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The study of geography? Franz Boas and his canonical returns

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Abstract

Amongst historians of geography, very little attention has been paid to Franz Boas's ambitious vision for 'The Study of Geography' published in *Science* in 1887. Historians of anthropology have, on the contrary, understood Boas's paper on geography as the cornerstone of his developing anthropological interest. This paper argues that the reason for this revolves around competing understandings of canonicity between geography and anthropology. 'The Study of Geography', alone among Boas's early geographical writings, is placed centrally within the anthropological canon. The paper shows how such interpretations locate a Boasian conversion to an ostensibly more mature disciplinary practice to his Arctic fieldwork on Baffin Island, 1883-84. In doing so, Boas was canonized, as were some of his texts and practices. The effect was that post-1945 North American anthropology was acutely Boasian.

This paper disputes aspects of this conventional narrative, using aspects of Boas's corpus and education to argue that there was a more complex relationship between discussions in German human geography in the 1880s and the development of American cultural anthropology into the twentieth century. In doing so, the paper examines the relationship of Boas, his texts and practices, to the geographical canon and notes his recent recovery in French scholarship. In consequence, the implications of these canonical turns and returns for conceptions of canonicity in geography are discussed.

Keywords

Franz Boas; canon; fieldwork; History of geography; History of anthropology; Arctic

Running Title

The study of geography?

Occasionally I look back over what I have achieved in order to contemplate it through the eyes of my expert colleagues, and without boasting I find that it is a respectable achievement, which deserves to be recognized. I have told you often enough what I think of it myself, i.e. that above all I respect the reputation of an explorer of strange parts of the world very little; one is nothing more than a drudge! But where there is a field that is worthy of a man's work, I know how to help myself whenever I am successfully or unsuccessfully striving to attain my ideals. Franz Boas, 1884.¹

In fact, my whole outlook upon social life is determined by the question: how can we recognise the shackles that tradition has laid upon us? For when we recognize them, we are also able to break them. Franz Boas, 1938.²

In this paper, I consider the processes of canonicity in geography and anthropology through a focus upon Franz Boas and his field practices in Baffin Island during 1883 and 1884. I want to argue that this fieldwork needs to be seen as a critical moment in the history of geography's conception of canonicity because Boas's thinking for his famous methodological paper, 'The Study of Geography', began to be developed during his time with the Inuit of Cumberland Sound.

Although historians of anthropology and Inuit Studies have done important work on Boas, there remains a need to understand the development of Boasian cultural anthropology, and thus American anthropology, through the vision of his Geography. Focusing on this episode, and its relative depiction in intellectual histories, reveals much about the boundaries between the emergent disciplines of geography and anthropology in the late nineteenth

¹ Letter from Franz Boas to his fiancée, Marie Anna Ernestin Krackowizer, 28 May 1884.

Reproduced in L. Müller-Wille (Ed) *Franz Boas among the Inuit of Baffin Island 1883-1884, Journals and Letters*, (Translated by W. Barr), Toronto, 1998. As Müller-Wille notes, this letter was written to commemorate the first anniversary of Krackowizer's acceptance of Boas's proposal of marriage, but it also demonstrates his intellectual ambition.

² F. Boas, An anthropologist's credo, *The Nation* 147 (1938) 201-204, 202. See also F. Boas, *Anthropology and Modern Life*, New York, [1928]1986.

century. Examining the different ways that text, individual and practice have been rendered is thus significant for understandings of geography's approach to canonicity.

CANONICITY AND GEOGRAPHY IN THE 1880s

The nature and provenance of geography's canon has undergone recent examination.³ This debate has, hitherto, been unduly dominated by a resolutely *textual* conception of the canonical.⁴ By this, I mean to suggest that debates about canonicity in geography have relied too closely on a scriptural understanding of the canon. As I have argued in the Introduction to this theme issue, the Greek word *kanôn* referred to the measuring rod used as a yardstick by carpenters. It was gradually accepted as a broader term for a standard model in art or law.⁵ The early churches used the term to refer to their rules, as in canon law, but with specific differences to indicate their doctrinal particularity. That is, after the Lutheran Reformation, different churches not only had variable textual canons, but they also began to conceive of canonicity in differential ways.⁶ A lesson of canonical criticism from theology, then, is that thinking about the canon cannot only rely on written texts. In short, canons, and decisions on their membership and material constitution, are about identity.

³ I.M. Keighren, C. Abrahamson and V. della Dora, On canonical geographies, *Dialogues in Human Geography* 2 (2012) 296-312.

⁴ See, for example, C.W.J. Withers, Geography's evolving traditions and textual critique, *Dialogues in Human Geography* 2 (2012) 317-320.

⁵ G.A. Kennedy, The origin of the concept of a canon and its application to the Greek and Latin classics, in: J. Gorak (Ed), *Canon Vs. Culture: Reflections on the Current Debate*, New York, 2001, 105-116.

⁶ R.C. Powell, Notes on a geographical canon? Measures, models and scholarly enterprise, *Journal of Historical Geography* [this issue].

This must concern us here because it is precisely the variation of models of canonicity that becomes evident when we consider the secular canon, which was first developed explicitly during the late nineteenth century.⁷ Since then, canon has been used by commentators in different disciplines to articulate a set of key texts, individuals, tools or methods or more likely some combination thereof.

In geography, therefore, the idea of ‘the canon’ can be applied in at least three senses to texts (canonical books, papers and maps), individuals (canonized members) and practices (canonical fieldwork or GIS). It is through the deployment of this more pluralist sense of canonicity that this paper will proceed. It is simply too easy to argue that the discipline has never had a canon, or, as John Agnew has it, to note the ‘canonical vacuum’ in geography.⁸ The question is more complicated, and varies across institutions and linguistic traditions. It is difficult to deny that the English geographer, Halford Mackinder, has not been both canonized and that some of his texts have been treated as canonical by geographers. This case may be stronger for British geography before ca. 1960, and certainly one might claim that Mackinder is currently engaged with more by political and historical geographers than, say, economic geographers. But it remains the case that Mackinder’s vision for geography from 1887, ‘On the Scope and Methods of Geography’, continues to be required for almost all British undergraduates reading the discipline.⁹

The 1880s were a pivotal moment in the history of disciplinarity across the social and natural sciences, and geography was fully implicated in this.¹⁰ During the 1880s certain conventions about canonicity in modern geography were established that continue to influence the debate today. Scholars such as Peter Kropotkin in 1885 and William M. Davis in 1887 articulated competing views for embryonic forms of geographical practice.¹¹ For Kropotkin, the Russian anarchist, a geographical education could provide the basis for global peace and social solidarity. The Harvard geologist, Davis, saw a geography that would be

based on physiography, or the study of landforms on the earth's surface. By far the most interesting of the many statements about the future of geography produced in the late 1880s, though, was that published by Franz Boas in *Science* as 'The Study of Geography.'¹² In this essay, Boas drew from his reading in the German intellectual tradition and his recent field experiences in Baffin Island to present a wholly different vision for *Geography*. Germany in the 1880s was the centre of debates about possible futures for geography as a disciplinary practice, but this has been rarely understood by those solely seeking the foundations of anthropology in Boas.

