almost unavoidable. If concepts are not words and if conceptualizations provide the theoretical frame that helps to construct the object of study, then this object of study can never be what is given to the naked eye, however sharpened its vision. The object of study cannot be the object of observation.

To these three theoretical lessons—the necessary distance between concepts and words, the necessary construction of the object of study, and the necessary gap between the object of study and the object of observation—we may want to add the need to establish distance from the state-centrism of nineteenth-century academic production. This state-centrism heavily influenced anthropology's approach to its objects of study, including the early deployment of the concept of culture in North America, which is the topic of the next chapter.

Chapter 5

Adieu, Culture: A New Duty Arises

A new duty arises. No longer can we keep the search for truth the privilege of the scientist.

—Franz Boas

Culture Matters

The conceptual kernel behind "culture" as deployed in North American anthropology provides a useful and fundamental lesson about humankind. Yet the word culture today is irretrievably tainted both by the politics of identity and the politics of blame—including the racialization of behavior it was meant to avoid. Contrary to many of the critics usefully reviewed by Robert Brightman (1995), I do not see the concept as inherently flawed on theoretical grounds. Thus I agree with Richard Shweder (2001) that something akin to a culture-concept remains necessary not only to anthropology as a discipline, but also to social science in general. Nevertheless, the distinction between concept and word is central to my argument. So is the related emphasis on the sites and processes of deployment and the modes of engagement that mediate between concepts and words. If concepts are not just words, the vitality of a conceptual program cannot hinge upon the sole use of a noun. We can abandon the word and be better off politically and theoretically. Without that shorthand, we will have to describe specific traits ethnographically and evaluate analytically the distinct domains we previously compressed into it. We could then better pursue a practice rooted in the concept.[1]

Culture's popular success is its own theoretical demise. Its academic diffusion has generated new institutional clusters on North American campuses: Cultural—and Multicultural—Studies. Outside of academe, culture has entered the lexicon of advertisers, politicians, business people, and economic planners up to the high echelons of the World Bank and the editorial pages of the *New York Times*. Thus the "Asian miracle" of the 1980s could be attributed in varying degrees to Japanese, if not Asian, culture—whatever that may be. So could Latin America's failure to follow suit. Culture now explains everything—political instability in Haiti, ethnic wars in the Balkans, labor difficulties on the shop floor of Mexican

maquiladoras, race tensions in British schools, and the difficulties of New York's welfare recipients on the job market.

As the explanatory power of culture increases, many anthropologists react negatively to what they see as the abuse of one of their favorite categories by the general public, journalists, and especially colleagues—reserving their most emotional attacks for practitioners of Cultural Studies.[2] Occasional and acute irritation aside, most academic anthropologists have a limited awareness of both the extent of this abuse and the extent to which it now serves politically conservative causes. I confess a triple weakness: The narrative and the solutions sketched here are valid only to the extent that we have both a conceptual problem and a *public*—therefore political—problem, that these problems are intertwined and urgent, and that the massive exportation of essentialized and racialized views of culture(s) from the United States increases both their theoretical and political urgency.

The massive diffusion of the word "culture" in recent times awaits its ethnographer, but even the trivia is revealing. One Internet search engine produced more than five million *pages* on "culture," even after exclusion of most references to cultivation and agriculture. When culture was coupled with anthropology or ethnography, the total went down to 61,000 pages. While the search engine of a major Internet bookseller produced more than 20,000 titles with the word culture, the list went down to 1,350 titles when culture was coupled with anthropology or ethnography in the subject index. Culture is out there, but anthropologists have no control over its deployment.[3]

Prominent among those 20,000 titles is *Culture Matters* (Harrison and Huttington 2000), an anthology praised by the *Wall Street Journal, Time* magazine, and political heavyweights such as Patrick Moynihan and the president of the World Bank. The underlying argument of most of the volume's essays, as is explicit in Harrison's introduction, is that culture explains the state of affairs in the world today, especially economic inequalities between countries and even continents.[4] Culture matters, indeed, but in ways few anthropologists would recognize.[5] Yet the success of the word is in part a reflection of the corporate success of anthropology in the United States, and to that extent we may wonder if the anthropological critique of culture's deployment should not start at home.

Words are not concepts and concepts are not words. Words and concepts intertwine in complex ways, sometimes overlapping, sometimes canceling each other out. The same word can express various conceptualizations. A conceptualization can survive the demise of the word that once encapsulated it. Conceptualizations, whether or not encapsulated by a single word, take full significance only in the context of their deployment.

That context is inherently multilayered. It certainly extends beyond the walls of academe. It not only includes other concepts, including academic, lay, and political deployments of key words (Williams 1983), but the very social milieu that is a condition of possibility of any conceptualization. Theories are built on words and with words, but what ties those words together is always a specific moment in the historical process. In short, conceptualizations are always historically situated.

So historicized, the North American trajectory of the concept of culture seems to offer a contradiction. The kernel of the conceptualization teaches fundamental lessons about humanity that were not as clearly stated before its deployment and

that cannot be easily unlearned. Yet the deployment of the word "culture" today, while evoking this conceptual kernel, carries an essentialist and often racialist agenda outside and especially within the United States.

The connection between these two states of affairs is not the misappropriation of an otherwise "clean" concept by non-anthropologists. Rather, North American anthropology's theoretical disregard for the very context of inequality—and specially the racism—that allowed the emergence of the conceptualization also doomed its deployment. This only appears to be a contradiction if we take concepts as disembodied truths. If we turn to context as a condition of possibility of any conceptualization, a different story emerges—that of a political move in theory that denied its own conditions of possibility. The trajectory of culture is that of a concept distancing itself from the context of its practice. As it did so, a concept created in part as a theoretical answer to an American political problem lost both its theoretical bite and its progressive political potential—and in so doing, also lost its universalism.

For purposes of this narrative, I choose to distinguish two contexts: academe and the society at large. Within the first, the culture-concept appears as an anti-concept, *a political move in theory,* the benefits of which become increasingly restricted by the status of anthropology as a discipline, the state-centrism of the human sciences, and micro-practices of reproduction such as the doctoral thesis. Within the second, the culture-concept appears as *a theoretical move from politics,* that is, a theoretical practice that silences its own conditions of possibility.

A Political Move in Theory

Two substantive propositions are central to the conceptualization of culture as it is deployed in North American anthropology:

(1) Human behavior is patterned. There exist within historically specific populations recurrences in both thought and behavior that are not contingent but structurally conditioned and that are, in turn, structuring.

(2) Those patterns are learned. Recurrences cannot be tied to a natural world within or outside the human body, but rather to constant interaction within specific populations. Structuration occurs through social transmission and symbolic coding with some degree of human consciousness.

