

Frameworks of Analysis



INTRODUCTION

It is clear from our discussion in the general introduction that it is impossible to tie the term 'culture' to a single concept or to a simple history of usage. It is better understood as referencing a network of loosely related concepts that has been shaped by the relations between the different histories and fields of usage with which the term has come to be entangled. A significant factor here has been the different meanings deriving from the ways in which the concept has been used and interpreted in the social science disciplines on the one hand and in the humanities on the other. These different disciplinary articulations of the concept are the focus of the contributions composing this first part of the book, which also assesses how the 'cultural turn' has affected developments within, across and between these different disciplinary ensembles.

The first group of chapters explores the role that the concept of culture has played in the social sciences, beginning with Eric Gable and Richard Handler's discussion of its role in the history of anthropological thought. Kay Anderson then looks at the role that questions of cultural analysis have played in constructing the human/nature divide that has played a key role in the development of, as it is sometimes still known, human geography. Valerie Walkerdine and

Tony Bennett then examine the forms of cultural analysis that have been associated with the development of psychological and sociological thought. Peter Burke's discussion of cultural history provides a bridge into the next group of chapters focused mainly on text-based disciplines. James English's account of the role that the analysis of form has played in the development of literary studies is followed here by Tia DeNora's consideration of music as both text and performance. Mieke Bal then examines the relations between art history and the more recent development of visual culture studies. The next two chapters – Tom Gunning's discussion of film studies and Toby Miller's account of broadcasting – are concerned with the forms of cultural analysis that have been developed in relation to the two main media systems of the twentieth century. The final set of chapters explores the role played by a number of interdisciplinary perspectives in developing new and distinctive forms of cultural analysis. We include here Ien Ang's account of the development of cultural studies, initially in Britain and subsequently as a wider international formation, and Griselda Pollock's discussion of the varied traditions of cultural analysis that have been associated with the development of feminist theory and politics. Daniel Miller then reviews recent developments in the field of material culture studies, arguing the need for a dialectical

perspective capable of taking account of the relations between subjects and objects, while Andrew Pickering, writing from a contrasting perspective, outlines the role that is accorded the relations between persons and things in the perspectives of posthumanist science studies and technoscience.

Our brief to all our contributors was that they should write an engaged account of their topic, reviewing and assessing its most salient characteristics from the vantage point of their own position within the contemporary debates associated with the fields of cultural analysis in question rather than aspiring to a position of Olympian detachment. In responding to this brief, Eric Gable and Richard Handler seek to untangle the history of the relations between anthropology and the 'culture concept' that is most commonly associated with that discipline: that is, culture as the organized system of beliefs, customs, and practices comprising the way of a life of a particularly territorially defined population. They see this as a task of untangling precisely because the histories of this concept and those of anthropology have sometimes followed separate paths, and sometimes converged, in ways that disqualify their often implicit equation with one another. Although focusing their attention for the greater part on the twentieth-century history of the discipline, they first show how Franz Boas's work broke with the hierarchical and evolutionary assumptions informing Edward Tylor's initial formulation of the 'culture concept' to propose a more pluralist understanding of cultures as bounded wholes that had a value and validity that needed to be understood on their own terms rather than – as had been the case throughout anthropology's earlier association with the history of colonialism – comparing non-Western cultures unfavourably to Western ones. Gable and Handler then turn their attention to the subsequent history of the relations between anthropology and fieldwork, paying special attention to the development, from Bronislaw Malinowski to Margaret Mead, of the 'participant observation' approach in which the anthropologist seeks to learn another culture by living it.

After reviewing how Anglo-American anthropology was influenced by French structural anthropology, and by the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss in particular, Gable and Handler examine the revival of a Boasian orientation in anthropology as evidenced by the work of Alfred Kroeber, Clifford Geertz and David Schneider. They conclude by assessing the varied forms of critical political self-reflexiveness that now inform contemporary anthropological approaches to culture.

Kay Anderson's concerns overlap with those of Gable and Handler at many points. She starts by reminding us that geography was included among the cultural sciences long before the emergence, since the 1980s, of 'cultural geography' in response to the perspectives of the 'cultural turn'. However, she is equally clear that these perspectives have significantly revised what had earlier been the distinctive signature of geography's contributions to cultural analysis: that is, the influence of space and place on the distribution and organization of human meaning systems and practices. The influence of structuralist and post-structuralist linguistics decisively shifted approaches to these questions by effecting what Anderson characterizes as a 'move from a positivist understanding of space as a "surface" on which people, events and so on are distributed and arranged, to a notion of space as relational and co-constitutive of social process' (00). Anderson then asks what light this perspective throws on the history of earlier geographical understandings of the relations between space, place and human cultures. Adopting a posthumanist perspective derived from contemporary feminist thought and the related challenge to essentialist conceptions of the nature/human divide emerging from the work of Bruno Latour, she reviews the ways in which earlier Enlightenment and evolutionary conceptions of the geographical relations between space, place and culture equated the essence of humanness with distance from nature. In assessing the consequences of such conceptions for indigenous peoples who, throughout the history of colonialism, were seen as closer to nature and therefore less human than their

colonizers, Anderson also shows how colonial encounters with indigenous peoples – and with Australian aborigines in particular – often unsettled the logic of such humanist ontologies.

Valerie Walkerdine and Lisa Blackman also remind us that, at first, psychology too was closely related to the cultural sciences. However, the emerging dominance of Anglo-American psychology in the early twentieth century, its commitment to an experimentally derived cognitive universalism, and the parallel parting of the ways between psychology and psychoanalysis saw an end to this until the 1960s, when the disciplinary hegemony of such conceptions was challenged from a variety of quarters. In reviewing these challenges and placing them in their appropriate political and theoretical contexts, Walkerdine and Blackman's main concern is to trace the various attempts to develop discursive, narrative, social and cultural psychologies, and to consider the influence of all of these on the development of critical psychology. Focusing initially on cultural and narrative psychology, they show how perspectives derived from Soviet linguistics were translated into programmes of research by Michael Cole, Sylvia Scribner and others that incorporated a cultural perspective into American psychology. They then turn their attention to the parallel development of social psychology in Britain. This sets the scene for an analysis of the more general international currency of the linguistic and discursive turns in psychology and, in the context of these, the influence of the Althusserian and Lacanian approaches to subjectivity in reformulating the concerns of Freudian psychoanalysis. In considering the influence of the Foucaultian school of discourse psychology and the psycho-social approach to the understanding of subjectivity, Walkerdine and Blackman conclude by outlining those directions in current research which they believe offer a route beyond the social/psychic dualisms that have reflected a continuing failure to satisfactorily integrate the social and the psychological mechanisms of subject formation.

Tony Bennett considers the relations between sociology and culture from three perspectives. The first of these focuses on sociological analyses of those practices and institutions which comprise culture as a distinctive level, field or subsystem of society: literary, musical and artistic institutions and texts, and the media and entertainment complexes comprising the culture industries. In reviewing these traditions of work, Bennett outlines the different ways in which sociologists have sought to explain social and historical variations in literary and artistic forms and practices, focusing particularly on sociological accounts of such genres as tragedy and the novel. He then considers the consequences of the ways in which literary and artistic forms are classified and organized into cultural hierarchies, and moves on to review different sociological accounts of the development of distinctive literary and artistic fields or systems, and of the nature and value of aesthetic experience. Bennett's second main concern is with the role that the analysis of culture, understood as particular sets of beliefs and values, has played in the more general theoretical and political concerns of sociology. He illustrates this by considering the role of such conceptions in the work of Emile Durkheim through to contemporary sociological constructions of 'social problems' in the literature focused on the roles of social or civic capital in securing social inclusion or social solidarity. Finally, Bennett reviews a range of different accounts of the role of culture in constructing the social that derive from different interpretations of the 'cultural turn'. His discussion here encompasses Stuart Hall's account of 'new ethnicities', Foucaultian accounts of discourses and their role – in the context of governmentality theory – in ordering the social, Pierre Bourdieu's sociology, and Bruno Latour's approach to the social.

In his account of cultural history, Peter Burke argues that while the concept – in the Germanic notion of *Kulturgeschichte* – is over two hundred years old, it is only in the context of the cultural turn that cultural history has assumed a recognisable intellectual profile

and influence alongside economic, social and political history. And it is only since the 1990s that it has achieved significant institutional form as reflected in the titles of journals, academic positions and programmes. It is, though, Burke suggests, a term that sometimes disguises as much as it reveals if account is not also taken of the significantly different meanings and uses of the concept of culture that it encompasses. He distinguishes three main understandings of culture, each of which has quite different implications for the project of a cultural history. According to the first, culture is interpreted as a synonym for the arts, with the tasks of cultural history accordingly being defined as being concerned with the development and functioning of specific artistic practices and institutions and, sometimes, the respects in which the relationships between these add up to a more encompassing account of the history of high culture. The second inverts the structure of attention associated with this conception to focus on popular cultural practices, and in particular the ways in which these have been shaped in opposition to the field of high culture. The third tradition adopts a more anthropological perspective to focus on the role of cultural practices in everyday life, no matter whether 'high' or 'low'. In examining these different traditions, Burke considers the relationships between cultural history and parallel tendencies in neighbouring disciplines – sociology, anthropology, cultural studies and cultural geography, for example – and reviews some of the key conceptual and methodological problems that the project of a cultural history needs to address.

The focus of James English's account of literary studies is 'to trace the longstanding connection between literary form and institutional form, between scholars' concern with the formal particulars of "literature itself" and their collective, ongoing struggle for recognition and security in the modern university' (00). No matter what phase of its history is considered, he argues, the contention that the defining characteristic of literary studies consists in its capacity to analyse the formal organization and operations of literary texts

has been central to its claims to distinctive forms of academic legitimacy and authority. Exactly how such claims have been pitched, however, and the consequences that have followed from this, have varied significantly depending on how the relationships between literary studies and other disciplines have been organized in different historical moments, national settings and institutional contexts. It is on the shifting contours of what has been at stake in literary studies' commitments to the analysis of form that English focuses his attention. This ranges across the influence of the programmes of formal analysis proposed by the Russian Formalists, Practical Criticism and the New Criticism and the reaction against these by the moral and communitarian forms of criticism associated with the Arnold-Leavis-Williams tradition – which nonetheless remained deeply affected by a formalist impulse – through to moments of Theory in American literary criticism. It is also, English suggests, the continuing influence of formalist principles of textual analysis on the methods of cultural studies that explain why cultural studies, while imaginarily opposing itself to literary studies, has in fact served as the vehicle through which the reach of formalist techniques of analysis has been expanded beyond the narrow confines of the literary canon to encompass all cultural practices.

