boas's idea of affective solicitation through the exchange of secondary understandings. Speaking in a genre of persuasion that parallels Herder's *This Too a Philosophy of History*, Montezuma enjoined his Indian public to constitute itself in dialogue with those whose just-so stories about Indians threatened to flatten them into caricature: the Indian Bureau, politicians, and anthropologists too. In practice, the boundaries of *Wassaja*'s emergent public were necessarily porous. Montezuma wanted it that way. After all, he wrote, it was only "by our personal contact with the masses of the country" that Indian people could hope to correct the "phantom" image generated by the Indian Bureau.

Montezuma's motivating responsibility as an agent of expressive enlightenment came from his Indian public, just as Boas's came from anthropologists and Springarn's from readers and writers of English. *Wassaja* listened to what the wider world—for instance, anthropologists—had to say, too. From time to time, when a sympathetic non-Indian wrote him a letter, Montezuma would publish it in *Wassaja*. But it only counted as *news* when a new Indian correspondent emerged or, better yet, when word came to him of a new Indian newspaper getting off the ground. "More Indian papers by the Indians the better," he wrote in 1919. "It shows the Indians are coming out to express themselves."<sup>65</sup> By showing Indian and multiracial publics how one could "Speak!" from a position of phantom-like un-freedom, Montezuma, like Boas, brought himself into being.

In his effort to make expressive enlightenment the basis for a pan-Indian social movement, Montezuma adopted an ethical attitude toward history and language that faces in the same direction as that of Franz Boas. As far as we know, the two never came into contact, but Montezuma's expressive opposition to the "aesthetic propensities" of the Indian Bureau parallels

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<sup>65</sup> *Wassaja* 3.2.1

the disciplinary critique of “excessive specialization” and “positive knowledge” that Boas developed on the “firm footing” provided by Brinton’s philosophy of expression. It was through his own commitment to this scientific project that Boas was able to imagine anthropology as a collective emergence from the thrall of tradition—not the thrall to nature Brinton feared—and thereby imagine it as being a global community comprised of those who would make it their personal responsibility to think and speak for themselves.

For both Boas and Montezuma, the main obstacle facing the global community they envisioned—the “secondary understanding” to be overcome—was the widespread conception of human history as an unending race war. This was the understanding to which Montezuma referred when he spoke of “the game of ‘the survival of the fittest,’ competition of life in God’s appointed way, ‘by the sweat of the brow.’” In place of this prevailing understanding Boas and Montezuma elected to put forward not a new master theory of human history—“WASSAJA is not writing a thesis,” Montezuma wrote in 1916—but a practice: a new form of expressive solidarity mediated by circulating discourse.<sup>66</sup>

To observe Boas’s unknowing affiliation with Montezuma is to see Boas from the global perspective for which he so often searched, and thereby, perhaps, to discover a broader set of communities in which he moved. This may run against Boas’s own sense of his intellectual-historical singularity, but in another way it confirms his intuition that exemplary forms of subjectivity, even of “genius,” can be recognized across the parochial boundaries between disciplines and endeavors. I want, in closing, to draw attention to two insights that this perspective brings into view.

The first is that expressive enlightenment cannot be accounted for by tracing the transmission of knowledge among Euro-American elites. We must look backward from Boas to

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<sup>66</sup> *Wassaja* 1.6.2.

Brinton, Humboldt, and Herder, but we must also look sideways to figures like Spingarn and Montezuma—to Boas’s contemporaries—in our effort to understand the pressures motivating Boas’s reformation of anthropological practice and the ideas those pressures generated. The second is that this sideways perspective on Boas can de-center the telos of the expanding “in-group” that emerged as his hope for modern cross-cultural solidarity. As Montezuma and the Society of American Indians demonstrate, expressive enlightenment constitutes a subject who is a “multiple being,” a being who makes manifest his responses to local concerns within a particular discourse that addresses itself to a universal audience.

This tenuous relation between the local and the global is encapsulated in the first number of the newspaper Montezuma competed with, the *Quarterly Journal of the Society of American Indians*. It occurs in an article by the editors advocating the study of ethnology in Indian boarding schools:

And a new and still nobler and more important work awaits us: to demonstrate that there is a higher and more significant bond; the relationship of created things, one with another, and their inseverable kinship and relation with that Sovereign Power and Intelligence, whom some men reverence as God, and whom other men call the Unknowable, the Unseen, but whom Philosophy regards as the Totality of all things. And the American Indian race should be found in advance in this important labor.<sup>67</sup>

There is something undeniably paradoxical about the way this universalistic effusion culminates in a statement of ethnic pride. Then again, there is something paradoxical about the situation of the Boasian knower, whether modern or “primitive,” who can only create an enlightened global in-group by wrestling with the misunderstandings furnished by his local discourse community. In both situations, the enlightened subject is expressed as a multiple self whose location lies at the

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<sup>67</sup> J. N. B. Hewitt, “The Teaching of Ethnology in Indian Schools,” *Quarterly Journal of the Society of American Indians* 1, no. 1 (April, 1913): 30–35, 31–32.

center of plural solidarities of very different scales. Montezuma and the social movement he helped bring into being can thus help us see something that Boas himself might not have realized: that the mediation of local concerns in the public discourse fostered by expressive enlightenment reproduces the same tension between in-group and out-group to which it claims to offer a solution.

Today, there exist a number of scholarly vocabularies for discussing phenomena like expressive enlightenment that exist in both local and trans-local, or “glocal,” social space.<sup>68</sup> The history of expressive enlightenment from Herder to Montezuma reminds us of the anxiety such glocal discursive phenomena produce for individuals. Much like Herder’s warning to his would-be Socrates that he set out from “weak and indeterminate beginnings,” Montezuma’s assertion that the modern American Indian could never be “reconciled to his situation” must be read as an expression of the modern self writ large. The phenomenon of expressive enlightenment reveals the extraordinary motivation such irreconcilable situations provide for the constitution of discourse, and of subjects themselves.

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<sup>68</sup> On glocalization, see e.g. James Tully, *Public Philosophy in a New Key: Volume 2* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 243–310.