These two propositions are indispensable to the most influential definitions of culture proposed by anthropologists in the United States—with the possible exception of Leslie White.[6] These two propositions are likely to be agreed upon as being a central point of departure to their practice by a majority of individuals who earned anthropological degrees in the United Sates. Yet they are not unique to North American anthropology, or even to anthropology as a discipline.[7] The first is necessary to Machiavelli's politics and fundamental to Montesquieu's socio-ocultural geography. The second echoes European thinkers from Machiavelli, Montaigne, or Montesquieu to Kant and Vico. Nor do these two propositions exhaust all anthropological definitions of culture. As conceptual foundations of North American anthropology, they precede by a decade at least—notably in

Franz Boas's writings—the routine use of the word that came later to embody them.[8]

So stated, *this conceptual kernel does not impose an essentialist reading on either the definition or the use of the word culture.* It certainly does not predispose a racialist interpretation. How culture found itself on the essentialist track with a racialist bent is much less about definitional truth than about context, much less about intellectual history than about the history of power that the concept itself was used to silence. Central to that context is race and racism.

North American anthropologists love to claim with no small pride that Boasian anthropology's answer to American racism was its theoretical drive to separate race, language, and culture. If that claim is true, as I believe it is, the culture-concept is not just an intellectual product remotely connected to society—if indeed such a thing could exist—but an intellectual maneuver against the background of a social, political, and intellectual context. I will describe that maneuver as a political move in theory.

In its initial context of deployment, culture is first and foremost an anti-concept. It is inherently tied to race, its nemesis. Culture is race repellent—not only what race is not, but what prevents race from occupying the defining place in anthropological discourse that it otherwise occupies in the larger American society. Within that privileged space, the culture-concept can limit the impact of notions and descriptions linked to biological inheritance. When Boas wrote in 1930 that "human cultures and racial types are so distributed that every area has its own type and its own culture" (Boas 1940:265), it was to insist that race (by which he meant the distinctive biological inheritance of a group) had no influence on culture. Boas's constant movement between anthropomorphic exercises and programmatic articles on cultural research similarly highlights a race-culture antinomy (Baker 1998; Cole 1999; Darnell 1997, 1998; Stocking 1974, 1982 [1964]).

The consequences of that positioning are far reaching yet unavoidable. As an anti-concept, the peculiarity of culture in North American anthropological theory stems less from its possible German predecessors or its distance from Malinowski's abstractions than from the peculiarity of North American notions of race and practices of racism. What makes culture unique in the U.S. academic context is not a definitional feature or a combination of such features, but its deployment in a society with a peculiar one-drop rule (Harris 1964), where either of the Dumas would have been a "black writer,"[9] and where black blood becomes not only a thing—that is, as Marx would say, an objectified relation—but also where that relation supercedes other such sets. What makes Boasian and post-Boasian "culture" peculiar and necessary is the white American gaze on blackness—the centerpiece of American racial consciousness—that justifies its gate-keeping function.[10]

Unfortunately, culture's academic career only reinforced the gate-keeping qualities that made its birth possible and necessary. Launched as the negation of race, culture also became the negation of class and history. Launched as a shield against some of the manifestations of racial power, culture eventually protected anthropology from all conceptual fields and apparatuses that spoke of power and inequality. Culture became what class was not, what evaded power, and what could

deny history. How it became so has much to do with context. The political move in theory was further restricted by anthropology's position within the human disciplines and by its practitioners' temptation to mimic the state-centered social "sciences." Its essentialist potential was also enhanced by micro-practices of reproduction within the discipline itself. "Culture" was part of the price sociocultural anthropology paid to gain a legitimate foothold in North American academe.

The Price of Power

I formulated earlier two propositions that constitute the substantive kernel of the culture-concept. But the career of the concept was also tied to a third proposition, both epistemological and methodological, which propelled if not required the use of the word "culture" and its cognates. One can summarize that proposition as follows: Cultural analysis is a legitimate lens of observation that relates to a distinguishable domain of human activity. Culture is a way to look at populations, the same way economics is.

So stated, *this methodological proposition is no more essentialist than the substantive propositions at the core of the conceptualization.* One can derive from it strong positions against both essentialism and philosophical empiricism. At best the domain of culture is a cut practiced by the analyst but does not exist independently in the phenomenal world. That reading is a legitimate interpretation of the work of Franz Boas and his followers up until the second decade of the twentieth century. Yet as early as perhaps the 1910s, but most certainly by the 1920s and especially in the four ensuing decades, culture had shifted from a domain of analysis to something "out there" (Stocking 1982 [1964]).

I am less interested in retracing all the steps of that history than in highlighting some prominent features of the academic context of deployment. In that context, the theoretical possibilities of what I have described as a political move in theory became increasingly restricted much less by theoretical arguments than by practices that allowed anthropology's solidification as a degree-granting discipline.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the new discipline brought to the Savage slot some of the methodological assumptions shared by the fields that studied the North Atlantic, such as history, sociology, and economics. One such assumption was that of the state-centrism addressed in chapter 4. Anthropology easily avoided that assumption when it turned its attention to ancient times, studying such massive and transcontinental movements as the spread of cereals or domesticated animals. Yet when it came to the study of its contemporary "primitives," anthropology mimicked the state-centrism of the other social sciences, often assuming a waterish version of the nation-state, the borders of which were alleged to be as obvious and as impermeable as those of the North Atlantic entities.[11]

Since that watered-down polity was only a copy, and a bad one at that, it could not provide either the methodological stability or the naturalness of borders that made North Atlantic countries appear to be obvious units of analysis. From the 1890s to the 1950s, anthropologists increasingly made up for that fuzziness. In France and Britain notably, they emphasized the rigidity of such concepts as the

"total social fact" or the "social structure," each of which supposedly brought to the observer's mind a closure otherwise difficult to demonstrate on the ground. In the United States, "culture" provided an even thicker closure.

The solidity of that closure came less from the methodological proposition sketched above than from the way it was used. Culture as a domain became what North American anthropologists could cling to in contradistinction to, say, sociologists or economists (Cole 1999; Darnell 1997, 1998; Stocking 1982 [1964]). But the emphasis on the distinction also entailed the acceptance of a model: the production of self-evident units of analysis of the kind produced by those "harder" social sciences, and the implicit acknowledgement of an essence within these boundaries. Culture became a thing in the footsteps of other thing-like entities such as the market, the economy, the state, and society.

