Current Anthropology Volume 40, Supplement, February 1999
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# Writing for Culture

## Why a Successful Concept Should Not Be Discarded[1]

by Christoph Brumann

In the past decade, the idea that speaking of a culture inevitably suggests an inordinate degree of boundedness, homogeneity, coherence, and stability has gained considerable support, and some cultural/social anthropologists have even called for abandoning the concept. It is argued here, however, that the unwelcome connotations are not inherent in the concept but associated with certain usages that have been less standardized than these critics assume. The root of the confusion is the distribution of learned routines across individuals: while these routines are never perfectly shared, they are not randomly distributed. Therefore, "culture" should be retained as a convenient term for designating the clusters of common concepts, emotions, and practices that arise when people interact regularly. Furthermore, outside anthropology and academia the word is gaining popularity and increasingly understood in a roughly anthropological way. Retaining the concept while clarifying that culture is not reproduced unproblematically, has its limits in the individual and the universal, and is not synonymous with ethnicity and identity will preserve the common ground the concept has created within the discipline. Moreover, it will simplify communicating anthropological ideas to the general public and thus challenging mistaken assumptions.

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*There are times when we still need to be able to speak holistically of Japanese or Trobriand or Moroccan culture in the confidence that we are designating something real and differentially coherent.*

James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*

For a long time, defining cultural/social anthropology as the study of the cultural dimension of humans would have raised few objections among the discipline's practitioners. Now the place of culture within that definition is considerably less certain. Within the past decade or so there has developed what Sahlins calls the "fashionable idea that there is nothing usefully called 'a culture'" (1994:386), and one prominent voice even advocates "writing against culture" (Abu-Lughod 1991), giving a name to a whole "'writing against culture' movement" in Fernandez's observation (1994:161). Although the scepticism over the culture concept has its origins in deconstructionist and poststructuralist thought, anthropologists sympathizing with it come from an amazing range of theoretical positions that reaches far beyond that specific vantage point. It will be worth while to document this disciplinary discourse at some length before contrasting it with standard anthropological formulations of culture. It turns out that what is being addressed by the critics is certain *usages* of the culture concept rather than the concept itself, and I argue that it is possible—and not very difficult—to disentangle the concept from such misapplications and to find historical precedents for this in anthropology. In a next step I will address what I consider to be the root of the confusion, namely, the fact that the sharing of learned traits among humans is never perfect, and how this can be dealt with. Finally, I will present pragmatic reasons for retaining "culture" and also "cultures": the concept has been successful, and other scientific disciplines as well as the general public increasingly employ it in a way we should not be entirely unhappy about. Some of these uses are certainly problematic, but retaining the concept and the common ground it has created will bring us into a better position to challenge them.

## The Critique

The major concern of the sceptical discourse on culture is that the concept suggests boundedness, homogeneity, coherence, stability, and structure whereas social reality is characterized by variability, inconsistencies, conflict, change, and individual agency:

> The noun *culture* appears to privilege the sort of sharing, agreeing, and bounding that fly in the face of the facts of unequal knowledge and the differential prestige of lifestyles, and to discourage attention to the worldviews and agency of those who are marginalized or dominated. [Appadurai 1996:12]

1. In writing this article, I have benefited from discussions of previous versions with Hartmut Lang, Thomas Widlok, and particularly Thomas Schweizer, from the remarks of participants in a presentation to Schweizer's research seminar, and from the valuable comments of the editor and two anonymous referees. I am grateful for all this advice, although responsibility for any shortcomings of my arguments—which did not find favour with all those mentioned—rests with me alone.

> The classic vision of unique cultural patterns . . . emphasizes shared patterns at the expense of processes of change and internal inconsistencies, conflicts, and contradictions. . . . From the classic perspective, cultural borderlands appear to be annoying exceptions rather than central areas for inquiry. . . . The broad rule of thumb under classic norms . . . seems to have been that if it's moving it isn't cultural. [Rosaldo 1993[1989]: 27–28, 209]

> Culture . . . orders phenomena in ways that privilege the coherent, balanced, and ''authentic'' aspects of shared life. . . . Culture is enduring, traditional, structural (rather than contingent, syncretic, historical). Culture is a process of ordering, not of disruption. [Clifford 1988:232, 235]