A concern with aesthetic form and its analysis has been equally strong in the history of Western musicology, albeit that its influence has been challenged by the development of new forms of socio-musical analysis that have significantly expanded the repertoire of methods that the study of musical practices can now draw on. To trace the paths and the logics of these transformations is the task that Tia DeNora sets herself in her account of the relations between cultural and musical analysis. Her starting point is with the high/low music distinctions of the modern Western musical system. Taking a leaf out of Pierre Bourdieu's accounts of the autonomization of art and literature in the course of the nineteenth century, DeNora examines the related processes through which a composer-centred musical canon was differentiated from

other musical forms. A failure to take adequate account of the relativity of this musical system is, for DeNora, one of the main shortcomings of Theodor Adorno's otherwise exemplary – and, for twentieth-century musicology, absolutely indispensable – contributions to musical theory. But it is, DeNora notes, echoing some of the points made by James English in his discussion of literary studies, a contribution focused largely on the analysis of musical forms. In approaching these as capable of generating distinctive cognitive effects with specific political consequences that might be read off from their formal properties alone, DeNora argues, Adorno's work did not adequately question some of the founding assumptions of the composer-centrism of the modern Western musical system. Her concerns in the rest of the chapter consequently focus on a broadened set of approaches to the analysis of the socio-cultural aspects of musical practices. She looks first at the new cultural musicology, exploring both the strengths and some of the weaknesses associated with its understanding of texts as social representations. Her final concern is with music as a technology of social action and the role it plays in providing a resource for the everyday performance and embodied enactment of social relations.

Mieke Bal takes Rembrandt's *Judith Beheading Holofernes* as her point of entry into her discussion of the topic of visual analysis (or, more fully, of visual culture studies). By contrasting an art-historical reading of this painting, a reading concerned with rediscovering an original and canonical meaning, and a more visual meaning, one that responds to the painting without trying to convert it into a series of art-historical clues, Bal maps out the territory of visual analysis as a distinctive set of concerns that has developed along three paths: an internal critique of art history, the 'visual turn' evident in the development of visual sociology and visual anthropology, and the democratic extension of the visual as a field of study outside the narrow confines of the arts to include everyday practices and performances. She is adamant, however, that the object of visual culture studies is not to be confused with visual

culture understood, in its most obvious sense, as the field of visual images and objects. While including these, Bal argues the case for a more extended field of study that will encompass the ways in which different scopic and visual regimes organize particular forms of visibility and draw objects, images and persons into them. The inclusion of distinctive forms of visibility – different ways of performing the act of seeing – and their organization in the context of different historical configurations of the relations between the senses is an equally significant component of an adequately theorized conception of the remit of visual culture studies. Having defined the field of study in these ways, Bal proposes a set of principles for analysing the role of the visual in social life.

Tom Gunning's account of film studies is, in some respects, at odds with Bal's advocacy of the virtues of a visual culture studies paradigm. While in no way wanting to separate off film from other visual media or to deny the significance of the ways in which, historically and in the present, film is significantly shaped by its ecological struggles with other media, Gunning argues that the absorption of film studies into the more general concerns of media or visual culture studies comes at too high a price: that of neglecting the specificity of film. This is not, though, a case of special pleading for film and film studies as somehow unique in this regard. To the contrary, Gunning argues, it is necessary, when studying visual media, to recognize the specificity of each medium – the specificity of its aesthetic, technical and industrial forms, the specific organization of its relations to other media, and the specific histories of its uses and reception. Nor is his argument one in favour of a purely formal concern with film. While acknowledging the importance of Classical Film Theory, and the work of Bordwell and Thompson in particular, for the enormous contribution of its approach to film as language, Gunning argues the need for a broader approach, one which, focused on the analysis of the heterogeneous array of activities which comprise what he calls 'film practices', stresses not the 'division between

texts and context, between the aesthetic and the social, the ideological and the cultural – but rather a continuous process of exchange and interaction which explains the power of film (or cinema) as a cultural force' (00).

For Toby Miller, too, the study of broadcasting necessarily encompasses not just the practices of broadcasting institutions, their distinctive textual regimes, their technical infrastructures and industrial organization, but their uses, the modes of their regulation, and the more general social discourses in which their roles are debated and contested. Dividing the study of broadcasting media into three broad traditions of work focused on the political economy of their ownership, organization and control, their textual regimes, and their influence on or uses by their audiences, Miller discusses how these have been differently applied in relation to radio and television. Common to both, however, has been a concern with the (usually deleterious) effects that broadcast media, in one moral panic after another, are supposed to have had on their audiences. Miller therefore reviews in some detail the different ways in which media effects have been theorized and operationalized in programmes of research. Focusing initially on the 'domestic effects model' in its concern with the media as forces that can shape the activities and identities of citizen-consumers, he then turns his attention to the 'global effects model' centred on the role of the media in either subverting or maintaining distinctive national cultures in the context of global media flows. Miller is also concerned with the forms of cultural analysis that are conducted within and by broadcasting institutions themselves, usually as aspects of their marketing strategies, and throws valuable light on the role that this has played, particularly in the USA, in the development of new forms of faith-based audience segmentation. In concluding, Miller draws on the varied repertoire of the different forms of cultural analysis reviewed earlier in the chapter for the light they collectively throw on TV weather programming as a case-study that illustrates broadcasting's continuing centrality in spite

of widespread predictions of its impending demise.

In the first of the contributions focused on interdisciplinary traditions of cultural analysis, Ien Ang argues that cultural studies has played a significant catalytic role in placing questions concerning the relations between culture, politics and the social on the agendas of a wide range of humanities and social science disciplines. This has, however, been accompanied by significant disputes and tensions within cultural studies as to what exactly it is or should aspire to be. Rather than taking sides between such contending views Ang seeks to distil from them what they share and, taking her bearings from this, to offer an assessment of where cultural studies currently stands and what it still has to offer in a context in which many of its original arguments have become more widely shared. She bases this assessment on a thumbnail sketch of the historical development of cultural studies. While stressing that cultural studies has always been a transnational critical discourse and, as such, not one that can be accorded an origin in any particular national context, she argues that the work of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham has nonetheless played the role of an exemplary harbinger for cultural studies – instantiating and developing its concerns in ways that have greatly facilitated its parallel development in other national contexts. This is followed by a discussion of the distinctive moral and political registers of the 'culture and society' tradition in British cultural studies, and of the later, more dispersed understanding of culture associated with the revisions within cultural studies prompted by its relationships to postmodernism. After reviewing the multiplication of the sites of political struggle that cultural studies has become engaged in since its original class-centrism, Ang draws on complexity theory to argue that an engagement with cultural complexity entails that the business of cultural studies will always be unfinished and, as a consequence, not susceptible to neat or tidy definitions.

Griselda Pollock, in seeking to unravel the intricate set of connections between feminism

as always both a social movement and an intellectual practice, is similarly alert to the open-ended and necessarily unfinished forms of cultural analysis that have been developed in association with feminist projects. She is alert, too, to the ways in which feminist cultural analysis has been affected by its relations to the changing dynamics of feminist struggles centred on questions of gender and sexuality and by the ways in which these have been connected to questions of class and race, particularly in the context of postcolonial struggles. Her point of entry into these questions is to consider how the question 'What is woman?' has been answered in different traditions of feminist thought. Beginning with the terms in which Simone de Beauvoir first posed and answered this question, Pollock reviews the different terms in which the question has since been engaged with by Julia Kristeva, Judith Butler and Monique Wittig. This account teases out significant differences in the ways in which cultural factors have been invoked in feminist accounts of sexed and gendered differences and sets the scene for a more detailed account of the ways in which feminism has been shaped by, and in turn helped to shape, a range of different traditions of post-war cultural analysis. The relationships between feminist cultural analysis and psychoanalytic theory and practice; the significance of critical work on the nature/culture divide by Donna Haraway and others for the agendas of 'cyborg feminism'; feminism's critical engagement with structuralism, particularly as represented by the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss; the influence of post-structuralist thought, particularly of Michel Foucault's work on sexuality; and the influence of Foucault's concern with technologies of the self on Theresa de Lauretis's approach to technologies of gender: these are among the traditions of engaged feminist analysis that Pollock's account encompasses. In concluding, she reviews the implications of these traditions of work for the process of working toward a social ordering of sexuality and difference that will displace the formations of phallogocentric masculinity.

While disciplines such as architecture and archaeology have been concerned with the study of material culture, understood, in Daniel Miller's pithy summary, as 'objects created by us' (00), material culture studies is a much more recent development. Its contemporary formation, Miller argues, can partly be explained in terms of the realignments between these disciplines and others, most notably anthropology, that share a concern with the role of humanly produced material phenomena in social life. However, he also suggests that the lateness of the arrival of material culture studies and, related to this, its failure to engage fully with the materiality of its objects of study have reflected a deep bias against materiality on the part of Western religious and secular cosmologies, in which the central purposes of human existence are defined in opposition to the merely material world. One of Miller's purposes is therefore to review those aspects of the major world religions, particularly Christianity, that have impeded a theoretically frank and open engagement with materiality. In doing so he shows how this anti-material bias has significantly affected the intellectual trajectories of disciplines such as anthropology and archaeology by bending these away, for large parts of the twentieth century, from the strong concern with material things that had characterized their work in the nineteenth century. According some importance to the role played by the revived interest in Marxist thought in the 1960s and 1970s in placing questions of matter and materialism back onto the intellectual agendas of the humanities and social sciences, Miller then traces the contours of two different approaches to the role of things in social life. In one tradition – exemplified by the work of Bruno Latour's approach to actor networks, Marilyn Strathern's account of personhood, and Alfred Gell's anthropology of art – attention focuses on identifying the independent agency that is exerted by things in particular contexts and situations. In the second – Miller calls it the dialectical tradition, which he traces to Hegel and, in the present, associates with Pierre Bourdieu's work – the object world is

an externalization of human creativity and, as such, is then appropriated in practices of human self-creation. In giving reasons for favouring this tradition, Miller proceeds to show how different aspects of the two traditions inform current work in material culture studies by reviewing current research on housing, clothing and new media.