As culture became a thing, it also started doing things. Parodying the market and the model set by economists, culture shifted from a descriptive conceptual tool to an explanatory concept. The more it explained, the more rigid and reified it became, just like the market or the state. In the process, North American anthropologists grafted an essentialist notion of culture that reproduced the state-centrism of the other human sciences unto the self-evident units of the Savage slot. Just as France or the United States obviously had one economy, one history, and one social life, the Iroquois, the Samoan, the Dobu, the Zuni, or the Japanese for that matter, could have only one of each. The extent to which their economy or their history mattered depended on the interests and benevolence of the observer. The extent to which inequality among them mattered was partly silenced by the liberal aversion toward Marxism and by the preconditions of the Savage slot, which made the people without history "classless societies." Culture functioned as an anti-concept, just like the Savage had functioned as an anti-concept in earlier times. For Columbus as for Montaigne, savages were those who had no state, no religion, no clothes, and no shame—because they had nature. For North American anthropology, primitives became those who had no complexity, no class, and no history that really mattered—because they had culture. Better still, each group had a single such culture whose boundaries were thought to be self-evident. Thus North American cultural anthropology reconciled the Boasian agenda with both the state-centrism of the strong social sciences and the taxonomic schemes (Silverstein, n.d.) of the even stronger natural sciences, notably zoology and biology.

Not every anthropologist welcomed the essentialist turn. Some, notably Edward Sapir, rejected it quite loudly (Brightman 1995; Darnell 1997). Many acknowledged outside influences (Stocking 1982 [1964]).[12] Their deep knowledge of history often led early anthropologists to recognize diffusion and thereby at times circumvent the borders they had erected around culture. In an impressive chapter on "The Spread of Culture," Clark Wissler (1923) recalled the early history of the horse, and then demonstrated how that animal, whose advance in the Americas often preceded that of the Europeans who had introduced it into the New World, became fully integrated into a number of Indian tribes. Similarly, Wissler (1923:13) easily conceded that identities were not always fixed. It was quite conceivable that as Europeans moved along the Alleghenies "a man could

have lived part of the year as an Indian and part as a colonist." Yet the same Wissler went on to say that we should dismiss such cases because they are not so common, and proceeded to find in the area that became the United States "six hundred separate cultures... one for each tribe," grouped into seven cultural types, provinces, or areas. That this taxonomy replicated the model honed at establishing racial divisions may not be accidental, as we will see later.

As acknowledged, Boasian anthropology overemphasized the concept of culture not only to inscribe its space within academe but also as a response to biological determinism. Yet its noblest goals notwithstanding, as North American anthropology became more powerful and more popular, cultural centrism—if not determinism—obscured the finer points of the intellectual program for the public and graduate students alike.[13]

Increased specialization made it impossible for single writers or even groups of writers to maintain the back and forth movement between race and culture that characterized the early work of Boas. Boas's definition of race now looks faulty, but it did play against culture and vice-versa. Culture and race then spoke to one another in the restricted context of anthropological discourse and "Man" remained a physical being.

Increased specialization, however, facilitated a mind/body dualism. Man the symbol maker was freed from the physical realities of his being and of his world. Culture was left on its own even within anthropology. Its boundaries became thicker; its negative reference to race blurrier. Increasingly the history of "contact," "change," or "acculturation"—including the history of power that led to these contacts—was dealt with separately, in specialized books or distinct chapters, when not completely silenced.[14] Diffusionism, a school that made serious indents in the United States and especially in Germany in the nineteenth century by tracing the movement of traits and artifacts, practically disappeared from cultural anthropology. Anthropologists such as Ruth Benedict (1959 [1934]) and Ralph Linton (1955) emphasized the "wholeness" of distinct cultures, a theme later revived by the work of Clifford Geertz (1973).[15]

Slanted as it became toward closure, *theory alone would not have sufficed to sustain the notion of cultures as isolated wholes.* Extreme isolationist pronouncements such as those of Benedict or Linton did not necessarily gain unanimity within the discipline (Brightman 1995; Darnell 1997). Archaeological data kept reminding sociocultural anthropologists of the extent of diffusion in ancient times and under more difficult conditions of contact. Daily field activities constantly questioned the myth even among those inclined to accept it on faith. Anthropologists in the field met people who did not follow the rules, did not share the dominant beliefs, did not reproduce the expected patterns, and had their eyes wide opened on the Elsewhere. The anthropologists' own presence in the field and the support system that made their research possible belied the possibility of a cultural quarantine.

Yet whatever individual doubts emerged from field practice crashed against the corporate wall of institutionalization. Institutionalized disciplines necessarily impose rites of passage that ensure and confirm professionalization. As anthropology gained demographic and institutional power, the ethnographic monograph

became a major proof of professionalization in France, England, and especially the United States where fieldwork support was more available. The production of at least one such work became the easiest—and soon enough the privileged—rite of access to the profession. In the North American context, it became the sole credential unanimously recognized for entry into the guild (Cohn 1987).

The institutionalization of the monographic tradition, primarily through doctoral dissertations and publications by university presses, in turn reinforced what I call the ethnographic trilogy: one observer, one time, one place. Since what is accessible to the gaze of a single observer who stays in one place for a limited amount of time is inherently limited, the ethnographic trilogy, as inscribed in a rite of passage, invited practical closure.

Contrary to recent critics, I do not see this closure as inherent in fieldwork, as indeed I will argue in chapter 6. Rather, on theoretical grounds, a naïve epistemology strongly influenced by empiricism predisposed anthropologists to fetishize fieldwork—first and most importantly by blurring the necessary distinction between the object of study and the object of observation, and second by avoiding the issue of the epistemological status of the native voice (Trouillot 1992). Furthermore, on practical grounds, in the first half of the twentieth century, procedures of acceptance within the guild provided additional corporate and individual incentives to fetishize fieldwork. To put it bluntly, at some point in time one has to close the book and the easiest way to do so is to claim to have exhausted the territory. Doctoral theses claimed—not always implicitly—to put between two covers all that was essential to know about "the culture" under study. The monographic tradition may have had more impact on the closing of culture within academe than theory, exactly because it enforced the practice even among those who did not necessarily believe that cultures were integrated and isolated wholes.[16] At any rate, by the middle of the twentieth century these units of analysis were most often taken as natural, obvious, and for all practical purposes, impermeable on both sides of the Atlantic, and "culture" in the United States became the impenetrable boundary of these units.

A Theoretical Refuge

The story described so far is academic in most senses of the word. It happens within academe. Its consequences may seem commonplace both within and outside of that context. The parallel with the deployment of terms such as economy, state, or society is evident. Each of these three words has been as thoroughly reified as culture. There is a difference, however: None of these terms today suggests the exact opposite of what it was originally intended to mean, and naturalizes what it was meant to question. The paradox of culture promoted by North American anthropology is unique. A word deployed in academe to curb racialist denotations is often used today inside and outside of academe with racialist connotations. A word intended to promote pluralism often becomes a trope in conservative agendas or in late liberal versions of the civilizing project. The story of how that happened is not merely academic. It is the story of a move away from

politics, the story of a conceptualization whose deployment denied its very conditions of possibility.