'THE STUDY OF GEOGRAPHY'

In 'The Study of Geography', Boas summarized two origin positions for all sciences, which he claimed emerged from two different desires in the human mind. The first was that of physics, which seeks after the 'aesthetic desire' for order in phenomena.¹³ By this, Boas drew attention to the seeking of explanation of the physical world through the creation of laws. This view was influenced by the theories of positivism developed by French philosopher Auguste Comte during the 1840s. The second origin position was, contrarily, based on the "affective" impulse towards the need to *understand* particular phenomena.¹⁴ This, argues Boas, is best relayed through the sense of awe that humans feel in encountering the world around them. And this, Boas claims after Alexander von Humboldt, is found in the science of *cosmography*.¹⁵

This discussion of *types* of science is based on a contemporary debate in Germany in the 1880s inspired by the neo-Kantians, particularly the work of Wilhelm Dilthey. In a wider sense, its appearance is a familiar trope in the history of the relationship between the natural and social sciences.¹⁶ It was the tension between these two views of science that, for Boas, provided an explanation for the competing agendas being outlined for Geography during the

1880s: 'It is easily understood, therefore, why in geography the contest between these views is particularly lively. Here naturalists and historians meet in a common field of work.'¹⁷ An individual could only privilege one impulse or the other depending on personal preference, but could never reconcile them. What was important for Boas, then, was the implication of this classical debate for the definition of geography. Boas wanted to stress human-environment interactions in geography, and particularly their mutual influence:

We will apply these results to the study of geography. Its objects are, the phenomena caused by the distribution of land and water, by the vertical forms of the earth's surface, and by the *mutual influence* of the earth and its inhabitants upon each other.¹⁸

Boas's statement on geography has received surprisingly little attention from geographers. In a short paper in 1969, Roger Trindell claimed that 'a careful perusal of our methodological literature fails to uncover even a casual reference to any of his publications.'¹⁹ Ironically, Richard Hartshorne devoted two years of his life to learning German in order to uncover the Germanic roots of the 'nature' of geography, and yet Boas does not feature at all in his landmark account.²⁰ More recently, Gerry Kearns's excellent *Geopolitics and Empire* devotes chapters to successive, comparative examinations of Mackinder's views on geography with respect to those of Kropotkin, Mary Kingsley and Élisée Reclus. And yet Boas does not feature at all in this account either.²¹

This is important for three reasons. The first is that, for anthropologists, 'The Study of Geography' is viewed as a very important philosophical statement that has been subject to continued debate and canonical return. Indeed, over the past decade, the paper has been recovered by a number of 'Neo-Boasian' anthropologists in America, who have tried to detect in Boas all sorts of precursors of later debates. As Matti Bunzl argues, 'While Boas's famous opposition between the physical and cosmographical method was thus developed in

¹⁸ Boas, *The study of geography*, 140, my emphases.

the context of another discipline, it is generally accepted that the piece represents the foundational statement of Boas's anthropology.²² In the past year alone, the essay has attracted substantial attention in a new French translation.²³

The second reason is that for Boas himself, 'The Study of Geography' was one of his most important papers. He included it in his last, major set of essays, *Race, Language and Culture*, published in 1940.²⁴ It was the earliest paper included from the 62 that made the final selection, and placed at the very end of the collection. He referred to it as one of two early papers that 'indicate the general attitude underlying my later work.'²⁵ Twentieth-century anthropologists almost exclusively cite the 1940 version, lightly edited from the original version, as the key canonical text for American anthropology.²⁶ As Julia Liss puts it, 'Couched as a defense of geography, it in fact explores more elusive questions about the temperament of scientists and styles of scientific inquiry.'²⁷ However, to make such a statement removes the intellectual context of the debates about geography into which Boas wished to intervene.

The third reason is that understanding 'The Study of Geography' requires a revisiting of Boas's geographical education and his fieldwork on southern Qikiqtaaluk (Baffin Island). Important relations between the disciplines in the late nineteenth century were played out using cases from Arctic peoples and environments. Boas was using his fieldwork to think through larger questions in the philosophy of geography.

This paper, then, examines this situation and considers its consequences for debates about processes of canonicity in geography. What has often been neglected by historians of anthropology is that, due to his training, Boas was arguing for the acceptable continuation of *both* the aesthetic and affective impulses in the study of the world, and in its foremost mode of practice, geography. To grasp the significance of this for Boas, it is necessary first to understand his early life and education. It has become a commonplace to stress that the

tracing of intellectual influences for Boas is difficult, because of his tendency to provide rather sparse bibliographies.²⁸ Perhaps like many canonized scholars, Boas was '[n]otoriously sparse in his acknowledgement of intellectual debt.'²⁹ This has allowed different 'Boases' to be written for different periods, places, debates and, indeed, disciplines.

FRANZ BOAS – AN EXILED INTELLECTUAL

Franz Boas was born on 9 July 1858 in Minden (Westphalia), Germany.³⁰ His family were relatively wealthy and well-educated mercantilists.³¹ Boas's parents held liberal political interests and were prominent members of the Jewish community. Indeed, commentators have noted that the household was characterised by the ideals of the 1848 Revolution and its constellation of ideals for education, political liberty and common humanity.³² The young Franz was a bright child, and at the Minden Gymnasium, his favourite subject was, perhaps apocryphally, geography (*Heimatkunde und Erdkunde*). Moreover, Boas's educational development occurred during a period of retrenchment in German liberalism and Prussian imperial expansionism under Chancellor Otto von Bismarck.

In 1877, Boas spent one semester at the University of Heidelberg, studying chemistry, under Robert W. Bunsen, and some mathematics.³³ At the time, Heidelberg had a very high proportion of students from the aristocratic class, and across Germany there was increasing frequency of anti-Semitic incidents.³⁴ After this apparently unhappy term, the young Boas transferred to Bonn University for the winter semester 1877-78.³⁵ He spent four semesters at Bonn, studying physics with Rudolf Clausius, more mathematics, and beginning the study of geography under Theobald Fischer (1846-1910).

Fischer was a historical geographer, heavily influenced by Karl Ritter, who argued that the unity of the sciences was achieved through geography.³⁶ He had become the first

individual to achieve *habilitation* in geography at a German university, which he had accomplished at Bonn in 1876.³⁷ Fischer was a young, influential docent and a hugely inspiring influence on Boas.³⁸ Attending Fischer's lectures on polar exploration and historical geography at Bonn in 1878-79 was exciting and awakened in Boas a 'return to a boyhood interest.'³⁹

³⁷ D. Cole and L. Müller-Wille, Franz Boas' expedition to Baffin Island, 1883-1884, *Études/Inuit/Studies* 8 (1984) 37-63.

³⁸ Little has been written about Fischer by Anglophone historians of geography, likely because he died young and before the Great War. He was a specialist in the Mediterranean region, particularly North Africa, and, as such, popularized the notion of 'South-Eastern Europe' in the 1890s. Perhaps in consequence, there is some discussion of his oeuvre amongst French geographers. See A. Bernard, Theobald Fischer, *Annales de Géographie*, 19 (1910) 462; A. Drace Francis, The prehistory of a neologism: 'South-Eastern Europe', *Balkanologie: Revue d'études pluridisciplinaires* 3 (1999). Available at: <http://balkanologie.revues.org/751>; Last accessed 2 September 2014.

³⁹ D. Cole, *Franz Boas: The Early Years, 1858-1906*, Vancouver, 1999, 57. This biography of Boas's childhood, education and early career is the best available and persuasively outlines the uncertainty and frustrations of Boas's attempts to carve out his academic niche. However, it was published posthumously, as Cole died suddenly in 1997 and was unfortunately never able to complete the anticipated second volume.

¹³ Boas, *The study of geography*, 139.

²⁴ F. Boas, *Race, Language and Culture*, New York, 1940.

⁷ Kennedy, *The origin of the concept of a canon*.

⁸ J. Agnew, Of canons and fanons, *Dialogues in Human Geography* 2 (2012) 321-323, 322.

At a precociously young age, Fischer was elected to the new Chair of Geography at the Holstein University in Kiel in 1879. The university was expanding following new investment from the Prussian government after 1870.⁴⁰ Moreover, these reforms involved specific instruction from the Prussian Minister of Culture and Education that professorships of geography be established in every Prussian university.⁴¹ Fischer was in the position to benefit from this.

⁹ H.J. Mackinder, On the scope and methods of geography, *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society and Monthly Record of Geography* 9 (1887) 141-174.

¹⁰ C.W.J. Withers and R.J. Mayhew, Rethinking 'disciplinary' history: geography in British universities, c.1580-1887, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* N.S. 27 (2002) 11-29. Moreover, a further aspect of the uneven attention on the 1880s has been the neglect of the importance of the First International Polar Year, 1882-1883. International collaboration in the field sciences formed partial inspiration in calls for a consolidated, institutionalized discipline of Geography in Germany and other states. See W. Barr, Geographical aspects of the First International Polar Year, 1882-1883, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 73 (1983) 463-484.

¹¹ P. Kropotkin, What geography ought to be, *Nineteenth Century* 18 (1885) 940-956; W.M. Davis, The study of geography, *Science* Volume 10, Number 240 (1887) 131-132.

¹² F. Boas, The study of geography, *Science* Volume 9, Number 210 (1887) 137-141.