In the final chapter Andrew Pickering articulates a set of concerns that resonate very strongly with those discussed by Kay Anderson. Addressing the relevance of recent developments in science studies (defined by the work of scholars such as Karen Knorr Cetina) and technoscience (exemplified by figures such as Donna Haraway and Bruno Latour) to the development of new forms of cultural analysis, he is additionally concerned to situate these within a posthumanist ontology of the social. The implications of this last step are, as Pickering frankly acknowledges, radically unsettling for the assumptions underlying many of the ways in which the relations between culture and the social have hitherto been represented in Western social and cultural theory. The 'key features of "culture" as it appears in posthumanist science studies', he argues, are that it should be conceptualized 'as visible; as visibly multiple and heterogeneous (material, conceptual, social); as having no outside (in the sense of base/superstructure models; there is nothing basic that explains culture); as a decentred field of symmetric encounter of multiple agencies (including, importantly, that of the material world itself); as having no pre-given boundaries (the question of units

of analysis); and as evolving open-endedly and emergently in time' (00). In fleshing out what such a programme for cultural analysis might look like, Pickering reviews the history of the relations between science studies and technoscience on the one hand and earlier work in the 'sociology of knowledge' tradition on the other. He then shows how the reformulations of the concerns of the latter by the former have been generalized to other areas of work through the new terms for the analysis of cultural practices, human-animal relations, the environment and politics that they propose.

It is difficult, when surveying these commanding reviews of such a wide and varied body of work, not to be impressed by the sheer scope and diversity of the methods of analysis that are now available for probing the organization of cultural practices and their relations to social processes. It is also not difficult to see how far some of the new theoretical logics that are in play in these debates unsettle, and often quite radically so, the founding assumptions of the forms of cultural analysis developed during the latter half of the last century. It is too early to assess how enduring the influence of these new modes of reasoning will prove to be. From all the indications of the approaches reviewed here, however, questions concerning the definition of culture and the appropriate methods for its analysis seem likely to be just as centrally implicated in the key theoretical and methodological controversies of the twenty-first century as they have been over the past fifty years.

Anthropology and Culture

Eric Gable and Richard Handler

Concerned, as were many of the early 'Boasian' anthropologists, to comment on a distinction between the objects of 'historical science' and 'natural science' that Franz Boas (1887) deemed crucial, Alfred Kroeber once wrote, 'the tree of life is eternally branching, and never doing anything fundamental but branching, except for the dying-away of branches. The tree of human history, on the contrary, is constantly branching and at the same time having its branches grow together again' (1943: p. 86). Kroeber's metaphor of entanglement can serve well enough for the history of anthropology, and of the culture concept in relationship to the discipline. But to untangle the strands of such intellectual and institutional histories, we should remember that the history of the culture concept is not the same thing as the history of anthropology. Indeed, in one of the seminal papers that led to the recognition of 'history of anthropology' as a sub-field within anthropology, the historian George Stocking (1963) disputed Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn's nomination of Edward Burnett Tylor as the apical ancestor of modern cultural anthropology. Kroeber and Kluckhohn claimed that Tylor, in 1871, had 'established' the 'modern technical

or anthropological meaning' of culture 'in English', thereby 'deliberately establishing a science by defining its subject matter' (Kroeber and Kluckhohn, 1952: pp. 9, 150). Stocking countered that Tylor's definition of culture was more Victorian and evolutionary than modern and relativistic. Following Stocking, we can conclude that whatever anthropology was in 1871, it was not dependent on the later, Boasian understanding of culture around which the twentieth-century discipline formed in North America. And we can ask what culture meant to anthropologists before Boas.

Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, anthropology came together as a discipline institutionalized in museums, universities, government bureaus, and amateur and professional societies. The story is one of branching and growing-together-again. In Stocking's overview (2001), not so different from Boas's telling a hundred years earlier (Boas, 1904), 'anthropology represents an imperfect fusion of four modes of inquiry ... including not only natural history, philology, and moral philosophy, but also antiquarianism' (Stocking, 2001: p. 308). As different schools and national traditions emphasized one or another of those

strands, anthropology in North America and Europe became a discipline more interdisciplinary than the other social sciences, one that spanned a range of approaches from the natural scientific and positivistic to the historical and hermeneutic. Its object was apparently humankind in all its biological, historical, linguistic and cultural diversity. In practice, it developed as the science of 'the people without history' (Wolf, 1982), of those people deemed unworthy by the storytellers in the other social sciences, for whom 'civilization' and 'Western' were more or less synonymous (Segal, 2001). Anthropology's 'peripheral' peoples, its objects of study, had 'dropped through the boundary spaces between the gradually separating disciplines' of the human sciences during the nineteenth century (Stocking, 2001: p. 311). Thus the 'work' of studying them fell to anthropologists only because, as Boas put it, 'no one else cares for it' (1904: p. 35; see Bunzl, 2004: p. 437).

Only in North America did anthropology develop institutionally as a single discipline that contained within itself the four 'sub-fields' of physical anthropology, archaeology, linguistics, and social or cultural anthropology – sub-fields that to some extent replicated the four modes of inquiry from natural history to philology. In Great Britain and Europe, 'social anthropology' or 'ethnology' has tended to be institutionally distinct from archaeology, linguistics, and physical anthropology and imagined as a branch (albeit an institutionally independent one) of sociology (Kuper, 1973). The culture concept has been relevant to all of anthropology's four fields, as these have developed in various national traditions over the twentieth century. But only in the North American four-field tradition did the concept come to define the discipline. Moreover, it has also distinguished North American anthropology from the British tradition of social anthropology, which more or less explicitly rejected culture as a central intellectual concept even while deploying the word as a synonym for 'society' – a way of life practiced by a people in a place (as in John Beattie's textbook, *Other Cultures* [1964]). Because our concern in this

essay will be culture in relation to North American and British (and, to a lesser extent, European) anthropological studies of society and culture, we will consider the social or cultural anthropology of both regional traditions, including the central role that culture has played in what one of the few major scholars who was able to appeal simultaneously to both traditions, Gregory Bateson, might have called their schismogenic relationship (Bateson, 1936).

The study of culture and society within anthropology – which we can call socio-cultural anthropology when we wish to elide the differences between the North American and British traditions – combines two intellectual traditions in the human sciences broadly conceived. One tradition (most strongly reflected in British and French social anthropology) emerged out of classical European sociology. Here the emphasis was on the grand-theory dichotomy between primitive or traditional society and modern or capitalist society, a pressing issue in the context both of the demise of feudalism and the rise of democracy and capitalism in Europe, and of the contemporaneous European colonization of Africa and Asia. Anthropologists working within this tradition have, in some instances, confirmed or exaggerated the difference between 'the West and the rest' (for example, by positing diametrically opposed value systems in gift versus commodity societies). In some instances, anthropologists inverted difference in order to make sense of the societies they encountered (by mediating in ironic ways [e.g., Dumont, 1970] the contrast Durkheim [1893] drew between 'mechanical' [egalitarian, undifferentiated] solidarity in primitive societies, as opposed to the 'organic' solidarity generated by Western societies' hierarchical and complex division of labor). Or they have tended to erase difference by stressing the degree to which human motivations and interests are everywhere the same, albeit expressed through locally distinctive cultural practices (arguing, for example, that magic and ritual satisfy basic human needs or reflect similar tendencies for humans toward rationality).

Much of social anthropology has used either the erasures or the exaggerations of the dichotomizing tradition to enact what is now known as 'cultural critique', usually directed at Western arrogance or complacency. A typical narrative tactic in this kind of critical social anthropology is to treat what used to be considered as the most lurid and disturbing of so-called primitive or traditional cultural practices – such as witchcraft – as symptoms of the malaise of modernity itself (e.g., Gluckman, 1963; cf. 1995, 2002). As a rule, anthropologists working within the sociological tradition tended toward a science of society – an effort to discover, for example, 'general principles of political manoeuvre which transcend cultures and which could be the tools of research in a variety of different cultures' (Bailey, 1969: p. xiii). In all cases, grand-theory dichotomies drove and shaped what anthropologists call ethnography – the written product of research in a particular place among a particular group of people.

Another tradition emerged out of romantic-era European theorizing in political philosophy and cultural history about the nation and the Volk (Kuper, 1999). Carried to North America by Boas, it blossomed as American cultural anthropology in the context of the development of the USA as a pluralist, yet often racist, nation of emigrants and the descendents of slaves along with an enduring population of indigenous tribal peoples. Such theorizing had an ironic relationship to essentializing theories of human difference based on biology – or 'race' – in that the positing of national or cultural difference could serve, on the one hand, as a critique of racialism and, on the other hand, as a replacement for it (Evans, 2006). Here the emphasis was on the plurality of cultural features that could define a people as a people. For Boasian anthropologists, influenced not only by Herderian romanticism but also by European philological studies, language was often seen as the essential component (or, at least, the *primus inter pares*) of cultural identity (Hymes, 1970). Hence their early interest in myths and folk-taxonomies, and their efforts to understand

and document indigenous artists as producers of the primitive equivalents of literature – of 'texts'.