The political move in theory described earlier was not necessarily fatal, even with the limitations mentioned. Within academe culture could be read as a step back from politics, but this step backward could have been healthy if the privileged space it created became one from which to address power, even if indirectly. Unfortunately, the pendulum never swung back. The privileged space became a refuge. Culture never went out to speak to power.

I am not suggesting that sociocultural anthropologists should have become political activists. Nor am I blaming them for avoiding the correct political positions. As far as academic organizations are concerned, the American Anthropological Association has taken quite a few positions that can be described as politically progressive. I am willing to concede a lot on mere political grounds. But my contention is that within the terms of its own history of deployment, the culture-concept failed to face its context. What I see as a move away from politics inheres in that deployment and the silences it produced. Those silences on which I insist are not political silences as such—though there were enough of those also. They are silences *in theory* that shielded theory from politics or, better said, from *the political.*

Two of them are most telling: first, the benign theoretical treatment of race, and second, the failure to connect race and racism in the United States and elsewhere along with the related avoidance of black-white relations in the United States as an ethnographic object.

Race for Boas was a biological fact. It did not need to be conceptualized, but it had to be documented. It is between that careful documentation—in the terms of the times, to be sure—and the development of a program of cultural research that the race-culture antinomy plays out in Boas's work (Darnell 1998; Stocking 1982 [1964]). Yet as biological determinism seemed to fade out of public discourse with the decline of scientific racism, as nineteenth-century definitions of race became questioned in academe, and as anthropologists themselves sub-specialized further within the discipline, culture and race went their own ways (Baker 1998:168–87). The result is that today there is more conceptual confusion about race among anthropologists than there was at the beginning of the last century.

After a careful survey of anthropological textbooks at the end of the twentieth century, Eugenia Shanklin (2000) argues that "American anthropologists deliver inchoate messages about anthropological understandings of race and racism." Echoing the pioneering work of Leonard Lieberman and associates (1989, 1992), she documents inconsistencies and lacunas that combine to make anthropology "look ignorant, backward, deluded, or uncaring" about race and racism.[17] Should we be worried? Sociocultural anthropologists have also proposed myriad definitions of culture, perhaps their most favorite category. That they would not agree on definitions of race should come as no surprise.

Yet this response to Shanklin's judgment makes sense only if we reduce conceptualizations to mere definitions. If we return to the conceptual kernel I sketched earlier, the two cases are diametrically opposed. Behind the definitional differences about culture there is a core understanding of the notion shared by most

sociocultural anthropologists. Definitional debates about culture are in fact battles over control of that conceptual core.[18] The opposite is true as far as race is concerned. Definitional divergences reveal the lack of a conceptual core.

The absence of a conceptual core is verified—at times inadvertently—by numerous entries in the *Anthropology Newsletter* on and after October 1997, when the American Anthropological Association (AAA) presented its chosen theme for 1997–1998, "Is it 'Race?' Anthropology and Human Diversity." Both the statement that announced this theme and the debates following it confirmed what we could already have concluded from Lieberman: Something of the order of the kernel sketched above for culture is blatantly missing.[19]

I read both Lieberman's and Shanklin's research as confirming my intuition that few within anthropology want control over a concept of race, except for a few politically naïve or conservative biological anthropologists. It is as if North American anthropologists—especially, perhaps, those who see themselves as politically liberal—were worried about stating bluntly what race is, even as a matter of intellectual debate. From Shanklin's survey as well as from the *Newsletter* entries, we learn much more what race is *not* than what it is. If there were a majority opinion about a working concept, it would boil down to the following statement: Biological inheritance cannot explain the transmission of patterns of thought and behavior. Culture (and/or social practice) does, including the transmission of the belief that biological inheritance plays such a role.

That may seem good news. And indeed, it is. In a context marked by racism that statement is worth repeating loudly and as often as possible, as both Shanklin and Yolanda Moses, who drafted the AAA statement, insist. Still, against the background of the deployment of culture as an anti-concept, that statement brings us back to our starting point. We have gone full circle so far as the race-culture antinomy is concerned. We have restated our belief in the conceptual kernel. But in spite of that kernel, within the antinomy itself culture is what race is not and race, in turn, is what culture is not. We have gained absolutely nothing *conceptually* on the race-culture relation, the original tension that propelled the conceptualization. Worse yet, in another way culture has been freed from its original milieu of conception, from the political tension that made its deployment necessary. It can function alone. It has become a theoretical refuge.[20]

Some may object to the apparent harshness of that judgment. Have we not learned that race is a "construction?" Indeed, we may have. Yet this catchword only states that race is a proper research interest for sociocultural anthropologists, like other kinds of constructions such as language, history, marriage, ritual, gender, or class. It says little about how to conceptualize this particular construction, about the specific mechanisms of its production or its special modes of operation.[21] To put it most simply, if race does not exist, racism does; and the mere coining of race as a construction gives us little handle on racism.

Shanklin's work verifies that conclusion. Mentions of racism seem to be more rare than mentions of race in North American textbooks. The dominant trend here is not divergence, but neglect. While disagreeing on what race is, North American anthropology often overlooks practices of racism. That outcome was predictable. Studies of racism by anthropologists in North America are extremely

rare. To be sure, as Roger Sanjek (1994:10) recalls in introducing the anthology that he edited with Steven Gregory, there are some anthropologists "who never turned away from [race] in their lives or their scholarship." Sanjek's (1998) own work, as that of Gregory (1998) and others, are obvious exceptions. But exceptions they are. So are works on blacks in the United States, though here again one can point to a few shining titles, notably Melville J. Herskovits's *Myth of the Negro Past* (1958). Yet Herskovits's own move from the proposition that "[Negroes] have absorbed the culture of America" to the celebration of a distinct Afro-American culture (Mintz 1990) poignantly reveals the political dilemma of cultural essentialism and augurs the recapture of culture by race.

The fact that anthropologists traditionally study people in faraway places is not enough to explain these low numbers. Native Americans have long been favorite objects of anthropological enquiry. In a fascinating article, unfortunately unavailable in English, Sidney W. Mintz (1971a) juxtaposes North American anthropology's aversion toward the study of the black victims of white domination and its predilection for the "red" ones. Mintz has a number of suggestions to explain this bizarre polarity. I would like to insist on one of them, lest it be lost between the lines. Indians fitted quite well the Savage slot. Black Americans fit less well. The combined reasons are theoretical and political in the way addressed here. Whereas each "Indian culture"—enforced isolation abetting—could be projected as a distinct unit of analysis, it is impossible to describe or analyze patterns of thought and behavior among the people who pass for blacks within the United States without referring to racism and its practices. Without that reference, anthropology will continue to look irrelevant to most blacks.[22] With that reference, the pendulum would swing back. Culture would have to address power.