> The most-dangerously misleading quality of the notion of culture is that it literally flattens out the extremely varied ways in which the production of meaning occurs in the contested field of social existence. [Friedman 1994:207]

Applied in this way, culture—a mere ''anthropological abstraction'' (Borofsky 1994*b*:245)—is transformed into a thing, an essence, or even a living being or something developing like a living being:

> ''A culture'' had a history, but it was the kind of history coral reefs have: the cumulated accretion of minute deposits, essentially unknowable, and irrelevant to the shapes they form . . . our conception of culture almost irresistibly leads us into reification and essentialism. [Keesing 1994:301, 302]

> Much of the problem with the noun form [*of culture*] has to do with its implication that culture is some kind of object, thing, or substance, whether physical or metaphysical. [Appadurai 1996:12]

> Culture . . . consists in transforming difference into essence. Culture . . . generates an essentialization of the world . . . [Friedman 1994:206, 207]

> A powerful structure of feeling continues to see culture, wherever it is found, as a coherent *body* that lives and dies. . . . It changes and develops like a living organism. [Clifford 1988:235]

This brings the concept of culture uncomfortably close to ideas such as race that originally it did a great deal to transcend:

> Viewed as a physical substance, culture begins to smack of any variety of biologisms, including race, which we have certainly outgrown as scientific categories. [Appadurai 1996:12]

> Where difference can be attributed to demarcated populations we have culture or cultures. From here it is easy enough to convert difference into essence, race, text, paradigm, code, structure, without ever needing to examine the actual process by which specificity comes to be and is reproduced. [Friedman 1994:207]

> Despite its anti-essentialist intent . . . the culture concept retains some of the tendencies to freeze difference possessed by concepts like race. [Abu-Lughod 1991:144]

As a result, the differences between the anthropologist and the people under study are exaggerated, and the latter are placed in a subordinate position. This increases the distance between the two parties to the ethnographic encounter while enhancing the anthropologist's privileged position as the expert and translator—or even the very creator—of such utter strangeness:

> ''Culture'' operates in anthropological discourse to enforce separations that invariably carry a sense of hierarchy . . . it could be . . . argued that culture is important to anthropology because the anthropological distinction between self and other rests on it. Culture is the essential tool for making other. As a professional discourse that elaborates on the meaning of culture to account for, explain, and understand cultural difference, anthropology also helps construct, produce, and maintain it. Anthropological discourse gives cultural difference (and the separation between groups of people it implies) the air of the self-evident. . . . It would be worth thinking about the implications of the high stakes anthropology has in sustaining and perpetuating a belief in the existence of cultures that are identifiable as discrete, different, and separate from our own. [Abu-Lughod 1991:137–38, 143, 146]

> In effect, the concept of culture operates as a distancing device, setting up a radical disjunction between *ourselves,* rational observers of the human condition, and those *other people,* enmeshed in their traditional patterns of belief and practice, whom we profess to observe and study. [Ingold 1993:212]

> In global terms the culturalization of the world is about how a certain group of professionals located at central positions identify the larger world and order it according to a central scheme of things. [Friedman 1994:208]

> The essentialism of our discourse is not only inherent in our conceptualizations of ''culture,'' but it reflects as well our vested disciplinary interests in characterizing exotic otherness. [Keesing 1994:303]

Proceeding from the diagnosis to the cure, a number of writers suggest that a simple grammatical shift might help:

> A view of the cultural (I avoid ''culture'' deliberately here, to avoid reification as best I can) . . . [Keesing 1994:309]

> I find myself frequently troubled by the word *culture* as a noun but centrally attached to the adjecti-

val form of the word, that is, *cultural*. . . . If *culture* as a noun seems to carry associations with some sort of substance in ways that appear to conceal more than they reveal, *cultural* the adjective moves one into a realm of differences, contrasts, and comparisons that is more helpful. [Appadurai 1996:12]

> Nationalists were themselves using what looked very like anthropological arguments about culture. . . One possible escape from this dilemma might be to abandon talk of different "cultures" altogether, because of its taint of essentialism, but to retain some use of the adjectival "cultural." [Barnard and Spencer 1996*a*:142]