Socio-cultural anthropologists today (whether in Britain, the USA or elsewhere) tend to combine (sometimes unconsciously) elements from both the culturalist and the sociological traditions in their efforts to explain, as coherent or systematic, a particular group of people acting and talking in a particular place. This reflects both the fact that since the 1930s, anthropologists trained in Britain became key players in the development of university departments of anthropology in North America, and a certain trans-Atlantic confluence of theorizing about the cultural. Especially salient here have been the ways that Anglophone anthropologists have borrowed from and critiqued French anthropologists and scholars in other disciplines (e.g., Durkheim, Mauss, Lévi-Strauss, Dumont, Bourdieu and Foucault). Currently the best anthropologists tend to disrupt old paradigms precisely as they call into question assumptions of social or cultural coherence. Anthropologists do so as they attempt to reintroduce historical contingencies into their ethnographies, or as they try to re-center the stories they tell around individual actors who are often resistant to, or creating against, what these actors see as dominant ideologies or practices. As anthropologists do so, however, they are also always looking over their shoulders to evaluate whether they are importing into their descriptions of history or of the person notions of agency and causality that are the outgrowths of their own cultural traditions. The best modern socio-cultural anthropology has become, in short, doubly reflexive or skeptical. On the one hand, anthropologists are leery of the power of culture to permeate their analyses such that they 're-naturalize' their own presuppositions in what they write about others. On the other hand, anthropologists worry at their tendency to exaggerate pattern, difference, or coherence at the expense of understanding particular people at particular moments in time.

ANTHROPOLOGY, CULTURE AND RACE

The history of the culture concept and the history of modern anthropology came together in the Boasian critique of Tylorian (Victorian) anthropology. Boas transplanted an orientation to culture drawn from nineteenth-century German romanticism and historicism to North America (Bunzl, 1996). From there, he set about systematically demolishing the Victorian anthropological synthesis, grounded in notions of inevitable civilizational progress and universal human rationality, both often crosscut by theories of racial hierarchy.

The Germanic version of culture was part of a longer, Continental tradition of speculation about human development and progress, a tradition of thought Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) meticulously documented. At issue in that centuries-long discussion was collective human progress in both the material and spiritual domains, with culture and civilization (and, later, race) being the key terms. From some points of view, human history was a story of 'progress', as mastery of nature increased, as social arrangements became more rational, or more in accord with a transcendent moral order, and as hard-won wisdom accumulated for all humankind. For other thinkers, the agents of human history were individuated peoples, and history itself consisted of local progressions and retrogressions. Retrogression, or degeneration, could be imagined either in terms of the Biblical narrative of a fall from divine perfection, or secularly and episodically, that is, lacking an overall direction, with local advances followed by local degenerations. From either perspective, progress could be imagined for all domains of human experience, or in some but not others; thus, writers might assert that progress in the material domain was, or was not, matched by progress in the spiritual or moral domain. Civilization and culture were often the terms used to distinguish the material and the spiritual, although culture in one writer's system might be analogous to civilization in another's.

Thus, for example, Matthew Arnold thought civilization (the civilization of steel and railroads) had advanced in the England of the industrial revolution, but culture (inward cultivation, 'sweetness and light') had declined (Arnold, 1868). Tylor, then, set out to prove that humanity had progressed in the moral as well as the material realm; hence, his overriding concern with 'primitive religion' in the past and 'superstition' in the present, both doomed, he thought, in the face of the inevitable progress of civilization, or culture (for him, those terms were synonymous; see Stocking, 1963: p. 73).

Both Tylor and Boas had to define culture in relationship not only to civilization, but also to race. By the late nineteenth century, race had become another keyword in Western understandings of human diversity. Its conceptual history is as tangled as that of culture. As Stocking put it, the term brought together 'the residues' of several traditions of thought – 'the ethnological, the Lamarckian, the polygenist, and the evolutionist' (2001: p. 9). Race was often synonymous with nation, tribe or breed. And culture (or way of life, mentality, tradition, etc.) was often imagined to be carried 'in the blood' of racial-national groupings. Lamarckian ideas made it possible to imagine that such racial-national groups were trans-historical entities with fixed socio-geographic boundaries, but open nonetheless to the impress of history and environment, the forces of which were over time absorbed into and carried in the blood of the people.

Tylor believed in the psychic unity of mankind. Human difference was to be explained not by race, but by the 'different grades of civilization' through which humankind progressed, more or less unidirectionally (Tylor, 1871: p. 7). For Tylor, the human mind and human rationality were essentially the same everywhere, but in primitive cultural stages, people did not have access to accumulated knowledge. Their minds worked in rational fashion, but, 'in a mental condition of intense and inveterate ignorance', their progress was slow (1871: p. 23). Nonetheless, most social-evolutionary anthropologies were easily racialized, as the

stages of cultural development (e.g., savagery, barbarism, civilization) could be explained as a function of collective biological differences.

Boas and his students articulated a nurture-over-nature position that by the mid-twentieth century had become dominant in the Anglo-American academy (although scientific racism has never been laid to rest and reasserts itself with regularity). From the 1880s through the 1920s, Boas attacked the notions that 'race, language, and culture' (the title of his 1940 collection of essays) moved together through history; that it was possible to establish a hierarchy of racial achievement based on an absolute standard; and that biological race determined mental or cultural capacity. In a striking historical irony, this anti-racist anthropology, borrowed from the German historical tradition of Herder and the brothers Humboldt, flourished in its transplanted, North American version, while it languished in Germany. As Proctor (1988) and Bunzl and Penny (2003) have shown, mid-nineteenth-century German anthropology was cosmopolitan and anti-racist; it emphasized the variety of world cultures, conceived to be local developments each one of which constituted a contribution to the full story of human civilization. Yet by the turn of the twentieth century, just as Boas was drawing together the threads of his attack on racist evolutionism, German anthropology, and German society, veered rightward toward increasingly racist explanations of human difference. Indeed, the judgement of contemporary German historians of anthropology seems to be that the discipline never recovered in that country (Gingrich, 2005).

But in North America, Boas tirelessly propagated the anti-racist position, from one social crisis (such as American anti-immigration hysteria after World War I) to another (the rise of Nazism in the 1930s). Again and again, Boas pointed out that throughout history, people of one physical 'type' had taken on (either through borrowing or imposition) the language or culture of another; and that two groups might share a language but differ in culture, or vice versa. It was also possible to show that culture and

language changed at different rates than racial type (which Boas considered more 'stable' than the other two, although he showed, in his important study of immigrant head form in New York City [1911a], that type, too, changed with changing social circumstances). Indeed, Boas argued that there had *never* been an original moment when race, language and culture coincided (1911b: p. 136). Empirically grounded, inductive history, then, gave the lie to the social evolutionists' deductive scheme of uniform stages of human development, in which race, language and culture marched in lockstep, such that a primitive race by definition was possessed of a primitive language and a primitive culture.

But it was not only the uniform directionality of the social evolutionary notion of development that was at issue. Boas mistrusted, and over time decisively refuted, the assumption that it was possible to establish an absolute standard by which to measure the degree of culture of different human groups. This was perhaps most easily shown in language, where the categorical features of linguistic structure (and, ultimately, of thought itself) were least available to native speakers for conscious scrutiny. Social evolutionists presumed they knew what a primitive language was: for example, a primitive language had a primitive sound system, so primitive, in fact, that the sounds were not fixed. In an early essay that Stocking (1965: pp. 157–160) considered seminal for all Boasian anthropology, 'On Alternating Sounds' (Boas, 1889), Boas showed that alternating sounds were a function of the observer's misperceptions. Unfamiliar with the phonemic systems of the languages they were studying, observers heard sounds now one way, now another, with the alternatives related to the phonemics of their own, native language. In reality, all languages had a fixed system of sounds, and each such system was fully adequate to the work of expressing the culture and thought of its speakers.

What was true of sound patterns was true of grammar, syntax and semantics. Boasian linguistic anthropology, developed to an exquisite art by Boas's great student,

Edward Sapir, and Sapir's protégé, Benjamin Lee Whorf, rested ultimately on the notion that language was by definition a system of abstractions, of categories, that made it possible for a finite human mind to make sense out of an infinitely complex natural world. Boas himself was somewhat timid in his treatment of the capacity of 'primitive' peoples to develop abstract thought. If the Indians he studied on the Northwest Coast of North America did not have words for the philosophical abstractions of Western cultures, it was not because their mental (racial) capacities or their languages were inferior to those of Europeans; the Indians simply didn't have use for such concepts in their daily life (Boas, 1911b: pp. 148–153). It was left to Sapir and Whorf to state the matter more boldly: all languages are logical, or deductive, systems, each equally arbitrary from the point of view of all others (Sapir, 1921; Whorf, 1956). And human thought, grounded by necessity in language, was *always* 'abstract' (that is, not merely reflecting the world, but structuring it, editing it, categorically).

The arbitrariness of one set of grammatical categories from the point of view of another became a metaphor for Boasian cultural relativism. Indeed, Boas phrased his critique of the social-evolutionary synthesis in similar terms: 'attempts to classify mankind, based on the present distribution of type, language, and culture, must lead to different results, according to the point of view taken' (1911b: p. 133). More generally, in Boas's conception of a 'historical science', the object of study (a culture or a historical epoch), 'originat[ed] in the mind of the observer', not in the natural world (1887: p. 642). From the infinite complexity of human history, anthropologists (and historians) abstracted their objects of study, based not only on the empirical facts available, but also on their own culturally (and personally) grounded viewpoints and interests. Studying culture, then, was a matter of establishing interpretive relationships between anthropologists and the peoples of interest to the discipline.

Boas himself never abandoned his nineteenth-century notion of scientific truth, but the possibility of establishing such truths (perhaps in the form of general laws of mind) receded as he pursued his particularistic studies of Northwest Coast (and other) cultures. As Stocking has noted (1974b: p. 17), it was left to Boas's students to develop the full implications of his anthropology, and, on the epistemological issue of the relativity of scientific knowledge, it was Sapir who did so most incisively: 'Now fantasied universes of self-contained meaning are the very finest and noblest substitutes we can ever devise for that precise and loving insight into the nooks and crannies of the real that must be forever denied us' (1939: p. 581). Other Boasians, however, favored other combinations of models and truths, and other ideas about anthropology's status as a science.