A Liberal Space of Enlightenment

Why does power seem to provide the stumbling block to anthropological theory at almost every point of this story? I contend that a recurring assumption behind the difficulties and silences we have encountered here about both culture and race is the illusion of a liberal space of enlightenment within which words-as-concepts can be evaluated without regard for their context of deployment.

On the front page of the October 1997 *Anthropology Newsletter* is another title: "AAA Tells Feds to Eliminate 'Race'." The Association recommended to the Office of Management and Budget to eliminate race from Directive 15, the Race and Ethnic Standards for Federal Statistics and Administrative Reporting. The rationale was that race and ethnicity are indistinguishable and commonly misunderstood and misused. Therefore the Census bureau should stop classifying Americans on the basis of race. Restating proposals first made by Ashley Montagu (e.g., 1974 [1942]), the AAA suggested first coupling race and ethnicity and then phasing out race all together.

The coupling seems awkward: native informants are likely to feel that one is not African-American the way one is Italian-American, especially since a reconsolidation of whiteness occurred soon after Montagu's initial proposal

(Jacobson 1998). This reconsolidation makes it both easier to claim the equivalence of all alterities and to subsume race under ethnicity (see chapter 3). Yet as I stated elsewhere (Trouillot 1995:133): "All hyphens are not equal in the pot that does not melt. The second part of the compound—Irish-*American*, Jewish-*American*, Anglo-*American*—always emphasizes whiteness. The first part only measures compatibility with the second at a given historical movement." Only when that compatibility is confirmed does one become "ethnic" in the U.S. context.[23] In the United States, as elsewhere, ethnicity and race need to be conceptualized together (Williams 1989), not evened out empirically or theoretically. Shanklin (2000) rightly castigates textbook authors who subsume race under ethnicity. Moses herself rightly implies that the change of labels may prove meaningless as long as "white" remains an unquestioned category. But can we really erase whiteness with a mere stroke of the pen?

A major contention of the AAA official 1997 position is that the public is misusing ethnic categories and especially the concept of race. Thus anthropology, which may have been silent on race, has to reclaim it and provide a better and unified concept in order to enlighten that public. The only way we can accept this solution as the primary response of the discipline is to assume a liberal space of enlightenment—a space blind to the world, isolated from the messiness of social life, within which the concept of race would go through its own intellectual cleansing and whence it would emerge with the purity to edify a world all too social and political.[24]

Left out of the discussion of Directive 15 are the practices within which these concepts and categories are mobilized and reach full realization. The problem with these concepts is not one of scientific exactitude, of their purported referential relation to entities existing "out there." The crux of the matter is the use to which these categories are put, the purposes for which they are mobilized, and the political contests that make this mobilization necessary in the first place. Here the academic, lay, and political lives of concepts (Williams 1989) intertwine.[25] Not to address this overlay boils down to assuming the imperviousness of the privileged space. That is a huge assumption. Yet it is a common assumption in anthropological practice, indeed the very one that overlays the deployment of the culture-concept itself.

In separating race and culture, Boas consistently notes "the errors" of racialist theories. Contrary to many followers, he does mention race discrimination in his academic writings as well as those directed at a popular audience (e.g., Boas 1945). Yet the fundamental strategy is to disconnect race and culture in anthropology, not to connect race and racism inside or outside of anthropology. It is within that space of enlightenment—and the politeness it guarantees—that Boas critiques the "ambitious attempt of [Count Arthur de] Gobineau to explain national characteristics as due to racial descent" (1940:263).

The evidence is overwhelming that Franz Boas, the individual, wanted to go beyond that space and its rules of engagement. His activism and his efforts to bring the results of his research into public space are well known (Hyatt 1990). At the end of his life, scarred by institutional fights within academe and appalled at the horrors of Nazism, Boas seems to question the very idea that truth produced within academe can be simply projected onto the public without a different form

of engagement that might imply a theorization of the relation between concepts and the world.

When read chronologically and against the background of *Anthropology and Modern Life* (Boas 1932), the essays collected posthumously in *Race and Democratic Society* (Boas 1945) hint at a dual progression rather than a fundamental break. From about 1925 to 1941, the themes—as well as a gradual shift in vocabulary—register a move from the description of politically neutral states of affairs (e.g., race 1925, race feelings 1932) to *inherently political categories* (e.g., prejudice 1937, racial injustice 1937, and racism 1940). The introduction and the concluding essay interrogate the purported isolation of academic institutions—and thus their mere role as exporters of good concepts. Boas wonders to what extent academic knowledge is influenced by "demagogues" and by both the prejudices and the institutional structure of the society at large. "A bigoted democracy may be as hostile to intellectual freedom as the totalitarian state" (1945:216). To be sure, "the ice-cold flame of the passion of seeking the truth for truth's sake must be kept burning. . . . But a new duty arises. No longer can we keep *the search for truth* the privilege of the scientist (1945:1–2; emphasis added). If this is not a full agenda, it is the closest anthropology came to the real thing in the first half of the last century.

As a rule, however, theory in sociocultural anthropology never followed that direction. Perhaps the political will was missing in—or poorly channeled through—the discipline as an institutional site.[26] Many of those individuals least willing to accept anthropology as refuge—St. Clair Drake, Otto Klineberg, Allison Davis, or Eugene King—never became its tenors. Perhaps the need to establish anthropology as an objective "science" limited the terms of engagement. It would be futile for us today to divide anthropological ancestors along Manichean lines. Ruth Benedict's pamphlet on the *Races of Mankind* (1943), co-authored with Gene Welfish, who was later a victim of McCarthyism, was banned by the Army as "Communist propaganda" (di Leonardo 1998:196). Yet in spite of her anti-racist activism, Benedict rarely questioned the implicit evaluation of white advancement. Worse, *Races* neatly reproduced some dominant ideological tenets of the times in separating "real" races (Negroes, Caucasians, and Mongoloids) from the not so real (Celts, Jews, etc.), most of which were comprised of whites.[27] Boas himself never went as far as Montagu (1974 [1942], 1946, 1964) whose 1941 claim that race was a complete fallacy made its various constructions a necessary topic for sociohistorical research. At any rate, the study of "race relations" relinquished by anthropology remained a purview of sociology—often with the unfortunate premise that race is a biological given. Sandwiched between *Races of Mankind* and *Race in a Democratic Society*, the publication of Gunnar Myrdal's much more influential *An American Dilemma* (1944) signaled both the absorption of culture by race and their twin capture from anthropologists in the public arena. Myrdal saw "American Negro culture" as a pathological distortion of the general (i.e., white) American culture.