¹⁴ Boas, The study of geography, 139.

¹⁵ Rooted squarely within the German intellectual tradition, it is possible to detect here the influences of Alexander von Humboldt, Immanuel Kant and Johann Gottfried Herder, as well as geographers Karl Ritter and Friedrich Ratzel. See M. Bunzl, Franz Boas and the Humboldtian tradition: From *Volksgeist* and *Nationalcharakter* to an anthropological concept of culture, in: G.W. Stocking Jr. (Ed), *Volksgeist as Method and Ethic: Essays on Boasian Ethnography and the German Anthropological Tradition*, Madison, 1996, 17-78.

Boas transferred to Kiel in 1879-80. It is a matter of some debate as to whether Boas followed Fischer to continue working under him, or whether the move was for family reasons, as his sister was taken ill nearby. In any case, Boas spent two further semesters at Kiel, studying geography with Fischer and some physical geography with Arnold v. Lasaulx.⁴² Despite his diverse studies with different professors, ‘only Fischer emerges as a distinctly personal figure’ from Boas’s letters and archives.⁴³ There is strong evidence of¹⁶ This might also be termed the tension between the ‘nomothetic’ and ‘idiographic’, now most commonly associated with psychology. In American geography, framing the issue in these terms led to an ill-tempered debate about the adoption of scientific method between Richard Hartshorne and Fred K. Schaefer during the 1950s. See F.K. Schaefer, Exceptionalism in geography: a methodological examination, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 43 (1953) 226-249; R. Hartshorne, ‘Exceptionalism in geography’ re-examined, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 45 (1955) 205-244.

¹⁷ Boas, *The study of geography*, 138.

¹⁹ R. T. Trindell, Franz Boas and American geography, *Professional Geographer* 21 (1969) 328-332, 328.

²⁰ R. Hartshorne, *The Nature of Geography: A Critical Survey of Current Thought in the Light of the Past*, Lancaster, 1939; R. Hartshorne, *Perspective on the Nature of Geography*, Chicago and London, 1959.

²¹ G. Kearns, *Geopolitics and Empire: The Legacy of Halford Mackinder*, Oxford, 2009.

David Livingstone does devote some discussion to Boas in *The Geographical Tradition*, but this is mainly in relation to the race/environment debate of the 1930s; D.N. Livingstone, *The Geographical Tradition: Episodes in the History of a Contested Enterprise*, Oxford, 1992; Livingstone repeats the allegation that ‘Boas turned from his geographical heritage to cultural anthropology’ in more recent work; D.N. Livingstone, Changing climate, human evolution, and the revival of environmental determinism, *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 86 (2012)

increasing influence on Boas from Fischer after September 1880, and significant contact between Fischer and Boas's parents through the early 1880s. In short, Boas saw Fischer as a role model and wanted to emulate his academic career.⁴⁴

Boas's Dr. Phil in Physics (with Minors in Philosophy and Geography) was awarded in 1881. He received *magna cum laude* on his doctoral examination, and *summa cum laude* for the doctoral thesis.⁴⁵ His thesis concerned the sensory perception of the colour of 564-595, 581. A recent exception that discusses Boas, albeit briefly, in connection with the disparate readings of contemporaneous American geographer Ellen Semple is in I.M.

Keighren, *Bringing Geography to Book: Ellen Semple and the Reception of Geographical Knowledge*, London and New York, 2010.

²² M. Bunzl, Boas, Foucault, and the 'native anthropologist': notes toward a Neo-Boasian anthropology, *American Anthropologist* 106 (2004) 435-442, 437.

²³ M. Espagne, Franz Boas et la pensée géographique, in: M. Espagne and I. Kalinowski (Eds), *Franz Boas. Le travail du regard*, Paris, 2013, 91-105; J. Soldani, Les yeux et le cœur de l'anthropologie: un autre regard sur Franz Boas, *Revue du Mauss permanente*, 1 July 2014 [en ligne]. Available at: <http://journaldumauss.net/./?Les-yeux-et-le-coeur-de>; Last accessed 3 September 2014.

²⁵ Boas, *Race, Language and Culture*, vi. The other paper mentioned is the 'The Aims of Ethnology', originally published in 1888.

²⁶ Another version, closer to the original *Science* text was also re-published as, F. Boas, The study of geography, in: G.W. Stocking Jr. (Ed), *Volksgeist as Method and Ethic: Essays on Boasian Ethnography and the German Anthropological Tradition*, Madison, 1996, 9-16. The new French translation was published in a collection of essays deriving from a conference on the Boasian corpus at the Musée du Quai Branly in 2011. See F. Boas, L'étude de la géographie, traduit de l'anglais par C. Joseph, in: M. Espagne and I. Kalinowski (Eds), *Franz Boas. Le travail du regard*, Paris, 2013, 271-280. A version of the paper was republished in

seawater, an investigation in what was then termed *psychophysics*. However, three of his subordinate theses were in geography (respectively on the geographical framing of history, the geographical diffusion of sunlight, and the northern limit of Greenland).⁴⁶

Much has been written about the different intellectual influences on Boas.⁴⁷ For example, he analysed Arctic collections of the Royal Ethnological Museum in Berlin under

an anthology of key writings in human geography for students in the mid-1990s; see, J.

Agnew, D.N. Livingstone and A. Rogers (Eds), *Human Geography: An Essential Anthology*, Oxford, 1996.

²⁷ J.E. Liss, German culture and German science in the *Bildung* of Franz Boas, in: G.W. Stocking Jr. (Ed), *Volksgeist as Method and Ethic: Essays on Boasian Ethnography and the German Anthropological Tradition*, Madison, 1996, 155-184, 155.

²⁸ C. Kluckhohn and O. Prufer, Influences during the formative years, in: W. Goldschmidt (Ed), *The Anthropology of Franz Boas: Essays on the Centennial of His Birth*, San Francisco, 1959, 4-28.

²⁹ Bunzl, Franz Boas and the Humboldtian tradition, 63.

³⁰ Boas's correspondence and published materials, collated as the 'Franz Boas Papers' (Ms.B.B61), are held at the American Philosophical Society Library in Philadelphia. At the time of writing, these are being digitized with a view to them being vetted for release for public access later in 2015.

³¹ His father, Meyer Boas, was the most successful textile merchant in Minden. L. Müller-Wille and B. Giesekeing, *Inuit Whalers on Baffin Island through German Eyes: Wilhelm Weike's Arctic Journal and Letters (1883-84)*, (Translated by W. Barr), Montréal, 2011.

³² G.W. Stocking Jr., *The Ethnographer's Magic and Other Essays in the History of Anthropology*, Madison, 1992.

³³ Kluckhohn and Prufer, 'Influences during the formative years'.

the instruction of Adolf Bastian.⁴⁸ The co-founder of the German Anthropological Society, Rudolf Virchow, was also cited as a later influence by Boas himself.⁴⁹ A distinguished cell pathologist, Virchow had interests in Arctic peoples and published on a group of Labrador Inuit that were brought to Berlin in 1880. Boas met Virchow through family contacts at a

³⁴ S. Schaffer, *From Physics to Anthropology – and Back Again*, Cambridge, 1994. It has been suggested that Boas directly encountered anti-Semitic agitators at Kiel University; L. Müller-Wille, *The Franz Boas Enigma*, Montréal, 2014. For more on Boas's time as a student, see J.E. Liss, Patterns of strangeness: Franz Boas, modernism, and the origins of anthropology, in: E. Barkan and R. Bush (Eds), *Prehistories of the future: the primitivist project and the culture of modernism*, Stanford, 1995, 114-130.

³⁵ W.A. Koelsch, Franz Boas, geographer, and the problem of disciplinary identity, *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 40 (2004) 1-22.

³⁶ G.W. Stocking Jr., From physics to ethnology: Franz Boas' Arctic expedition as a problem in the historiography of the behavioral sciences, *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 1 (1965) 53-66.

⁴⁰ Bismarck had annexed Kiel for Prussia in 1867, and the University became a base for campus experiments in laboratory and industrial science. See Schaffer, *From Physics to Anthropology*. For general accounts of this restructuring of German higher education and its impacts on the social sciences, see W.D. Smith, *Politics and the Sciences of Culture in Germany, 1840-1920*, New York, 1991; C.E McClelland, *State, Society and University in Germany, 1700-1914*, New York, 1980.