Ruth Benedict's *Patterns of Culture* (1934) is the most important (and widely read) statement of Boasian cultural anthropology, presenting the discipline as an authoritative science equipped not only to discern, describe and interpret cultures, but also to make suggestions to improve them. Benedict relied on vision metaphors: culture is a lens through which people see the world. The lens structures their vision, but they cannot themselves see the lens or analyze its formula: 'No man ever looks at the world with pristine eyes. He sees it edited by a definite set of customs and institutions and ways of thinking. Even in his philosophical probings he cannot go behind these stereotypes; his very concepts of the true and the false will still have reference to his particular traditional customs' (1934: p. 2; see also Benedict, 1946: p. 14). In each culture, customs and institutions fall into 'patterns'. Over time, cultures tend to 'integrate' themselves in terms of a few key values, values which, then, come to inflect all aspects of the culture, even those borrowed from other peoples, for whom that material might have a very different meaning than it would come to have when integrated into the borrowers' culture. And as cultural materials and 'traits' become integrated into a culture, a way of life, they

become invisible to the people who make habitual use of them. Indeed, people rarely have the ability rationally to scrutinize their culture; rather, when challenged, they provide rationalizations to defend their practices, as Benedict noted in remarks on the absurdity of war: 'War in our own civilization is as good an illustration as one can take of the destructive lengths to which the development of a culturally selected trait may go. If we justify war, it is because all peoples always justify the traits of which they find themselves possessed, not because war will bear an objective examination of its merits' (1934: p. 32).

Benedict's sally against Western violence is a fundamental feature of her anthropology; it complements, and even undercuts, the rhetoric of objective scientific authority she elsewhere establishes (Handler, 2005: ch. 5). As a scientist, she claimed to be able to describe the pattern of a culture, as if that culture were an object available naturally to scientific inspection. Yet Benedict was also a moralist (see Geertz, 1988: pp. 102–128), and sometimes in her work the voice of the engaged, even partisan, moralist clashes with the calmer tone of the detached scientist. The word 'pattern' could be bent to either purpose. As Stocking suggested (1976: p. 22), that word implies a less rigid, more open-ended form of organization than the word structure, the preferred term among both British and French social anthropologists of the period. Indeed, 'weaving' metaphors were as central as vision metaphors to the Boasians. Terms such as pattern, weaving and warp and woof facilitated their discussion of cultures as historically active organizations. Cultures, as Boasians such as Benedict construed them, were animated by an organizing energy, the drive to 'integrate' the multiplicity of a people's experiences into a coherent way of life. But cultures might also fail to integrate aspects of collective experience, or fail, even, to cohere over time as 'a' culture (Benedict, 1934: pp. 223–226). And just as saliently, cultures might transform themselves for the better. Boasians were especially eager to stress that because cultures

were historically open-ended organizations, individuals might change them through their creative efforts. In particular, Benedict and her equally famous protégé Margaret Mead were cultural pluralists who wished to make room for the marginalized within what now is called the mainstream – for racial and ethnic minorities, and for the sexually deviant. By writing about other cultures and other patterns of the normal and the deviant, and by making cultural otherness a popular topic, Boasians hoped to make Americans more tolerant and America a more capacious cultural place.

ANTHROPOLOGY AND FIELDWORK

In order to capture and catalogue the range of human diversity, both American cultural and British social anthropology developed strong fieldwork traditions along the lines of natural history. Fieldwork initially drew on an older practice of scientific expeditions (team fieldwork), as in the polar research projects so popular at the end of the nineteenth century (one of which took Boas to the Eskimo; Cole, 1999: pp. 63–82) or the Torres Straits expedition of 1898–1899 (Stocking, 1983). But by the 1930s the ideal became to replicate what later was to be recognized as the myth of Bronislaw Malinowski's lone anthropologist-hero exploring the heart of darkness (Kuper, 1973). Malinowski spent years in the Trobriands living with his subjects (as did Boas in the 1890s on the Northwest coast of North America). In what quickly became one of the canonical works of anthropology, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, Malinowski set out the basic methods of anthropological research. 'The ethnographer's magic' entailed combining good theory with living 'without other white men right among the natives' (1922: p. 6). The goal of such fieldwork was to transform 'a strange, sometimes unpleasant, sometimes intensely interesting adventure' into something more mundane and familiar. To do this the anthropologist had not only to learn the local vernacular and eschew scheduled interviews in favor of spontaneous

conversations, but also to take advantage of serendipitous events: 'it must be emphasized that whenever anything dramatic or important occurs it is essential to investigate it at the very moment of happening' (1922: p. 8). Like animal ethologists, the anthropologist's goal was to carry out research in the natural habitat of his subjects; but because his subjects were human, the anthropologist also had to understand their habitat from what Malinowski called 'the native's point of view' (1922: p. 25). Hence the invention of what later came to be known as the method of 'participant-observation', or later still and more critically, as the rhetorical evocation of the authority of 'being there' or 'I witnessing'.

If fieldwork entailed an effort to 'enter into the soul of the savage' to see the world 'through his eyes', Malinowski stressed that such an awareness of basic cultural difference would allow us (that is, Westerners) 'to understand our own nature and make it finer, intellectually and artistically' (1922: p. 518). Indeed, early 'being there' ethnographic accounts filled an important and long-standing role in what might be called the politics of culture in the West, by providing nuanced accounts of the 'savage slot' (Trouillot, 1991). Untouched or undistorted by civilization, 'savage' or 'primitive' people were assumed to be closer to a state of nature and therefore paradigmatic of human nature. Arguing that savages had a culture, and that 'every human culture gives its members a definite vision of the world, a definite zest of life', Malinowski used Trobriander material to debunk generalizing theories of human nature and to assert or imply a basic human pluralism. Thus, for example, Malinowski attacked the universalizing excesses of Freudian psychoanalytic theory: since it is 'essentially a theory of the influence of family life on the human mind' (1927: p. 2), a culture with a family structure dramatically different from that of the West would not generate a Western-style Oedipus complex, but different neuroses, different repressions – in short, different 'psychologies'.

A decade later Margaret Mead (1935) used the authority of two years of intensive

fieldwork among three dramatically different New Guinea societies to make a similar argument about the cultural construction of core temperaments associated with gender along with core experiences of sexuality, of the body and of pleasure. Malinowski, Mead and their peers developed what has become a standard form of cultural criticism. First, fieldwork provides data showing that what was once taken to be a human universal is a cultural norm. The Oedipal complex makes sense but only among 'the overfed and nervously overwrought people of modern Vienna, London, or New York' (Malinowski, 1927: p. 15). Then a different set of cultural practices is demonstrated as leading to a different set of basic human motivations and attitudes – Arapesh women and men do not experience or seem to desire sexual 'climax' or orgasm (Mead, 1935: p. 105). The exercise should lead to the acceptance of alternative ways of being, as well as the recognition of one's implicit prejudices. Thus did Malinowski and Mead, and indeed many of the anthropologists of the discipline's formative years, anticipate and theorize about the kinds of preoccupations that would later be associated with cultural constructivism in post-structuralist philosophy. If in the work of Judith Butler, and contemporary scholars like her, the cultural Other whose perspective is used to attack the universalizing claims of a dominant perspective are homosexuals, women and racial minorities, then in Mead's and Malinowski's anthropology 'other cultures' provided the necessary ammunition.

After Malinowski, Boas, and then Mead and others, 'participant observation' became the standard for the discipline. Most anthropologists spent long periods living among their subjects. Their ethnographic accounts were often deployed, both as a rhetorical device and as data to be analyzed, to give an intersubjective sense of what it was like to be an outsider trying to gain a foothold in a strange community. Such encounters in the field with a congeries of individuals whose actions and beliefs were conventionally taken to be representative of a culture or a society became at once the method and the implicit theory of

anthropology (Wagner, 1975). Indeed, it is in the various ways that fieldwork allows for this kind of representation to occur that the notion of societies or cultures as entities in and of themselves came to be the standard view of anthropology. As Evans-Pritchard remarked, comparing his fieldwork with the hierarchical Azande and the egalitarian Nuer: 'Among Azande I was compelled to live outside the community; among Nuer I was compelled to be a member of it. Azande treated me as a superior; Nuer as an equal' (1940: p. 15). Here Evans-Pritchard's assertion of experience among each group heightens the 'reality effect' of the two 'case studies' he had created (1937, 1940) out of those experiences. For the full effect, one needs to hold in one's hand a monograph from a monograph series, perhaps Napoleon Chagnon's *Yanomamo, the Fierce People*, the best-selling of all the many titles produced in the Holt, Rinehart and Winston series, *Case Studies in Cultural Anthropology* (Chagnon, 1968). On the back covers of the books in that series, students found a list of all the other titles in the series, and thereby learned that the world is made up of discrete, bounded cultures – despite the fact that over and over again in the history of anthropology, field workers have had to admit that boundaries they assigned to the societies under study were not the boundaries that the natives themselves used.

Evans-Pritchard's juxtaposition of the 'ethos' of Nuer and Azande was a rhetorical ploy that tended to remain undeveloped in British anthropology, even as many of the most famous social anthropologists undertook fieldwork in several societies. While such juxtapositions were, for example, central to the arguments about the cultural construction of personhood that Mead made when she compared three Melanesian societies in *Sex and Temperament* (1935); and to Benedict's argument about culture as 'personality writ large' in *Patterns of Culture* (1934); and much later in Geertz's deployments of 'Bali', 'Java' and 'Morocco' to illustrate the proposition that to be human is to experience a world through the lens of a particular culture (Geertz, 1968, 1980, 1983), Evans-Pritchard did not develop

a sustained comparison of Nuer and Azande. Rather, he used ethnographic accounts of each society to comment on the stock contrast between 'primitive' and 'civilized' that was inherent in the dichotomizing tradition of classical sociology. If, for example, Nuer time was experienced as relative to social structure, to the movement of cattle and people, to the closeness or distance among kin groups (Evans-Pritchard, 1940: pp. 94–110), so too was a seemingly objective conception of time in the twentieth-century West a product of ticking clocks and the reiterated routines of the factory floor. If Azande could be skeptical about the powers of particular witch doctors but credulous about witchcraft, so too could Westerners damn this doctor or disparage that treatment while bowing to the god of medicine. By focusing on the persistence of religious practices in the face of skepticism about the efficacy of particular diviners, rites and charms, and the accuracy of particular witchcraft accusations, Evans-Pritchard's monograph explicitly blurred the boundaries between Western and African modes of thought. For him, Azande were just as suspicious of the truth claims of others, just as likely to test forms of curing empirically, as were Westerners.