The public resonance of Myrdal's thesis only verified an old division of labor within academe rarely acknowledged by historians of anthropology (but see Baker 1998). Anthropology's monopoly on both the word and the concept of culture obtained only when the use of either was restricted to the Savage slot. When it came to black savages in the cities, white immigrants, or the majority population,

other social scientists, such as political scientists or sociologists—notably of the Chicago school—took the lead. Their varying notions of culture challenged the Boasian race-culture divide at times. But even when non-anthropologists accepted the Boasian divide, the politics of race and assimilation and the belief in American exceptionalism led these scholars to emphasize the "white American culture" that Myrdal assumed.

To say that sociologists coined the wrong concept or distorted the right one for a general public obsessed by race is to miss the point. The political persona and professional career of Clark Wissler illustrate how much these public developments came from anthropology's own theoretical ambiguities. After a Ph.D. in psychology, Wissler turned to cultural anthropology and became an important figure in the field with ties to Boas, Kroeber, Lowie, and Mead, whose research he helped to fund.[28] His writings on culture-areas and "American Indian cultures" fit broadly within the Boasian paradigm.

When Wissler turns his gaze to "Euro-American culture," however, his conceptual handling reveals the extent to which conceptual and political ambiguities overlap. He identifies three "main super-characteristics" of "our [American] culture," one of which is the practice of universal suffrage and the belief that the vote is one of the "inalienable and sacred rights of man" (1923:10). Strange on many grounds, the proposition becomes suspicious when we recall that Wissler wrote these lines at a time when about forty states had laws against miscegenation and when grandfather, poll, and literacy laws—among other features of the Jim Crow apparatus—kept most blacks from voting throughout the U.S. South.

Wissler's position becomes both conceptually stranger and politically clearer in his discussion of the race-culture relationship—a topic "where everyone should watch his step." He backs his reserve toward miscegenation by evoking this major tenet of "our" American culture, universal suffrage. He writes: "if it can be shown that negroes may under favorable conditions play an equal part *in the culture of whites*, it is yet proper to question the social desirability of such joint participation" (emphasis added). The first issue is amenable to "scientific treatment." The second depends only on "the preferences of a majority of the individuals concerned" (Wissler 1923:284–87). In other words, miscegenation it is not a topic for anthropological study but a political matter best left to universal suffrage.

It may not be surprising that the same Wissler, who thanks members of the Galton Society in the preface to his book on culture for "many illuminating suggestions," also sat on the Executive Committee of the Second International Congress of Eugenics in 1921 and on the Advisory Council of *Eugenics, A Journal of Race Betterment* up until at least 1931.[29] He was most likely the influence behind the presence of Melville J. Herskovits in the pages of *Eugenics*, where Herskovits provided a rather polite rebuttal to those who saw interracial mixture as a recipe for undesired mutants (Davenport et al. 1930).[30]

I am not arguing that Wissler was a standard representative of the Boasians—if there was such a being.[31] I am arguing that his positions demonstrate not only the inability to produce a clear *theoretical reply to racist practices* from the space carved by the Boasians, but also the possibility to short-circuit culture as an anti-concept both from within (Wissler/Benedict) and from without (from

Davenport and Myrdal to Murray and Harrison). The space Wissler used between politics and "science" was carved by the two moves described here, which fully isolated culture (best approached from within academe) from issues of power, including racism, and made it relevant only to the world around the Ivy walls.[32] Wissler's position could be made theoretically consistent with most of Boasian anthropology, just as racist practices today can very well accommodate the belief that "race" is a construction.

A political climate that mixed nativism and exceptionalism is also part of the story of culture's road to essentialism.[33] Although North Americans have no monopoly on exceptionalism or essentialism, there is a specific mixture of the two in North American social science. Drawing from Dorothy Ross (1991), I read the American particularity as the confluence of three trends: a methodological reliance on natural science models, a political reliance on liberal individualism, and an ideological reliance on American exceptionalism. Liberalism and exceptionalism permeate Benedict's dismissal of racism as an aberration of North American democracy.[34]

Variously prompted by the confluence of those trends, Boas's successors contributed to reinforcing the isolation of the space that he carved for culture, especially as the discipline of anthropology solidified. Current reactions among many anthropologists about what they see as the misuse of the culture-concept rely on the same assumption. Worse, they nurture it. The quite common statement that anthropologists should recapture the word culture encourages a belief in that impervious space. If only culture could get back where it belongs, the world would be edified. But who is to say where culture belongs?

The desire to occupy a privileged space of enlightenment is a frequent feature of both philosophical and political liberalism, though not unique to them. It echoes dominant ideologies of North American society, notably the will to power. Liberalism wishes into existence a world of free willing individual subjects barely encumbered by the structural trappings of power. The dubious proposition follows that if enlightened individuals could indeed get together within their enlightened space, they could recast "culture" or "race" and, in turn, discharge other free willing individuals of their collective delusions. But is racism a delusion about race? Or is race made salient by racism? That is the crux of the matter.

Albert Memmi (2000 [1982]:143) may have been the first scholar to loudly proclaim that "racism is always both a discourse and an action," a structuring activity with political purposes. Semantic content and scientific evidence thus matter less than the denunciation of that purpose, argues Memmi.[35] Along a somewhat similar line, Étienne Balibar (1991 [1988]) asks how we can eliminate some of the practices of power rooted in ambiguous identities when we disagree with the politics of these practices. Balibar argues that we cannot get rid of these practices by repression, that is, by forbidding some kinds of thoughts or speech. He goes on to say that we cannot get rid of these practices through predication, either, that is, by the mere infusion of new kinds of thoughts and new kinds of speech.

One need not put a low premium on the value of thought and speech to recognize that the primary solution anthropological theory has tended to propose to the problems that many anthropologists genuinely want to solve is the infusion of new kinds of words.[36] From the early Boasian wager to the recommendations

about either race or culture, the reduction of concepts to words has worsened—hence the fetishization of "culture" to the detriment of its conceptual kernel. The distance has increased between theory and its context of deployment, and not only within anthropology. The pressures are much greater now than they were in Boas's time to find refuge in a privileged space of enlightenment where words are protected and in turn protect their writers (see chapter 6).

That space does not exist. Once launched, the concepts we work with take on a life of their own. They follow trajectories that we cannot always predict or correct. We can place them into orbit, design them with a direction in mind that we know will be challenged inside and outside of academe. Even then, there is no guarantee that the final meaning will be ours. Yet without such prior attention to the wider context of deployment, the words that encapsulate our concepts are most likely to become irretrievable for us. That, I think, is what happened to "culture."

Out of Orbit?