⁴¹ Koelsch, Franz Boas.

⁴² Kluckhohn and Pruffer, Influences during the formative years.

⁴³ Kluckhohn and Pruffer, Influences during the formative years, 8.

meeting of the Berlin Anthropological Society, and studied his methods of anthropological measurement.⁵⁰

Inevitably, Boas bore the traces of different disciplinary and intellectual debates of the 1870s and 1880s. But it must be stressed that almost all Boas's education in geography was received through Fischer, and more specifically, in the human-land tradition of German geography. Boas was ambitious, and saw Fischer's rapid advancement to a Chair at Kiel as

⁴⁴ J.E. Liss, German culture and German science.

⁴⁵ Kluckhohn and Prufer, Influences during the formative years.

⁴⁶ Koelsch, Franz Boas. Boas seems to have published the last of these in 1885. See F. Boas, The configuration of Grinnell Land and Ellesmere Island, *Science* Volume 5, Number 108 (1885) 170-171. It is also likely that the first of these, investigating theories of anthropogeography, provided some material for the later consolidation in 'The Study of Geography' paper.

⁴⁷ Simon Schaffer stresses the key influence of Rudolf Virchow on Boas, particularly in his interest in psychophysics, in making in a fascinating argument about the link between laboratory practices and anthropological fieldwork. However, the evidence presented specifically for Boas's case is rather light, and the point is demonstrated much more effectively for his approximate contemporary W.H. Rivers in Cambridge. See Schaffer, *From Physics to Anthropology*. See also R. Baehre, Early anthropological discourse on the Inuit and the influence of Virchow on Boas, *Études/Inuit/Studies* 32 (2008) 13-34.

⁴⁸ C.C. Knötsch, Franz Boas' research trip to Baffin Island, 1882-1884, *Polar Geography and Geology*, 17 (1993) 3-54.

⁴⁹ F. Boas, Rudolf Virchow's anthropological work, in: G.W. Stocking Jr. (Ed), *A Franz Boas Reader: the Shaping of American Anthropology, 1883-1911*, Chicago, 1974, 36-41. The article was originally published in *Science* in 1902.

an aspiration. Fischer, it seems, strongly encouraged his young student to undertake the Baffin Island research as a way to make a career in academic geography.⁵¹ At that moment, German intellectuals were widely preoccupied with the possibilities offered by the ‘new geography’, indicated in Friedrich Ratzel’s *Anthropogeographie*, the first volume of which was published in 1882.

It is evident from Boas’s letters to his uncle, Dr. Abraham Jacobi, in the period immediately before his trip to the Arctic, 1882-83, that he wanted to undertake a broad training to become a geographer. This training, Boas believed, would allow him to consolidate a body of work to establish an academic career in the difficult and competitive university system in Germany.⁵² It was through geography that Boas, as an ambitious young intellectual, wanted to make his mark.⁵³

Boas spent the last months of 1881 developing his training in geography and cartography, before undertaking his compulsory year of military service in the Prince Friedrich of the Netherlands Regiment during 1882. Any spare moment was spent preparing

⁵⁰ Baehre, Early anthropological discourse on the Inuit. Boas also learnt the importance of the need for a secure institutional base from which to conduct research from Bastian and Virchow; Bunzl, Franz Boas and the Humboldtian tradition.

⁵¹ Koelsch, Franz Boas.

⁵² M.J. Herskovits, Some further notes on Franz Boas’ Arctic expedition, *American Anthropologist* 59 (1957) 112-116. For further discussion of the German academic system at this time, see B. Massin, From Virchow to Fischer: physical anthropology and ‘modern race theories’ in Wilhelmine Germany, in: G.W. Stocking Jr. (Ed), *Volksgeist as Method and Ethic: Essays on Boasian Ethnography and the German Anthropological Tradition*, Madison, 1996, 79-154.

⁵³ Stocking Jr., From physics to ethnology.

for his planned Arctic research. He consequently made trips to the National Museum and libraries in Copenhagen, and began learning both Danish and Inuktitut.⁵⁴

Boas had hoped to get sponsorship for his expedition from the American Geographical Society in 1882, but his application for support was unsuccessful.⁵⁵ He also applied for a Fellowship in Geography at Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, towards the end of 1882, which he saw as an opportunity for further geographical training. Again, he was disappointed.⁵⁶ His luck changed when Germany was taken up by Arctic fever in planning for the International Polar Year.

BETWEEN PHYSICS AND ETHNOLOGY IN THE ARCTIC?

General interest in the Arctic region had grown globally over the nineteenth century, but in Germany it accelerated through the 1870s, culminating in the First International Polar Year (IPY), 1882-1883. In 1880, Great Britain had transferred its Arctic sovereignty claim to the Dominion of Canada, and this had led to a complicated resurgence of polar tensions between international science and national prestige. Although Boas found the increasingly imperialistic tenor of Bismarck's Second German Reich distasteful, he was fascinated by the Arctic.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ I. Krupnik and L. Müller-Wille, Franz Boas and the Inuktitut terminology for ice and snow: from the emergence of the field to the 'Great Eskimo Vocabulary Hoax', in: I. Krupnik, C. Aporta, S. Gearheard, G.J. Laidler and L.K. Holm (Eds), *Siku: Knowing Our Ice. Documenting Inuit Sea-Ice Knowledge and Use*, Dordrecht, 2010, 377-400.

⁵⁵ For a history of the American Geographical Society during the second half of the nineteenth century, see K. Morin, *Civic Discipline: Geography in America, 1860-1890*, Farnham, 2011.

⁵⁶ L.A. White, *The Ethnography and Ethnology of Franz Boas*, Austin, 1963.

The IPY was an initiative of Lieutenant Karl Weyprecht of the Austro-Hungarian Navy.⁵⁸ Weyprecht argued that the classic era of Arctic exploration, characterized by independent and incoherent expeditions, was coming to a close and needed to be replaced by international coordination. Through the late 1870s, Weyprecht mobilised support for his proposal through different European scientific institutions, culminating in a mandate for an International Polar Conference in October 1879. Discussions led to a proposal for fourteen major field stations, twelve of which were in the Arctic, to undertake scientific observations during the IPY from August 1882 until September 1883.⁵⁹ The German expedition to Kingua (Clearwater) Fiord on Baffin Island, comprising 12 scientists and staff and led by Wilhelm Giese, was to establish one of these Arctic field stations.⁶⁰ The ship, *Germania*, sent to relieve the expedition at the end of the IPY in 1883 included the passengers Franz Boas and his servant, Wilhelm Weike, on its journey to Qikiqtaaluk.⁶¹

The *Germania* departed in June 1883, and Boas undertook fieldwork at Cumberland Sound from 28 August 1883 to 26 August 1884. He overwintered into 1884 with American and Scottish whalers at Kekerten, and then that summer visited various Inuit communities around the Sound. His field programme, derived from Charles Francis Hall's model of adapting to Inuit ways, 'was extraordinary for its time.'⁶² In order to defray some of the costs of his expedition, Boas took a contract as special travel correspondent for the *Berliner Tageblatt*, a newspaper that had emerged since 1872 as a major media corporation in Central Europe.⁶³ Although this was Boas's only episode of Arctic fieldwork, he continued to publish from it until 1927.