By contrast, Americans, often as not, used the estrangements of the fieldwork encounter to stress fundamental cultural differences. If British anthropologists noted how similarly blinkered were Western and non-Western rationalities, Americans, for their part, stressed that people of different cultures experienced even basic perceptions (as in the case of color, for example) in radically different ways. As such, despite the practical similarities of their fieldwork traditions, American and British anthropology split (quite self-consciously) along a culture-society fault line. The British tradition defined itself as a branch of sociology and its practitioners often eschewed the word 'culture' in favor of 'society'. As sociologists of 'primitive societies', or of 'small-scale' or 'rural', or 'non-modern', or 'pre-literate', 'pre-capitalist', or 'non-Western' societies, they were always defining their terrain in

relationship to the societies of the colonizers, the modern world, capitalist society and the like. As sociologists they inherited not only the dichotomizing vision of classical sociology, but also its tendency to divide human imaginative actions into the social and the cultural, with the social defined as pertaining to interests and goals, and the human propensity to organize to obtain them, and the cultural defined as all those activities that might be lumped together under the category 'not obviously useful'. Thus, for example, marriage practices and rules or political institutions and the ideas that were implicated in them were social, while games, art, myths, beliefs in spirits and the practices such as ritual and ceremony associated with those were cultural. In general, the social took precedence over the cultural.

If, for American cultural anthropologists, the focus was on how particularly situated people comprising 'a culture' projected their imagination, through action, onto the world they made, British social anthropologists tended to be concerned with how particular forms of imagination arose out of or justified particular kinds of social order, or how imaginative forms were used to critique or subvert particular kinds of order. It was, in a word, a discipline characterized by discourses of functionalism. By looking at how people in societies subverted as much as maintained order, anthropologists such as Frederik Barth, Max Gluckman and Edmund Leach focused on people 'competing with one another to enhance their means and status, within the framework set by often conflicting rules' (Kuper, 1973: p. 177). In focusing on political activity, they and the anthropologists who followed them (e.g., Arjun Appadurai and John and Jean Comaroff) tended to be interested in the utility of the cultural. The goal became to show why such things had a political significance – why, for example, witchcraft beliefs could be read as a warped critique of the cannibalism of capitalism, or why Indian enthusiasm for cricket makes Indian nationalism as much as reflects it. As such the British tradition of anthropology – sociology, as it were, in 'out of the way

places' – continued to reflect and draw from the sociological canon, with that canon coming to include not only Durkheim and Marx, but also Foucault, Bourdieu and de Certeau.

French social theorists have had a large impact on Anglo-American anthropology. Lévi-Strauss is a crucial example, not to mention a seminal figure in anthropology and human studies more generally. Lévi-Strauss applied structuralist theories of linguistic communication to a variety of cultural practices that combine literal language with ritualized performance. He argued that kinship, for example, could be understood not merely as a way to organize persons and groups, but as a communicative system. He subsumed more sociologically oriented questions about marriage as a form of economic exchange to the exchange of signs and the production of codes. He also applied the structuralist method to studying myth and ritual, extending the project of social anthropology to the problem of human rationality. In *The Savage Mind* (1966), he argued (in a sense, *pace* Durkheim) that all human beings created structures of thought by recognizing and deploying sensory contrasts available to them in nature, and that recognizing and elaborating upon structure was a basic human desire and source of pleasure. Lévi-Strauss, like the Boasian anthropologists whose works supplied him the raw materials he used for his analyses, argued against utilitarian views of human nature. Humans created myths and rituals because symbolic contrasts, metaphor and metonymy, are 'good to think'. Neolithic humans, like modern scientists, enjoyed classifying for the pleasures it afforded. They created cultural values out of natural phenomena and mapped those values back onto nature, naturalizing them, albeit in arbitrary ways.

American anthropologists, most famously Marshal Sahlins, used Lévi-Straussian structuralism to argue against inevitable or universal categories of value, thus using structuralism to further the project of cultural constructivism inaugurated and enacted by Boas, Malinowski, Benedict, Mead and Geertz (Sahlins, 1976). Like his British

counterparts (e.g., Douglas, 1966, 1970; Leach, 1976; Needham, 1973), Sahlins was especially eager to borrow from Lévi-Strauss a method for unpacking how cultural systems of meaning could be de-coded and revealed to be social products. In *Culture and Practical Reason* (1976) and *How "Natives" Think* (1995), he uses a structuralist reading of American and Polynesian culture to mount a 'an anthropological critique of the idea that human cultures are formulated out of practical activity and, behind that, utilitarian interest' (1976: p. vii). By stressing that 'the distinctive quality of man is not that he must live in a material world, circumstances that he shares with all organisms, but that he does so according to a meaningful scheme of his own devising' (viii), Sahlins argued that culture is not 'precipitated' from 'rational activity' (vii). Rather, it is 'culture which constitutes utility' (viii). Sahlins liked Lévi-Strauss for offering a corrective to Marx – for developing a science of signs as systems to develop a 'theory of superstructures' (Lévi-Strauss, 1966: p. 130). Read anthropologically, that is, through the lens of Lévi-Strauss, Marx was redefined as a cultural anthropologist who recognized early that the West was itself a culture, and that mid-nineteenth-century appraisals of nature were 'the re-presentation of culture to itself in the form of nature' (Sahlins, 1976: p. 53). Sahlins also emphasized that such a critique of the ideological underpinnings of science is hard to demonstrate from the perspective of one society. It requires comparison. This is what cultural anthropology can provide: 'other cultures, other rationalities' (Sahlins, 1995: p. 14).

In *Culture and Practical Reason*, Sahlins offers a succinct definition of culture: 'Cultures are meaningful orders of persons and things. Since these orders are systematic, they cannot be free inventions of the mind'. Sahlins realizes that saying it does not make it so. For him, 'anthropology must consist in the discovery of the system' (1976: p. x). If there is a system, then our job is to find it and reveal its workings to others. He was also interested in how such systems of codes acted as interpretive grids that were

transformed by historical events. This became the major theme in his interpretation of Hawaiian responses to the arrival of Captain Cook and their eventual murder of him (Sahlins, 1981, 1985, 1995). Cook's arrival enacted a mythical scenario of the arrival of a god, Lono. His inappropriate return required that he be killed. But the events of British contact with the Hawaiians also promoted the transformation of mythologically naturalized codes of conduct between the Hawaiian aristocracy and their commoners. For Sahlins, structure plus history yielded transformation.

Like Sahlins, British anthropologists were interested in tracing how particular cultural codes (embodied in myth and ritual) naturalized particular ideologies and served particular interests. This was the lesson they took from Lévi-Strauss as they used structuralism for their purposes. A case in point is the way social anthropologists read Lévi-Strauss's seminal essay on the structural analysis of myth, 'The story of Asdiwal'. In this essay Lévi-Strauss attempted to reveal the complex confluence of 'codes', at once geographical and ecological, contained in a Tsimshian story about the birth and death of a mythological hero known as Asdiwal. Lévi-Strauss argued that the myth highlights or reveals contradictions in life as lived and then resolves them, thereby erasing the destructive effect of contradiction, at least in terms of the imagination, or thought. The ultimate 'function' of myth is a kind of naturalizing mediation of life as it is – a way of revealing contradictions while coming to terms with them. As Mary Douglas put it in a famous summary of his work: 'The myth is a contemplation of the unsatisfactory compromises which, after all, compose social life. In the devious statements of myth, people can recognize indirectly what would be difficult to admit openly and yet what is patently clear to all and sundry, that the ideal is not attainable' (1967: p. 59). Myth, in short, is a kind of propaganda. But the best myth is artful propaganda. And myth, as the social anthropologists pointed out, always, in Lévi-Strauss's scheme, supports the status quo

because it is a story a people collectively make and collectively consume.

In 'The story of Asdiwal', Lévi-Strauss's central concern was the contradiction in residence and marriage patterns in a society that has matrilineal clans. But social anthropologists who engaged with Lévi-Strauss pointed out other perhaps far more important contradictions. Douglas, for example, stressed the contradiction between the gendered value of labor (female gathering was less esteemed than male hunting) and the subsistence value of different kinds of food in the Northwest Coast region (gathered foods such as salmon and candlefish were more central to the diet than hunted foods). Thus for Douglas, the central contradiction of the myth of Asdiwal was Marxian: while hunting took precedence in the region in terms of prestige and general ethos, gathering (women's work) was the foundation of the economy and society. Hence her remark: 'the myth could well be interpreted as playing on the paradox of male dominance and male dependence on female help' (1967: p. 52). She went on to argue that the 'general effect' of the myth is to convey the message that 'women are necessary but inferior beings, and men are superior'. For social anthropologists, the cultural, again, was yoked to the social. Yet Lévi-Strauss, because he soon abandoned the kinds of sociologically oriented analyses of myth associated with the myth of Asdiwal in favor of analyses of mythological transformation chiefly concerned with the properties of human thought to the exclusion of the social, was taken to task by them.

Lévi-Strauss's structuralism opened up new terrain for anthropology. It made myth and ritual useful again – good to think. And because social anthropology had always been concerned with action, many social anthropologists became especially creative in theorizing about the centrality of ritual in human experience, among these Victor Turner, whose analyses of the 'dramaturgical' became foundational texts in a soon to emerge cross-disciplinary interest in 'performance' (Turner, 1966, 1967, 1974, 1982; also Schechner, 1985). But structuralism

eventually prompted anthropologists to assert the authority of fieldwork against yet another all-encompassing theoretical apparatus. Like the practitioners of cultural studies who reacted to the excesses of textual analysis by resorting to ethnographies of textual reception, so, too, did anthropologists argue for looking at audiences, at polysemy, at conflict and context at the local level, thus anticipating, through a faith in fieldwork-based ethnography, post-structuralism *avant le lettre* (Ortner, 1984).