The debate continues about how much distance anthropologists can take from their own milieu. We need not accept the often essentialist terms of that debate to recognize that the culture-concept, as summarized here, is not uniquely North American but quite universalist in both its assumptions and pretensions. We must also acknowledge that its deployment echoes a voluntarism quite distinctive of liberal ideologies that permeate U.S. society. As anthropologists debated on culture within their privileged space, the word and the concept were placed into orbit in the world outside—mostly by non-anthropologists.

That possibility was premised in an academic deployment that denied the historicization of the object of study. If culture had remained tied to the race-culture antinomy even as circuitously as with early Boas—therefore maintaining an engagement with biology and biological anthropologists—or, more importantly, if its anthropological deployment compelled references to sociohistorical processes—such as mechanisms of inequality—it would have been more difficult to displace. Launched on some conceptual path, it still could have been nabbed in orbit. But as a self-generating, singularized, and essentialized entity, it was literally up for grabs.[37]

The complexity of the Boasians's private debates (Brightman 1995; Darnell 1997) was not immediately accessible to the general public. Even within the discipline, groups of specialists integrated different parts of an increasingly vast corpus and inherited only sections of an increasingly wide agenda. While some cultural anthropologists have successfully questioned biological determinism as far as group behavior is concerned, some biological anthropologists may have reinforced biological determinism as far as individual behavior is concerned.[38] The separation of race and culture heralded by Boas, which was the major public purpose of the culture-concept, filtered down quite slowly to parts of the citizenry (Baker 1998). By then it had become, for all practical purposes, a mere matter of terminology. Not only racism survived the Boasians; it survived them quite well. Worse, it turned culture into an accessory.

While the culture-concept helped to question the theoretical relevance of race in some learned circles, it has not much affected racism in the public space. At best, the racism that evokes biological determinism simply made room for a parallel racism rooted in cultural essentialism. At times the two forms of racism contradict one another. More often they reinforce each other inside and outside of academe. The biological determinisms of a Charles Murray or a Vincent Sarich both imply an essentialist notion of culture without which the biological package does not hold. Many of the chapters in *Culture Matters* imply an essentialist take on racial, religious, or geo-ethnic clusters projected as cultural isolates. Instead of the culture versus race effect that Boas expected, many in American society now espouse a culture *qua* race ideology that is fast spreading to the rest of the world.[39]

Culture has become an argument for a number of politically conservative positions and been put to uses that quite a few anthropologists would question, from the disapproval of cross-racial adoptions to the need for political representation based on skin color. It has also revived, with much less criticism from anthropologists, versions of the white man's burden. The "cultural argument" defense now has precedents in U.S. jurisprudence. The "culture of welfare" is a favorite phrase of pundits everywhere. Since Edward Banfield (1974) made a number of working and lower-class social attributes a matter of cultural choice in the 1970s, culture has become a preferred explanation of socioeconomic inequality within and across countries. All along this public trajectory, the conservative and racialist connotations of "culture" have increased.[40]

Both the politically conservative use of culture and the late liberal versions of the white man's burden have theoretical roots in anthropology itself: first, in the unchecked explanatory power many anthropologists endowed in culture; second, in the use of culture to delineate ever smaller units of analysis. These delineations ("the culture of science," "the culture of academe," "political culture," etc.) make the concept of society and the entire field of social relations less relevant both analytically and politically to any topic under study. The social order need not be analyzed, let alone acted upon; we need only to change morally dubious or politically ineffective subcultures. On a different scale but in similar manner, the burden of the North Atlantic today can be formulated as a duty to bring the enlightenment of Protestant Liberalism to the rest of the world (Harrison and Huttington 2000).[41]

Many cultural anthropologists are appalled by these uses, which they tend to discover too late anyway.[42] Indeed, few non-anthropologists now bother to ask us what we mean by culture, since it is often assumed that our expertise is limited to cultures of the Savage slot anyway. Since the early 1980s, a vibrant discussion has centered in economics around the relation between culture and development (e.g., Buchanan 1995; Mayhew 1987) with little participation from anthropologists. In policy circles we are often left out of debates about multiculturalism, which are accepted as "really" about race. When solicited we reject the engagement, preferring the isolation of our place of enlightenment. Even within academe we are losing ground to Cultural Studies in the debate over the appropriation of the word culture, a loss that seems to irritate some of us even more than the political capture of the word in the world outside. We keep telling all sides: You've got it wrong. But a lot of it they got from us—not only through our epiphany of

culture but also through our clinging to a space where we feel conceptually safe. If some Afrocentrists today believe that an inner-city Chicago kid is culturally closer to a Kalahari bushman than to her white counterpart on the North Side of town, and if the inequalities between the two are ascribed to culture, however misdefined, anthropology has to take part of the blame.

Adieu Culture

Blame is not enough, nor is it the most effective attitude. Solutions are necessary. They will not come from a single individual or group but from the discipline's collective engagement with the context within which we operate. I do not mean by this a political engagement, which remains a matter of individual choice. Anthropology's primary response as a discipline cannot be a political statement, however tempting or necessary that solution is in critical circumstances. While the primary context of our practice as professionals remains the academic world, the ultimate context of its relevance is the world outside, usually starting with the country within which we publish rather than with those that we write about.[43] While I am not suggesting that anthropologists abandon theory for political discourse, I am arguing for a theory aware of its conditions of possibility, including the politics of its surroundings.

The nineteenth century generated a particular model of the relations between academe and politics premised on an alleged difference of nature between scientific and social practices. Challenged as it was at times, this model continues to dominate North Atlantic academic life. The most visible alternative emerged perhaps in the 1960s and remains alive under various guises, including some trends of identity politics. That alternative model negates the autonomy and specificity of academic life and research. It solves the problem of the relation between academe and politics by collapsing the two: Science is politics and theory is insurgency. One does one's politics in the classroom or in academic journals. There is no need to problematize a relation between academe and its context because the two entities are the same, except that the first is a disguised version of the second.

Neither model is convincing. While the first assumes a liberal space of enlightenment where concepts can be cleansed by academics, the second belittles academe's specific rules of engagement and the relative power of different institutional locations. It perniciously allows academics to claim the social capital of political relevance while comforting them in their privileged space. Yet concepts honed in academe become most problematic in their non-academic deployment, regardless of their political bent in that initial setting, and most anthropologists today would be uncomfortable with the role that "culture" has come to play in politics and how little influence they actually have over its use. A major hope behind this book is that anthropologists can explore together the possibility of a third model of engagement that reflects our awareness of the true power and limits of our position as academics.