Stimulated by the debates in the *modern* Geography of the period,⁶⁴ Boas had selected the case of the Inuit of Cumberland Sound to investigate the relationship between humans and their environments. His hypothesis was that humans in the Arctic are dependent on changes in climate and ice conditions.⁶⁵ It has often been stated that Boas believed that the

Arctic environment and the geographical isolation of the Inuit would make them a relatively simple case through which to test theories of environment-culture relations.⁶⁶

However, from Boas's first publications from this fieldwork, it is obvious that he understood himself as also making a contribution to geographical discovery, as 'most parts of these ice-encumbered regions are unknown, and even their outlines are not yet properly delineated.'⁶⁷ Knowledge of the Inuit of Qikiqtaaluk was also important, for Boas, in contributing towards the great 'origin' question of Inuit Studies. In other words, Boas saw himself as enhancing significantly 'our knowledge of the origin and the migrations of the Esquimaux.'⁶⁸

In autumn 1884, following his return, Boas outlined ambitions to write three books so as to establish himself as the global authority on Arctic geography and Inuit ethnology (*Völkerkunde*).⁶⁹ In developing this work for publication, as was common at the time, Boas tried to use his material to articulate an agenda between the two nascent disciplines. In 1885, Boas published *Baffin-Land*, a Ratzelian-influenced anthropogeography that was envisaged as his major contribution to Arctic geography.⁷⁰ However, even *The Central Eskimo*, published in 1888 by the Bureau of Ethnology in Washington, DC, showed the influence of geography on his structuring of ethnology:

Besides the configuration of the land, the extent of the land ice formed during the winter is of vital importance to the inhabitants of the Arctic region, because during the greater part of the year it affords the only means of communication between the tribes.⁷¹

For the late George Stocking, the preeminent historian of anthropology, the Baffinland expedition is 'one of those incidents in individual biography which in retrospect appear as turning points in the history of anthropology.'⁷² Stocking convincingly argues that anthropologists have tended to read Boas's 'first field work as a sort of conversion

experience' through the lenses of their *own* 'first field work.'⁷³ After all, first fieldwork forms the locus of one's disciplinary becoming.

Following the representational turn across the social sciences, writing about field experience has become commonplace, even cliché, in the discipline of anthropology. Julia Liss stresses the need to comprehend the Baffin Island fieldwork instead as a series of dynamic encounters through which Boas developed his understanding through 'feelings of estrangement and marginality.'⁷⁴

In any case, although relatively short, this episode on Baffin Island has played a critical role in the history of anthropology by forming a foundational myth. The conventional narrative of this is that Boas-the-geographer was interested in environmental determinism. He went to do fieldwork in Cumberland Sound because this was envisaged as the location where the social-environmental relationship would be starkest. A conversion occurred because, during fieldwork, Boas had the revelation that Inuit culture develops in spite of the environment, rather than because of it. In consequence, Boas was able to *become* anthropologist. He then resolved to undertake future research with the peoples of the Pacific Northwest, because the culture there was 'more complicated' resulting from an ostensibly less pervasive environmental influence.

Indeed, some anthropologists have conventionally understood that *Baffin-Land* was Boas's geographical publication for a German audience, whereas *The Central Eskimo* was a major, *ethnographic* contribution for Americans. The reality is, of course, more complicated. The English-language monograph showed an extensive influence of contemporary geographical methods, such as maps of explorations and patterns of seasonal migration, often drawn from Inuit testimony and knowledge. Moreover, the first 60 pages or so of *The Central Eskimo* were a direct English translation of the German in *Baffin-Land*.⁷⁵

As examinations of his field materials from the Arctic suggest, Boas was also working through his readings of Kant and the neo-Kantians, and the relations of the *naturwissenschaften* and *geisteswissenschaften*, during his time with the Inuit. For Boas, then, geography and ethnology were complementary pursuits.⁷⁶ It is therefore less that Boas abandoned geography in Cumberland Sound, and rather that his Arctic fieldwork allowed him to develop a vision for the study of both subjects that was not tied to simplistic understandings of human-environmental relations. And this vision was articulated most strongly in ‘The Study of Geography’.

Notwithstanding the lazy conversion narrative, Boas ‘continued to integrate spatial, geographical, and environmental aspects and themes, as well as statistical applications, into his later studies and interpretations of human conditions.’⁷⁷ In order to understand the turn from geography, then, it is necessary to investigate the tribulations of Franz Boas when he returned home to Minden in April 1885.

A developing theme in German social sciences at the time was *Auslandskunde*, or the idea that the *Habilitationschriften* (the professorial thesis) needed to be based on extensive foreign research.⁷⁸ Boas was eager for institutional and financial security, but he knew he had to wait until *Baffin-Land* appeared in print. At the same time, though, a professor was also required to show competence in their general field of learning. The modern geography was essentially a new subject, still open to definition. From the late spring of 1885, Boas began consolidating in writing his thoughts on the philosophy and methodology of geography. His third book was to be a landmark statement on the purposes and conception of geography.

At Fischer’s insistence, Boas proposed *Baffin-Land* as his *habilitation* thesis at the University of Berlin in 1885. This was a protracted process due to the opposition of Heinrich Kiepert, the ageing, cantankerous Chair of Geography at Berlin. Kiepert, a historical

⁷⁷ Müller-Wille, *The Franz Boas Enigma*, 28.

geographer, was vehemently hostile to all forms of the ‘modern geography’. Kiepert tried to block Boas’s application, apparently on the grounds of jealousy and resistance to change. Boas was aware that he would have to defend the parameters of his geography.

Eventually Kiepert reluctantly agreed to pass Boas, as long as he revised the thesis to demonstrate greater facility with physical geography.⁷⁹ The general faculty had been made aware of Kiepert’s behaviour on previous occasions, and after great deliberation Boas was

⁵⁷ The precise relationships between forms of anthropological and geographical imagination and imperial politics in late nineteenth-century Germany deserve further investigation. In a sophisticated essay, Benoit Massin suggests that the German physical anthropology of 1860-90s is actually best understood as ‘anti-racist’, unlike other dominant European models of the period, and that this only changed with Bismarckian imperialism expansion from the early 1880s. See Massin, ‘From Virchow to Fischer’. For another excellent history of anthropology in nineteenth-century Germany, see A. Zimmerman, *Anthropology and Antihumanism in Imperial Germany*, Chicago, 2001.

⁵⁸ Barr, Geographical aspects.

⁵⁹ There was also a further range of smaller, auxiliary expeditions as part of the IPY.

⁶⁰ An observer at the German IPY station, H. Abbes, made ethnographic observations of the Inuit of Cumberland Sound, thus predating Boas’s studies by one year. See Barr, Geographical aspects. On German Polar history generally, see D.T. Murphy, *German Exploration of the Polar World: A History, 1870-1940*, Lincoln, 2002.

appointed *Privatdocent* (Dr.habil. in Geography) at the University of Berlin in June 1886. Following this appointment, lectures were scheduled at Berlin for the winter semester, 1886-87. The proposed topics included the 'Geography of North America', 'History of polar expeditions' and 'Ethnography of the Northwest Coast'. However, these lectures were never given, as Boas declined the post and left Berlin in summer 1886.⁸⁰

⁶¹ There is not space to discuss this fully here, but Boas was assisted in the field by a number of Inuit and European individuals. Most notable of these was Wilhelm Weike, a domestic servant of his parents who was permitted to accompany Boas to the Arctic. Weike was an effective contributor to the fieldwork and wrote his own field journal. See Müller-Wille and Giesecking, *Inuit Whalers*. See also K. Harper, The collaboration of James Mutch and Franz Boas, 1883-1922, *Études/Inuit/Studies* 32 (2008) 53-71.

⁶² Cole and Müller-Wille, Franz Boas' expedition to Baffin Island, 45.

⁶³ Throughout his career, Boas published 725 items, of which 87 were about the Inuit (and 47 of these were in German). Müller-Wille provides a comprehensive list, and demonstrates that many of the early German-language publications have been neglected by historians, especially those about the Arctic from the 1880s; Müller-Wille, *The Franz Boas Enigma*.

⁶⁴ Boas himself makes mention of developments in German geography in F. Boas, Supan's Journal of Commercial Geography, *Science*, Volume 9, Number 214 (1887) 251-252.

⁶⁵ A critical source for understanding the Baffin Island fieldwork is what historians have termed the 'letter-dairy', essentially a long letter to Boas's fiancée, Marie Krackowizer, composed in episodes over the duration of his fifteen-month fieldwork. See D. Cole, 'The value of a person lies in his *Herzensbildung*' Franz Boas' Baffin Island Letter-Diary, 1883-1884, in: G.W. Stocking Jr. (Ed), *Observers Observed: Essays on Ethnographic Fieldwork*, Madison, 1983, 13-52.