THE REBIRTH OF BOASIAN (BY WAY OF SYMBOLIC) ANTHROPOLOGY

As British and French structuralism were gaining coherence and prominence, Boasian cultural anthropology in North America began to lose its, diversifying as it expanded within the fast-growing university system, while also capitalizing on the increasing availability of government and foundation grant monies during and after World War II. In the 1950s and 1960s there was (yet another – see Stocking, 1968: pp. 270–307) scientific reaction against Boasian historical particularism, and various neo-evolutionisms flourished, in the work of such people as Julian Steward (1955), Leslie White (1949), Eleanor Leacock (1954), (the early) Marshall Sahlins (Sahlins and Service, 1960) and (the later) Irving Hallowell (1960; see Stocking, 2004). Evolutionary and ecological approaches to culture and cultural development ranged across a political and intellectual spectrum, from the work of the politically liberal Steward, whose interest in the interaction between humans and the natural environment stemmed from a long American tradition of scientific exploration, to that of a generation trained after World War II (including Sahlins, Service, Robert Murphy and Sidney Mintz), who studied with Steward but also drew theoretical inspiration from various European social theorists, especially Marx (Kerns, 2003: pp. 235–262).

The post-war opposition between science and history, evolutionism and cultural particularism, was mediated by Talcott Parsons,

doyen of American sociology, and Alfred Kroeber, the most senior and distinguished surviving student of Boas. In a 1958 two-page manifesto on 'The concepts of culture and of social system', they tried to clear up confusion about the terms 'society' and 'culture' (or, more precisely, about the routine conflation of the two). They did so by defining both terms as analytically distinguishable components of human 'behavior'. 'Society,' or 'social system', in the scientific terminology they proposed, referred to the 'system of interaction among individuals and collectivities'; while 'culture' was 'restrict[ed] ... to transmitted and created content and patterns of values, ideas, and other symbolic-meaningful systems as factors in the shaping of human behavior and the artifacts produced through behavior' (1958: p. 583). With these definitions, they attempted to mandate the proper division of labor between sociology and anthropology. More generally, they envisaged a coordinated scientific enterprise, to eventuate in 'a general theory of [human] action', as the title of a contemporary work put it (Parsons and Shils, 1961).

The conceptualization of this unified theoretical enterprise drew on the nineteenth-century German philosophy of science and history that Kroeber had absorbed from Boas: human behavior or action was seen as a 'level' of phenomenal reality organized in terms of principles or forces different from those that organized the physical, biological and psychological levels of reality. Given such differences, scientific disciplines and concepts had to be established and defined based on the 'level' to be studied, or, in a related epistemological approach, on the analytic problems of interest to the student of human action. It is worth noting that while Parsons had come to this position by way of an intellectual trajectory quite separate from that of Kroeber (Parsons's reading [1937] of European social theorists, particularly Durkheim and Weber), his studies had led him back to the same sources that had nourished Boas. Indeed, Boas and Weber may be envisaged as alternate 'carriers' of the same intellectual tradition, with Boas

bringing that tradition to North America and developing it as four-field anthropology, while Weber contributed to professional sociology in Europe.

In any case, the Kroeber-Parsons mandate can be seen, retrospectively, to have licensed Parsons's (and Kluckhohn's) Harvard anthropology students, Clifford Geertz and David Schneider, to consider 'culture' their special domain. The two converged in the early 1960s in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Chicago (although Geertz soon left for the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton [see Geertz, 1995: pp. 109–128]). In different ways, both grappled with the relationship between culture and the social system, and both eventually lost interest in the second analytic term, as they focused their efforts on 'culture theory'. The flourishing of culture theory in the 1970s and 1980s can be seen retrospectively (and to some extent was seen at the time) as a renewal of older Boasian approaches to culture; the most common labels at the time were 'symbolic anthropology' (Dolgin, Kemnitzer and Schneider, 1977) and 'interpretive anthropology' (Rabinow and Sullivan, 1979). But symbolic anthropology also brought together as a collective reading community Geertz and Schneider and those who were inspired by them along with European social anthropologists such as Edmund Leach, Rodney Needham, Victor Turner, Mary Douglas and Marilyn Strathern – most of whom were influenced by Lévi-Strauss's structuralism and all of whom, like their American counterparts, stressed that 'culture communicates' (Leach, 1976: p. 2).

Some British social anthropologists construed this interest in the symbolic as a shift away from what Edmund Leach characterized as an 'empiricist' approach to understanding 'ethnographic data' or 'customary behavior' and, as such, wrote books which were as explicitly critical of Western commonsense constructions as were the American 'culturalists'. According to Leach, much of social anthropology was premised on the empiricist notions that humans act to achieve recognizable ends, compete for scarce resources, and generally try to control one another.

The model was economic as economics was conceived in the West. Leach argued instead for what he called a “rationalist approach” to the study of ethnographic material, one based on the premise that people act to send and receive recognizable messages; the model is linguistic. In the former, the goal is to understand the structure of rules that limit and channel action; in the latter, structure is the system that limits and channels thought, meaning, expression.

Some social anthropologists used these insights to make more incisive critiques of the structure of anthropological ideas themselves. Marilyn Strathern (1988), for example, showed how anthropologists usually posited as if they were universals contrasting binaries such as nature/culture, society/individual, and male/female and as a result misconstrued native conceptions. Strathern’s critique of anthropological structures of ideas dovetailed in significant ways with Derrida’s critique of structuralism itself, while remaining ethnographically grounded in illuminating the ways Hageners of New Guinea imagined their world through categories of their own invention. Strathern is also sometimes read as a part of a pervasive feminist critique of anthropology’s androcentricity, although her work is also critical of the misapplication of a Western concern for equality among individuals in societies where neither the individual nor equality exist as indigenous concepts.

Similarly, American anthropologists such as Geertz and Schneider yoked ethnographies of (what Geertz famously called) ‘out of the way places’ to critiques of Western scholarly common sense. Geertz has had perhaps the greatest impact of any anthropologist (other than Lévi-Strauss) outside the discipline. Typical of Geertz’s attack on common sense via the development of a culture theory is his 1966 essay, ‘The Impact of the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man’ (reprinted in Geertz, 1973: pp. 33–54). There he distinguished what he claims to be cultural anthropology’s contribution to an understanding of human beings from an Enlightenment understanding. In the Enlightenment view, as Geertz characterizes it, culture is like a costume that hides or

covers over an essential human nature. The costume is either good, because it shapes and molds human nature in salutary ways, or it is bad because constraining, imprisoning. But in either case Enlightenment thought posits ‘a uniformitarian view of man’ in which there is a universal human nature. For Geertz, *pace* Enlightenment thinkers, cultural difference is ‘not a mere matter of garb and appearance, of stage settings and comedic masques’ (1973: p. 36). Culture, for Geertz, is core, not surface.

In this and other essays Geertz argues that much of twentieth-century social science is also misguided in its study of ‘man’. Cognizance of cultural diversity caused the earlier uniformitarian model to morph into a ‘stratigraphic’ model, one in which the posited universals of biology, psychology and society underpin culture, which becomes little more than the icing on the layer cake. Geertz objects that, again, such models treat culture as an outcome of more fundamental facts of human life.

If Geertz dislikes both uniformitarian and stratigraphic models, his concept of culture also was explicitly framed as an exercise in interpretation rather than explanation – an idea he derived from Weber but also from Boasian anthropology more generally. The goal of the ethnographer, in Geertz’s scheme, was to understand how people in any given society tended to make ‘models of’ reality into ‘models for’ action – both ritual and practical – thereby inscribing a particular worldview into everyday and ceremonial life. Interpretation entailed uncovering (or even abstracting) such models. With its emphasis on drama, theatre, text and ritual as metaphors for interpreting human action, Geertz’s work appealed to scholars outside anthropology, especially in the humanities. Cultural forms are (like) art in that their affect is aesthetic. But unlike so much of the art that Westerners know, the distinction between writer and reader, artist and viewer, actor and audience, producer and consumer (for is it not the case that even connoisseurs are primarily consumers, educated, and therefore ‘cultured’ consumers, but nevertheless not producers?) is always blurred in the societies Geertz talks

about. People act in rituals, they perform for themselves, they live the art they make, and as a result, the meanings dramatized in art forms are internalized – as ‘culture’ in the sense that American cultural anthropologists use the term.

By focusing on the tropes of art to make a case for the ‘construction’ of culture (all those models of becoming models for), and for a model of culture as a system of meaning that is at once internal to a subject and constitutive of the public domain, Geertz is a lot like Victor Turner, his British counterpart. Turner offered the humanities a social science of the dramaturgical (1982). His emphasis was on performance – on stages, dramas, denouements – and their transformative powers (1966, 1967). He, too, became a favorite among the literary critics of the late twentieth century, especially those carving out that new discipline, performance studies. But unlike Geertz, Turner remained squarely within the traditions of social anthropology. Turner’s goal was to search for human universals in how theater worked its magic. He used examples from a number of societies – juxtaposing, say, an essay on Hidalgo’s march on Mexico City with Becket’s murder by knights loyal to Henry – to show how the dramaturgical worked (1974). By contrast, when Geertz described the Balinese theatre state it was only in part to argue for the theatricality of politics; it was also (inevitably) to assert a certain cultural quality (revealed in politics) that was typically and quintessentially Balinese. The Javanese proverb, ‘Other fields, other grasshoppers’, served as a reminder that human nature is plural because cultural (Geertz, 1973: p. 53).

David Schneider is less well-known outside anthropology than Geertz, but took what was considered within anthropology to be the more radical position concerning the cultural. In *American Kinship: A Cultural Account* (1968), he proposed a study of cultural symbols in and of themselves (in this case, the symbols that defined kinship in American culture), irrespective of their connections to the social system and to their realization in social action. The symbols of

kinship ought also to be considered, Schneider argued, independently from biology. The ‘scientific facts’ of biology were not the basis of kinship in cultures; rather, those scientific facts could never be formulated apart from culture, and, furthermore, there were many kinship systems that made no reference to what Westerners call ‘biology’ at all. Putting the matter generally, Schneider argued: ‘the notion of a pure, pristine state of biological relationships “out there in reality” which is the same for all mankind is sheer nonsense’ (1965: p. 97). These arguments deconstructed (in the sense of ‘did away with’) what had been a core subject for anthropologists (kinship, considered, in social-evolutionary terms, to be the central organizing principle of ‘primitive’ societies) and, for a while, anthropologists lost interest in the topic. But over the longer run, Schneider’s cultural approach to kinship stimulated revitalized kinship studies, freed to consider such ‘non-natural’ forms of kinship as gay and lesbian families (Lewin, 1993; Weston, 1991), adoptive children (Modell, 1994) and the ‘new reproductive technologies’ (for an overview of these new kinship studies, see Franklin and McKinnon, 2001). More generally, Schneider’s cultural approach to the Western analytic categories that mediated anthropologists’ interpretations of other cultures dovetailed with other trends in the discipline (reflexivity, historicism) that were prompting a renewed understanding of anthropology itself as a culturally distinctive phenomenon.