No single individual can or should define that model, yet I venture to say that its collective elaboration requires a responsible reflexivity. We are indeed speaking from a privileged space, but that privilege is fundamentally institutional, rooted

less in our individual or collective wisdom than in the economic and administrative shields that surround academe. Within North Atlantic democracies, imperfect as they may be, we are paid to speak our minds with relatively few personal risks, and we should use this privilege responsibly yet fully, lest someone takes it away from us. For cultural anthropologists in particular a responsible reflexivity includes the awareness that we constitute a major source of "expert" knowledge on non-European populations everywhere and that the knowledge we produce matters much more outside than within the discipline.

Until a collective engagement that makes use of this reflexivity manifests itself forcefully, what do we do about culture? If the story told here is somewhat accurate, the word is lost to anthropology for the foreseeable future. To acknowledge this is not to admit defeat.[44] Rather it is to face the reality that there is no privileged space within which anthropologists alone can refashion the word. Culture is now in an orbit where chasing it can only be a conservative enterprise, a rearguard romance with an invented past when culture truly meant culture—as if culture ever meant culture only. If concepts are not words, then Brightman (1995) is correct that strategies of "relexification" are not useful either.[45] There is a conceptual kernel to defend, but that defense need not be tied to a word that the general public now essentializes on the basis of our own fetishization.[46] We need to abandon the word while firmly defending the conceptual kernel it once encapsulated. We need to use the power of ethnographic language to spell out the components of what we used to call culture.

Quite often the word culture blurs rather than elucidates the facts to be explained. It adds little to our description of the global flows that characterize our times or to our understanding of their impact on localized populations—especially since globalization itself has become thing-like much faster than culture. Expressions that just ride the wave—such as "global culture" or "world culture"—have little methodological purchase. Their methodological or even descriptive effectiveness has yet to be demonstrated. Words such as style, taste, cosmology, ethos, sensibility, desire, ideology, aspirations, or predispositions often better describe the facts that need to be studied because they tend to better limit the range of traits and patterns covered and are—at least in their current usage—more grounded in the details that describe living, historically situated, localized people.[47] These words actually allow for a better deployment of the conceptual kernel to which I hold.

Do we gain or lose by describing clashes between *beur* and white youth in France as a clash between Arab (or Muslim) and French (or Western) culture? How close do we want to approach Huttington's clash of civilizations? Is the spread of McDonald's in France or China proof of the globalization of American culture—whatever that may be? We may be more precise in exploring how successfully North American capitalists export middle-class American consumer tastes. We may want to investigate how U.S. corporations—often dominated by white males—are selling speech forms, dress codes, and performance styles developed in Northern American cities under conditions of segregation as "black culture." The "black culture" being promoted worldwide is a recent product of the entertainment and sports industries, based on a careful repackaging of these styles for commercial purposes. What are the mechanisms through which these forms

and styles are accepted, rejected, or integrated into the South of the United States, into the rest of the Anglophone world, into Africa, Brazil, or the Caribbean, or into European neighborhoods that have substantial numbers of African immigrants? We may want to look at how the expansion and consolidation of the world market for consumer goods, rather than creating a "global culture," actually fuels a "global production of desire." What forces and factors now reproduce the same image of the good life all over the world and push individuals in very different societies to aspire to the same goods? We may want to ask how the current wave of collective apologies for historical sins is propelled by the production of new sensibilities and subjectivities and the virtual presence of a Greek chorus now naïvely called "the international community" (Trouillot 2000). The production of these new subjects, the rise of new forces and new sites, makes it increasingly perilous to hang our theoretical fate on a single word over whose trajectory we have absolutely no control.

Abandoning the word "culture" would free practitioners from within all the subfields of the discipline, and enhance dialogue between sociocultural anthropologists, archaeologists, and especially biological anthropologists. Biological anthropologists would not have to find "culture" in the behavior of humans or other primates. Rather, they would have to specify the role of biology in patterning particular instances of cognition, volition, and activity among the groups—human or otherwise—that they study, and detail the degree to which symbolic constructions inform these patterns. Debates would turn on specifics, not on generalities. Anthropologists will undoubtedly find that those specifics can open new discussions by providing links across disciplinary boundaries.

Urging fellow physical anthropologists to abandon the word "race," Ashley Montagu (1964 [1962]:27) once wrote: "the meaning of a word is the action it produces," suggesting that the only reasons to deploy racial terms were political. Sociocultural anthropologists need to demonstrate a similar courage. The intellectual and strategic value of "culture" depends now, as it did then, on use and historical context (Knauft 1996:43–5). There is no reason today to enclose any segment of the world population within a single bounded and integrated culture, except for political quarantine. The less culture is allowed to be a shortcut for too many things, the more sociocultural anthropology can thrive within its chosen domain of excellence: documenting how human thought and behavior is patterned and how those patterns are produced, rejected, or acquired. Without culture, we will continue to need ethnography. Without culture, we may even revitalize the Boasian conceptual kernel, because we will have to come to the ground to describe and analyze the changing heads of the hydra that we once singularized.

Chapter 6

Making Sense: The Fields in which We Work

Anthropology could not have simply landed where it did had the deployment of the culture concept not influenced its disciplinary path. To ask where anthropology is—or should be—going today is to ask where anthropology is coming from and to assess critically the heritage that it must claim. But it is also to ask about changes in the world around us, inside and outside of academe, and how these changes should affect our use of that heritage, and what is best left behind as obsolete, redundant, or simply misleading in this new context of global transformations.

When Charles Darwin wrote *The Descent of Man* (1871), the humanity he purported to connect with its animal cousins counted about a billion individuals. *Homo sapiens* had grown at first haphazardly over more than 200,000 years to reach close to 200 million during the lifetime of Jesus of Nazareth.[1] As humanity strengthened its mastery over a growing number of species, it took only 1,500 years for that number to double. As the global transformations emphasized in this book started, the pace of demographic growth accelerated further. World population jumped to 750 million by 1750; a century later it was over one billion; a century later it had more than doubled. In 2003 world population reached the 6.3 billion mark. By the end of the twentieth century humanity added more members in any single year than it had in any of the *centuries* before Columbus reached the Americas. By 2025 we will have surpassed the ten billion mark, barring no major catastrophe.

Many observers see in these numbers the harbinger of further massive changes, especially when juxtaposed with the rate of technological growth, including increases in communications technology. Others have insisted on the effects of speed rather than mass. As the speed of change increases, so does the speed of immediate response, as we have seen earlier; but so too does the gap between the devastation caused by new problems and the application of long-term strategies. Humanity faces an increasing inability to envision and implement durable solutions to the transformations it generates (Bodley 1976).

Does sociocultural anthropology—a painstaking enterprise that requires slow years of preparation and relishes in the long-term observation of small groups—have a role in that speeding and massive world? The answer to that question depends largely on what kind of anthropology one has in mind and who takes