By this point, Boas was suspicious of changes in the political and sectarian atmosphere of Bismarck's new holy German Empire. The International Berlin Conference of 1884-85 had appropriated African territories for the new German Reich and other European powers.⁸¹ There were increasing incidents of anti-Semitism across Germany, and Boas was becoming anxious about the evident lack of opportunities for him in German geography. However, the surprise appointment in 1886 of physical geographer Freiherr Ferdinand von

⁶⁶ For sensitive analyses of Boas's understandings of environmental influences on Inuit sociality, as described in *The Central Eskimo*, see E.A. Smith, Approaches to Inuit socioecology, *Études/Inuit/Studies* 8 (1984) 65-87; G. Wenzel, L'écologie culturelle et les Inuit du Canada: une approche appliquée, *Études/Inuit/Studies* 8 (1984) 89-101.

⁶⁷ F. Boas, A journey in Cumberland Sound and on the west shore of Davis Strait in 1883 and 1884, *Journal of the American Geographical Society of New York* 16 (1884) 242-272, 242. For further discussion of the Arctic expedition, see L. Müller-Wille, Franz Boas and the Inuit, *Études/Inuit/Studies* 32 (2008) 9-12; M.M.R. Freeman, Franz Boas on Baffin Island: a centennial observed, *Études/Inuit/Studies* 8 (1984) 11-12.

⁶⁸ Boas, A journey in Cumberland Sound, 271.

⁶⁹ Müller-Wille, *The Franz Boas Enigma*.

⁷⁰ F. Boas, *Baffin-Land: Geographische Ergebnisse einer in den Jahren 1883 und 1884 ausgeführten Forschungsreise*, Gotha, 1885.

⁷¹ F. Boas, *The Central Eskimo*, Washington, DC, 1888, 417.

⁷² Stocking, From physics to ethnology, 53.

⁷³ Stocking, From physics to ethnology, 53. For Spier, for example, the Arctic fieldwork 'set the pattern of his thinking'; L. Spier, Some central elements in the legacy, in: W. Goldschmidt (Ed), *The Anthropology of Franz Boas: Essays on the Centennial of His Birth*, San Francisco, 1959, 146-155, 146.

Richthofen to a new Chair at Berlin, was a significant moment.⁸² Richthofen's connections to the Prussian aristocracy, and apparent desire to advance his own students and geographical agenda, were a sudden, unexpected barrier to Boas's prospects.

At the time, Boas was still envisaging that he would complete his book on geographical methodology to consolidate the new discipline. He had not yet finished the full

⁷⁴ Liss, *Patterns of strangeness*, 115. This was magnified, for Liss, by his initially unsuccessful attempts to find academic employment in Germany and North America upon his return from the Arctic.

⁷⁵ Cole, *Franz Boas*; Koelsch, *Franz Boas*.

⁷⁶ Boas was a lifelong defender of geography, continually arguing for 'the importance of geographical discipline for ethnological research'; S. Benison, *Geography and the early career of Franz Boas*, *American Anthropologist* 51 (1949) 523-526, 526. Speth documents links between Boas and some early twentieth-century American geographers, such as Isaiah Bowman and Ellsworth Huntington; W.W. Speth, *The anthropogeographic theory of Franz Boas*, *Anthropos* 73 (1978) 1-31.

⁷⁸ Koelsch, *Franz Boas*. This became known as the 'German fieldwork tradition' by historians of geography. For more on its impact on twentieth-century American geography, particularly in the work of Carl Sauer and his 'Berkeley School', see K. Mathewson, *Between 'in camp' and 'out of bounds': notes on the history of fieldwork in American geography*, *The Geographical Review* 91 (2001) 215-224; W.W. Speth, *On the discrimination of anthropogeographies*, *The Canadian Geographer* 31 (1987) 72-74; W.W. Speth, *How it Came To Be: Carl O. Sauer, Franz Boas and the Meanings of Anthropogeography*, Ellensburg, 1999.

⁷⁹ Müller-Wille, *The Franz Boas Enigma*.

⁸⁰ Knötsch, *Franz Boas' research trip to Baffin Island*.

manuscript of this book, but he had completed the introduction. The text of this introduction appears to have been rewritten as ‘The Study of Geography’ paper. His immediate options in Germany were closing and he was anxious to find paid employment so that he could marry. In the U.S., there seemed to be more opportunities to become a proponent of the new geography. Boas travelled to New York later in 1886 and hand-delivered the manuscript of the ‘The Study of Geography’ to the office of the magazine, *Science*. On the strength of this, publisher N.D.C. Hodges offered Boas a two-year contract as assistant editor for ‘Geography’ at *Science*.⁸³ This provided the financial grounding on which he was able to marry Marie Krackowizer on 10 March 1887.

BOAS AND HIS RESPECTIVE CANONISATIONS

As Simon Schaffer argues, anthropologists are often inclined to ‘use terms designed for the analysis of other cultures to define their own. ... Founders of the discipline are the ancestors; schools of training and method are represented as complex networks of kinship and tribal rivalry.’⁸⁴ It is common to find unreconstructed reference to ‘founding fathers’, ‘myths’ and ‘tales from fieldwork’ in writings about the histories of anthropological practice.⁸⁵ The issue for the history of the social sciences is that ever since the beatification of Boas was established, it has become difficult to re-visit the processes of his canonisation. The dominant narrative seems to have emerged at the behest of Boas’s graduate students at

⁸¹ J.C. Stone, Imperialism, colonialism and cartography, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* N.S. 13 (1988) 57-64.

⁸² Koelsch, Franz Boas. In April 1887, the Geographical Institute in Berlin was finally established, with Freiherr von Richthofen appointed as first director. See Knötsch, Franz Boas’ research trip.

Columbia University in New York City.⁸⁶ During the 1920s, according to Margaret Mead, Boas basically did *all* the teaching in the Department of Anthropology at Columbia.⁸⁷

Boas's first student, Alfred L. Kroeber, indicated a good example of this practice, noting in a discussion of Boas's career that it involved just 'a sidelong nod to geography.'⁸⁸ According to Kroeber, from his 'first contact with immediate cultural and linguistic

⁸³ Koelsch, Franz Boas.

⁸⁴ Schaffer, *From Physics to Anthropology*, 6.

⁸⁵ In recent years, Arctic anthropologists have also revisited the Baffin Island fieldwork to claim Boas as the founding pioneer of studies of Inuit peoples. See Krupnik and Müller-Wille, Franz Boas and the Inuktitut terminology for ice and snow.

⁸⁶ It is notable that hardly any of Boas's graduate students worked on the Inuit. This perhaps reinforced the early neglect of his geographical and German-language publications. A.L. Kroeber did study the six Inuit that Robert Peary brought to the American Museum of Natural History, New York; Müller-Wille, *The Franz Boas Enigma*.

⁸⁷ M. Mead, Apprenticeship under Boas, in: W. Goldschmidt (Ed), *The Anthropology of Franz Boas: Essays on the Centennial of His Birth*, San Francisco, 1959, 29-45.

⁸⁸ A.L. Kroeber, Preface, in: W. Goldschmidt (Ed), *The Anthropology of Franz Boas: Essays on the Centennial of His Birth*, San Francisco, 1959, v-vii. It is important to note that Kroeber was a colleague of Carl Sauer's at Berkeley, and there was significant interaction between their respective students in the Anthropology and Geography departments in the 1920s. See M.S. Kenzer, From 'Morphology' to 'Foreword': toward a clearer understanding of Carl Sauer's intellectual growth, in: K. Mathewson and M.S. Kenzer (Eds), *Culture, Land, and Legacy: Perspectives on Carl O. Sauer and Berkeley School Geography*, Baton Rouge, 2003, 55-79. For a full biography of Sauer, see M. Williams, *To Pass on a Good Earth: The*

phenomena, Boas became an unwavering anthropologist.⁸⁹ Or, as another of Boas's former students, Ruth Bunzel, put it:

Throughout his life Boas looked back with nostalgia to his days among the Eskimo. This was his first contact with primitive people, and it was his sense of common humanity with them that changed him from a geographer to an anthropologist.⁹⁰

And, of course, this was a nice story to tell, given the developments in German geography during the 1920s and 1930s and Boas's own significant contributions to the contemporaneous race debates in America. But the Boasian conversion myth has always underpinned the creation myth of anthropology – born as the younger, but rapidly superior sibling of geography – which continues to predominate in the U.S..⁹¹

It is also important to note that Boas himself contributed to his own canonisation in number of ways. Not least among these was his retrospective emplacement of an Arctic conversion narrative. A central presentation by Boas, towards the end of his career, is as follows:

I decided to make a journey to the Arctic for the purpose of adding to our knowledge of unknown regions and of helping me to understand the reaction of

Life and Work of Carl O. Sauer, Charlottesville and London, 2014.