Geertz’s work had a similar effect, both within anthropology and (as Schneider’s did not) beyond it. Geertz never saw the need to rule out social action as an object of cultural analysis. Indeed, his earlier work (1960, 1963a, 1963b) grappled explicitly with the relationship between social change and cultural change. But his interests eventually settled on a conception of culture as ‘an acted document’, and of the study of culture, anthropology, as ‘an interpretive [science] in search of meaning’, not ‘an experimental science in search of law’ (1973: pp. 10, 7). To see anthropology as an interpretive science is, of course, a Boasian or Weberian position.

What was new in Geertz's approach, however, was the consequence he drew from that orientation: if culture is an 'acted document', then the anthropologist who studies it is a reader, a literary critic. 'Doing ethnography is like trying to read (in the sense of "construct a reading of") a manuscript – foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behavior' (1973: p. 10). Moreover, the people that anthropologists study are doing the same thing: 'what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to' (1973: p. 9).

Taken together, Schneider's injunction to study cultural symbols apart from social action and Geertz's assertion that to 'do' anthropology is to 'interpret' culture (itself construed as publicly acted texts) prompted a generation of younger anthropologists to conceive of their ethnographic work (both the fieldwork itself and the written results) as an interpretive or literary endeavor. And that work, in turn, led to a new theoretical interest in fieldwork and anthropology itself as a Western or scientific practice, one in which anthropologists 'invent' culture (both the anthropological concept and specific examples of it). Schneider's student Roy Wagner provided perhaps the earliest discussion of 'the invention of culture', a process he saw in terms of 'objectification':

We might actually say that an anthropologist 'invents' the culture he believes himself to be studying ... It is only through 'invention' of this kind that the abstract significance of culture ... can be grasped, and only through the experienced contrast that his own culture becomes 'visible'. In the act of inventing another culture, the anthropologist invents his own, and in fact he reinvents the notion of culture itself. (1975: p. 4)

Over the next decade, anthropologists and critics of anthropology became especially interested in the literary aspects of such inventions. The work of anthropology came to be seen as 'writing culture' (Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Behar and Gordon, 1995),

and the results of that work were open for literary-critical analysis, with an eye for both its 'poetics' (the relationship between the literary conventions of ethnography and the knowledge conveyed in the genre) and its 'politics' (the relationship between the scientific authority of anthropologists and the social position of those about whom they had the power to write).

THE POLITICS OF CULTURE

Although it sometimes seems that scholars have only recently discovered that anthropological writing is a form of politics, it is worth recalling that anthropologists have consistently imagined that their work would have a transformative impact on their own society, that it would be political in that sense. So, to speak of the politics of anthropological writing is to speak of two (at least analytically separable) perspectives about this politics – a celebratory perspective and a critical perspective. Arguably texts from a celebratory perspective have had a greater impact both on cultural politics within modern societies and on the shape of knowledge within the academy.

In the celebratory perspective, the anthropologist sees herself or himself as a spokesperson for non-Western others and uses their authority to mount a critique of Western society. Clearly, it has not been anthropologists alone who have used the savage as the source of utopian dreams. One has only to think of Montesquieu, Rousseau and Thomas Jefferson, the latter who made Indians into honorary American ancestors, to realize how pervasive this practice has been. Yet, anthropologists came to speak with a special authority for this kind of perspective.

Paradigmatic of this kind of cultural critique is Marcel Mauss's *The Gift*, published in 1924 and translated into English thirty years later. In *The Gift*, Mauss travelled in time and space, from Old Norse to New Caledonia to the Northwest Coast of North America to ancient India, in order to argue for the gift's ubiquity in 'archaic' societies. Gift-exchange

existed, he wanted to emphasize, as a fundamental social fact which created and signaled essential social solidarities even in an archipelago of individuals – even, that is, in the modern France Mauss lived in and never left. Mauss was writing against what he felt was an ultimately impoverishing, if increasingly dominant, discourse in Western economics which equated the individual pursuit of economic interest via the commodity with ‘liberty’. He wanted modern Europeans to learn from the long and pervasive precedent of the archaic world that societies can survive and thrive only if their members come to recognize their mutual obligations and their interdependence.

The Gift continues to be widely read inside and outside anthropology (Strathern, 1988; Schrift, 1997; Godelier, 1999), usually to endorse as an alternative to neo-liberal ideology the social intertwinement that gift-exchange entails. More than Mauss himself, scholars re-reading him today tend to make dichotomizing comparisons – between gift and commodity, between the person who knows he is the sum of his social relationships and the individual who suffers – yes, suffers! – the illusion that everyone is an island (e.g., Gregory, 1983; Strathern, 1988). In such ongoing critiques (which deploy the non-Western other as an alternative) it is the commodity, not the gift, that poisons (Godelier, 1999; cf. Raheja, 1988).

Thus anthropology has a long-standing role in Western utopian discourses, and old texts continue to find new readers as Westerners struggle with social and moral contradiction. But more recently anthropologists have also participated in more critical self-reflection. But another motivating factor has been postcolonial guilt among anthropologists themselves, who came to see that they were as patronizing of ‘natives’ (if primarily textually) as were their cousins among the ranks of colonial administrators and among the run-of-the-mill tourists who visited the exotic and the primitive for the pleasures such a visit provided. Since at least the time of the American and French Revolutions, and probably for several centuries before that

(Koester, 2006), a global politics has developed from encounters between European, Asian and African polities and the lands they subjugated; moreover, that politics was defined in part in terms of objectifying ethnographic practices. Geographers and ‘explorers’ mapped territories, and in doing so they described local peoples, often as though such people were part of a natural landscape. With the rise of the social sciences, concepts such as ‘society’, ‘culture’, ‘tradition’, ‘folklore’ and even ‘history’ became key terms in that practice. Throughout the twentieth century, and perhaps from the mid-nineteenth century, the politics of decolonization and national liberation has been at least in part a ‘politics of culture’ (Handler, 1988). Intellectuals of and for subordinated groups worked to provide cultural and historical legitimacy for liberation movements, creating exemplary knowledge (books, monuments, archaeological sites, museum collections) necessary to establish a group’s claim to independent existence, and hence the right to political sovereignty.

The ‘native’ production of cultural-historical studies with explicit nationalist or liberationist motives has put increasing pressure on anthropological culture theory, and on the politics of anthropology. With respect to culture theory, it has become increasingly difficult for anthropologists to believe they can extract culture as an object of study from the cultural practices that precipitate such objects. Studying people who are acting like anthropologists – people who are busy writing, collecting and representing culture – anthropologists cannot fail to see that their own disciplinary practices are of the same order or level of social reality as the native culture-constructing practices. The conventional anthropological notion of fieldwork as ‘participant-observation’ was conceived to grapple with a similar problem, the awkward positioning of the researcher as at once a member (temporarily) of the group under study, and an observer or analyst. But the current widespread, everyday, and self-conscious use of the culture concept makes even ‘participant-observation’ seem an

inadequate gloss for anthropological praxis: perhaps when one imagined oneself to be studying kinship or ritual, it was possible to keep 'anthropology' and 'native life' conceptually separate; it seems impossible to do so today, when those natives are culture theorists. One casualty of the present situation is the concept of 'authenticity'. It is no longer possible to imagine a pristine cultural identity, a people who do not reflect upon their culture (and thereby change it) as they come routinely into contact with others.

This new politics of culture has complicated the politics of anthropology. In practical terms, it is increasingly less easy for anthropologists to gain 'access' to people who, in the past, would have had no power to exclude a researcher from their community. Today, when subordinated but politically organized and self-conscious communities cooperate in anthropological research, it is often at least partially on their terms; indeed, for land-claim cases, language preservation and social welfare programs, communities hire anthropologists to help them. But such political programs generally require a kind of culture theory that 'postmodern' or 'neo-Boasian' (Bashkow et al., 2004) anthropologists have tried to transcend – one that presupposes cultures as bounded communities in possession of clearly demarcated, and 'authentic', culture (Clifford, 1987: pp. 277–346). In a world of nation-states conceptualized as bounded units, groups within or between those units can gain political recognition only by presenting themselves as similarly delineated and endowed cultural entities. The long history of anthropology – with its scientific racism and its countervailing cultural relativism, its tradition of living 'in the field' among the people being studied, and its cultivation of 'empathy' as a method of cross-cultural understanding – has bequeathed to today's anthropologists a deep sympathy for the struggles of the subordinated peoples they study. There is a romantic tradition of celebrating the cultures of such people, and there is also, today, good political reason to do so. But such practices contradict the theoretical consensus among symbolic,

interpretive or neo-Boasian anthropologists concerning the ontological status of culture: culture is conceptualized best not as a thing, but as a semiotic process.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the institutionalization of anthropology in the academy gave the discipline a social unity that many anthropologists, at the turn of the twenty-first century, fear is increasingly fragile. These worried anthropologists, almost as postmodern as the Boasians, know all cultural phenomena to be historically situated symbolic creations and, as such, subject not just to change, but also to radical reinterpretation, from multiple points of view. One consequence of such a perspective is the understanding that anthropology itself may well disappear as a discipline or even as a concept. 'Culture', a longer-lived and socially more salient term than 'anthropology', will probably not disappear, but will continue to mutate, as it has for centuries in Western and more recently in world locales, and it will continue to migrate among a variety of disciplines and institutions, and to come into opposition with a contingent set of equally 'key' words.

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