⁸⁹ Kroeber, Preface, vi.

⁹⁰ R.L. Bunzel, Franz Boas (1858-1942), in: M. Mead and R.L. Bunzel (Eds), *The Golden Age of American Anthropology*, New York, 1960, 246, 246.

⁹¹ The idea of an Arctic epiphany for anthropology remains pervasive in popular culture. A television documentary from 1985 provides a good case of this, further claiming that Boas was the first to study the Inuit and that 'Boas had to admit, as he reflected on human life in the Frozen North, that what he had learned as a geographer was incomplete'; B. Dakowski, *The Shackles of Tradition*, Strangers Abroad Television Series, Central Independent Television plc, 1985. Another example is provided in C.R. Pierpont, Annals of culture: 'The measure of America', *The New Yorker*, 8 March 2004, 48.

the human mind to natural environment. A year spent as an Eskimo among Eskimos had a profound influence upon the development of my views, not immediately, but because it led me away from my former interests and toward the desire to understand what determines the behavior [sic.] of human beings. The first result of my attempts to explain human behavior [sic.] as a result of geographical environment was a thorough disappointment.⁹²

The stated intentions of his fieldwork here differ from those given in his field materials from 1883-84 and the resultant publications. But developments in German and American geography by the mid-1930s were very different from the possibilities envisaged in 1887.

It was from around the same time that Boas's students, such as Margaret Mead and Kroeber, constantly expressed that there was *not* a 'Boasian School.'⁹³ As Mead put it, 'Characteristically, there are no methods named after Boas, just as there is no Boas school.'⁹⁴ For Ruth Benedict, Boas was a 'culture-hero',⁹⁵ or for another student, 'Boas left no body of dogma as a legacy'.⁹⁶

The implication, of course, is that the Boasian School was American anthropology – 'With Boas, anthropology had come of age'.⁹⁷ Through Boas, a form of modernism became central to anthropology's origin myth.⁹⁸ The idea that there was any tradition of anthropology in North America before Boas was erased. For some, this became a problem for anthropology in the 1940s and 1950s, as Boas's standing became 'greatly – even grotesquely – exaggerated by his disciples and others'.⁹⁹

⁹² Boas, *An anthropologist's credo*, 202.

⁹³ This was notwithstanding earlier claims to the contrary, particularly during Boas's censure from the American Anthropological Association.

⁹⁴ Mead, *Apprenticeship under Boas*, 31.

⁹⁵ G.W. Stocking Jr., *Boasian ethnography and the German anthropological tradition*, in: G.W. Stocking Jr. (Ed), *Volksgeist as Method and Ethic: Essays on Boasian Ethnography and the German Anthropological Tradition*, Madison, 1996, 3-8.

⁹⁶ Spier, *Some central elements in the legacy*, 146.

Moreover, Boas was involved in other mythical moments in the history of anthropology, including the redesign of the displays at the American Museum of Natural History in 1905, the reshaping of understandings of American Indian linguistics,¹⁰⁰ and his unwarranted censure by the American Anthropological Association in 1919.¹⁰¹ Even in the debates over the founding of the American Anthropological Association in the late 1890s, Boas was the central advocate for a more 'elite', academic organisation, as opposed to alternative proposals for a broader, more inclusive membership of amateurs.¹⁰² In this case and many others, Boas was the key protagonist in the development of academic anthropology. He pioneered its institutional establishment and intellectual coherence and unity in the US.¹⁰³ More widely across American letters, Boas 'has assumed a gargantuan stature' because of his leading development of antiracism in the social sciences.¹⁰⁴

The propensity for anthropological mythology even characterizes the narratives of Boas's death during a luncheon in New York on 21 December 1942. Claude Lévi-Strauss, who was present at the event at the Columbia University Faculty Club, described him as 'a man who was not only the honoured master of their discipline, but the last of the intellectual giants produced by the nineteenth century, the likes of whom will probably never be seen again.'¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ Stocking, *The Ethnographer's Magic*.

¹⁰¹ On the disciplining of Boas by the American Anthropological Association, see D. Price, *Anthropologists as Spies*, *The Nation* (20 November 2000). The details of the 2005 AAA Resolution revoking Boas's censure can be found at 'Uncensoring Franz Boas', Available at: <http://www.aaanet.org/about/Policies/Uncensoring-Franz-Boas.cfm>; Last Accessed 30 August 2014.

¹⁰² G.W. Stocking Jr., Franz Boas and the founding of the American Anthropological Association, *American Anthropologist* 62 (1960) 1-17.

Towards the end of the 1950s, as was the common mood across the social sciences, Boas was criticized for impeding creativity and theory-development in anthropology.¹⁰⁶ His corpus was denigrated for being overly historicist and failing to contribute to developing laws about the cultural world – that is, for being insufficiently concerned with the aesthetic impulse.¹⁰⁷ Murray Wax, discussing the 1887 paper, claimed that ‘it is difficult to know how much importance to give this early declaration by Boas’, because it disrupted Wax’s rather simplistic attempt to classify Boas as a historian or scientist.¹⁰⁸ Intriguingly, the method that Wax attributed to the Boasian corpus in 1956 – that of stressing particularities and thus hesitating before generalization – connotes the prevailing dominance of the affective impulse. The point, for Boas, was that geography involved both impulses, but the scholar was irresolvably inclined one way or the other. This was increasingly difficult to grasp for students of a bifurcated (or even quadfurcated) discipline such as anthropology after 1945.

A further element in the canonizing of Boas has been the peculiarity of the scholarly history of anthropology.¹⁰⁹ There is still no complete biography of Boas to supplement Cole’s efforts.¹¹⁰ Consequently, George Stocking’s role as *the* disciplinary historian of anthropology has been critical.¹¹¹ Stocking’s intellectual recovery of Boas helped underpin the ‘return to culture’ at the expanding Department of Anthropology at Chicago in the 1960s and 1970s. Incidentally, this coincided with the denudation of the Geography Department at Chicago.

¹⁰³ W. Goldschmidt, Introduction, in: W. Goldschmidt (Ed), *The Anthropology of Franz Boas: Essays on the Centennial of His Birth*, San Francisco, 1959, 1-3; G.W. Stocking Jr., Delimiting anthropology: historical reflections on the boundaries of a boundless discipline, *Social Research* 62 (1995) 933-966.

¹⁰⁴ V.J. Williams Jr., *Rethinking Race: Franz Boas and His Contemporaries*, Lexington, 1996, 1. See also J.E. Liss, Diasporic identities: the science and politics of race in the work of Franz Boas and W.E.B. Du Bois, 1894-1919, *Cultural Anthropology* 13 (1998) 127-166.

Stocking was well aware of his own role in forming anthropology's canon:

I have recently come to appreciate that my own history, rather than being decentred, has largely been what today might be called canonical. ... One of the most satisfying compliments I ever received came when one of his late students said to me, *'You gave us back Boas' – returned him, as it were, to the canon*, after those early posthumous years in which his work was dismissed by some, as indeed it still sometimes is, as having little positive theoretical interest.¹¹²

Towards the end of his career, Stocking became preoccupied with the consequences of his personal 'matter of canonicity.'¹¹³ Stocking argued that Boas's version of nineteenth-century German liberalism remained the dominant influence throughout his anthropological career. These connections had long been obscured until the 1990s through deliberate obfuscation as part of the Boasian cultural critique of Nazi racism and 'scientism.'¹¹⁴

In the past decade, a group of anthropologists inspired by Stocking have tried to recover a Neo-Boasian anthropology for the twenty-first century. Calling for a more careful reading of anthropology's disciplinary history, they sound a call for 'returning to our Boasian forebears.'¹¹⁵ This would provide for a disciplinary holism that they use to argue against fissiparous tendencies.

For Matti Bunzl, 'The Study of Geography' is the best place to begin a discussion of Boasian fieldwork. Bunzl argues that the key element of the aesthetic and affective contrast is that it creates a cosmographical, and ultimately cosmopolitan, programme for ethnographic research. The affective impulse means cultural phenomena must be studied not because they are each reified as 'other', but because they each exist and need to be understood in their historical and spatial particularity. For Bunzl, therefore, the 'Neo-Boasian' project attempts to recover an anthropological tradition that resists, and has resisted, the fetishization of the Other. It is clear that although this recuperation of Boas is 'in some ways strategic. ... [T]he neo-Boasian approach sketched ... promises a new anthropology deeply rooted in one of the discipline's originary traditions.'¹¹⁶

CONCLUSION

This paper forms an attempt to chart one track through the discipline of geography's practices of canonicity by focusing on Boas. The relationship between the development of geography and anthropology has been shown to be more complicated than has hitherto been assumed.¹¹⁷ Conventional biographies of Boas, as William Koelsch puts it, 'typically treat the geographical episode, if at all, as an ailment of Boas's scholarly adolescence, a kind of intellectual acne to be overcome on his way to maturity.'¹¹⁸ Boas created a particular vision of anthropology. He was canonized, as were his texts and field practices. For most of the middle of the twentieth century, the Boasian approach was *American* anthropology. And after a period of critique, the Neo-Boasians have begun to recover his vision to argue for a revived cosmopolitanism in contemporary anthropology.

As Frank Kermode argued in his influential Tanner Lectures, the history of reception indicates that many members of the literary or artistic canon have 'endured long periods of oblivion until the conversation changes and they were revived'.¹¹⁹ The programme outlined in 'The Study of Geography' in 1887 provided an alternative, Germanic, pathway for geography in the twentieth century. As Trindell put it, 'Boas is important, therefore, not for what he contributed to geography, but for what he might have contributed'.¹²⁰ Moreover, this neglect of Boas is particularly acute in Anglo-American geography. In France, as already noted, there has been a recent return to this canonical text because it underpins Boas's contribution to the human sciences. As Michel Espagne argues, 'La géographie reste en filigrane tout au long de son œuvre'.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ F. Kermode, *Pleasure and Change: the Aesthetics of Canon*, Oxford, 2004, 33.

¹²⁰ Trindell, Franz Boas and American geography, 328.

I have argued that it is important to revisit these aspects of geography's canon – including the particular text, the field practices undertaken in the Arctic that allowed for reflection on the permeable boundaries between geography and anthropology, and Boas-as-geographer himself. In calling for a revisiting of canonicity in geography, we must heed Kermode's warning that

...we make lists, canons, of what we decide is valuable, and these, in the interests of that humanity, we may press on other people, our successors. Some of the reasons we give for doing so may be false or self-serving, or at any rate fallible. But the cause is a good one.¹²²

¹²¹ Espagne, Franz Boas et la pensée géographique, 105. 'Geography runs imprinted throughout his work' [my translation].

⁹⁷ M. Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory: A History of Theories of Culture*, New York, 1968, 252. In Regna Darnell's inspirational study of American anthropology, she argues that the 'Boasians' should be seen as the founders of a pervasive *Americanist* tradition that derives continuity, ultimately, from initial research encounters with the Native Americans. For Darnell, this is the source of the diversion of the American and British traditions of anthropology; R. Darnell, *Invisible Genealogies: A History of Americanist Anthropology*, Lincoln and London, 2001; R. Darnell, *And Along Came Boas: Continuity and Revolution in Americanist Anthropology*, Amsterdam and Philadelphia, 2000.

⁹⁸ Liss, Patterns of strangeness. Kroeber was eager to reduce all traces of previous thought about *Kultur* in his work in California during and following the events of the 1930s in Germany. See C.N. Degler, *Culture versus Biology in the Thought of Franz Boas and Alfred L. Kroeber*, New York, 1989.

⁹⁹ White, *The Ethnography and Ethnology of Franz Boas*, 66.

¹⁰⁵ C. Lévi-Strauss, Claude Lévi-Strauss' testimony on Franz Boas, *Études/Inuit/Studies* 8 (1984) 7-10.

Our identity, and its generational transference through pedagogy, remains central to the discussion of the geographical canon.

I will finish with Boas's geography because a rethinking of its place in the canon has been the purpose of this paper:

Our consideration leads us to the conclusion that geography is part of cosmography, and has as its source the affective impulse, in the desire to understand the phenomena and history of a country or of the whole earth, the home of mankind. ... Many are the sciences that must help us to reach this end;

¹⁰⁶ M. Wax, The limitations of Boas' anthropology, *American Anthropologist* 58 (1956) 63-74.

¹⁰⁷ H.S. Lewis, Boas, Darwin, science, and anthropology, *Current Anthropology* 42 (2001) 381-400. Lewis uses this to revisit Boas's philosophy of science drawing on his relations with Kant and Darwin, and argues that he should be recuperated for the next generation of scholars. Together with a set of responses by distinguished American, Canadian and British anthropologists, this is very much an attempt at canonical re-scripting.

¹⁰⁸ Wax, The limitations of Boas' anthropology, 67.

¹⁰⁹ When Boas began teaching at Clark University in November 1889, for example, he continued to attempt to publish in both geography and anthropology.

¹¹⁰ H.S. Lewis, The passion of Franz Boas, *American Anthropologist* 103 (2001) 447-467. For Mackinder, paradoxically, there are already four scholarly biographies by historians of geography.

¹¹¹ G.W. Stocking Jr., *The Ethnographer's Magic and Other Essays in the History of Anthropology*, Madison, 1992. Stocking was trained as a historian but for many years was employed in leading anthropology departments.

¹¹² Stocking Jr., *The Ethnographer's Magic*, 8, 9, my emphases.

¹¹³ Stocking Jr., *The Ethnographer's Magic*, 9.

¹¹⁴ Stocking Jr., Boasian ethnography and the German anthropological tradition.

many are the studies and researches that must be pursued to add new figures to the incomplete picture; but 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 our country we inhabit, and the nature that surrounds us.¹²³

In summary, the lesson to derive from this discussion of Boas is that the agenda for the New Geography was open in both Europe and America in the 1880s. As an era of geographical

¹¹⁵ I. Bashkow, M. Bunzl, R. Handler, A. Orta and D. Rosenblatt, A new Boasian anthropology: theory for the 21st century, *American Anthropologist* 106 (2004) 433-434, 433. See also D. Rosenblatt, An anthropology made safe for culture: patterns of practice and the politics of difference in Ruth Benedict, *American Anthropologist* 106 (2004) 459-472; I. Bashkow, A Neo-Boasian conception of cultural boundaries, *American Anthropologist* 106 (2004) 443-458; A. Orta, The promise of particularity and the theology of culture: limits and lessons of 'Neo-Boasianism', *American Anthropologist* 106 (2004) 473-487; R. Handler, Afterword: mysteries of culture, *American Anthropologist* 106 (2004) 488-494. For a critique of the Neo-Boasians, see M. Verdon, Boas and holism: a textual analysis, *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 36 (2006) 276-302.

¹¹⁶ Bunzl, Boas, Foucault, and the 'native anthropologist', 441.

¹¹⁷ An important early paper on the relationship between anthropology and geography is R. Ellen, Persistence and change in the relationship between anthropology and human geography, *Progress in Human Geography* 12 (1988) 229-262. See also R. Anderson, Franz Boas: Geographer/Anthropologist, <http://www.anthropologiesproject.org/2011/09/franz-boas-geographeranthropologist.html>, 2 September 2011; Last Accessed 25 February 2015.

However, there remains much work to be done.

¹¹⁸ Koelsch, Franz Boas, 2.

¹²² Kermode, *Pleasure and Change*, 31.

¹²³ Boas, The study of geography, 141.

exploration was being replaced by a resurgent European imperialism, the terrain of the future discipline was being defined and contested. This Boasian geography was being outlined at the very moment that practitioners of competing field disciplines were seeking to establish themselves. As professional opportunities began to close in Germany geography, others grew for Boas in American anthropology.

One of the earliest founding myths of American anthropology is the presumed intellectual immaturity of geography. The canonisation of Boas, I have argued, is more problematic. The reasons for these divergent remembrances have been resultant from different conceptions of canon, canonicity and canonisation between the disciplines. It is in this sense that we might root yet another of geography's exceptionalisms.