> Following Keesing . . . I use the term "cultural" rather than "culture." The adjectival form downplays culture as some innate essence, as some living, material thing. [Borofsky 1994*b*:245]

> Reformulating culture: return to the verb. [Friedman 1994:206; the "verb" is not given]

Further, despite Moore's belief that "even if one wanted to, it would be impossible to trash the culture concept because it is so deeply rooted in the history of ideas and in the discipline of anthropology" (1994:373), some writers go so far as to envision an anthropology without it, albeit not in very strong terms:

> It may be true that the culture concept has served its time. [Clifford 1988:274]

> We need to be fully conscious of the varying boundaries, not so much of a culture but of cultural practices. A recognition of these features may make us wary of simplistic notions of cultural homogeneity. . . . It may indeed make us wary of . . . even using the term "cultural" altogether. [Goody 1994:255]

> In its application, the concept of culture fragments the experiential continuity of being-in-the-world, isolating people both from the non-human environment (now conceived as "nature") and from one another. . . . Would it not be preferable to move in the opposite direction, to recover that foundational continuity, and from that basis to challenge the hegemony of an alienating discourse? If so, then the concept of culture, as a key term of that discourse, will have to go. [Ingold 1993:230]

> Perhaps we would do best if we stopped privileging the representation of "culture," and instead focused on the level of events, acts, people, and processes. [Barth 1994:358]

> Perhaps anthropologists should consider strategies for writing against culture. [Abu-Lughod 1991:147]

In assembling the above collage I do not want to suggest that each of the quoted writers supports each of the ideas expressed. Nonetheless, there is a surprising degree of common ground among scholars who would not agree on very many other issues.[2] I am convinced that most readers of this article could easily furnish similar references from equally diverse sources. A profound doubt about the validity of the culture concept, justified in terms of the many misleading associations it is presumed to carry, has undoubtedly become an important trope in current anthropological discourse.

## Historical and Optimal Usage

There is no denying that anthropologists in their ethnographic and theoretical work have committed the aforementioned sins in abundance, but I am not convinced that they have done so *because of the culture concept.* To demonstrate this, I will turn to anthropological definitions of culture, since the conception of that term ought to be most clearly expressed there. Modern textbooks define culture as follows:

> A culture is the total socially acquired life-way or life-style of a group of people. It consists of the patterned, repetitive ways of thinking, feeling, and acting that are characteristic of the members of a particular society or segment of a society. [Harris 1975: 144]

> Culture . . . refers . . . to learned, accumulated experience. A culture . . . refers to those socially transmitted patterns for behavior characteristic of a particular social group. [Keesing 1981:68]

> Culture is the socially transmitted knowledge and behavior shared by some group of people. [Peoples and Bailey 1994:23]

Here and in other textbook definitions, no mention is made of boundaries, universal sharing, immunity to change, or culture's being a thing, an essence, or a living being. Since the negative tendencies identified by the culture sceptics are ascribed to a "classic perspective," however, one might expect them to be more present in older formulations. Here are some well-known examples:

> Culture, or civilization, . . . is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. [Tylor 1871: 1; Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1952:81]

> Culture embraces all the manifestations of social habits of a community, the reactions of the individual as affected by the habits of the group in which he lives, and the products of human activities as determined by these habits. [Boas 1930:79; Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1952:82]

> The culture of any society consists of the sum total of ideas, conditioned emotional responses, and pat-

2. For a more sustained and systematic analysis of the presumed defects of the culture concept, see Brightman (1995).

> terns of habitual behavior which the members of that society have acquired through instruction or imitation and which they share to a greater or less degree. [Linton 1936:288; Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1952:82]

> *Culture* means the whole complex of traditional behavior which has been developed by the human race and is successively learned by each generation. *A culture* is less precise. It can mean the forms of traditional behavior which are characteristic of a given society, or of a group of societies, or of a certain race, or of a certain area, or of a certain period of time. [Mead 1937:17; Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1952:90]

Except for the occasional use of an outmoded word (such as "race" or, arguably, "civilization") and for male bias, these definitions do not deviate fundamentally from the modern ones. Incidentally, most anthropological textbooks and encyclopedias I consulted quote Tylor's formulation, invariably with extensive comments (Harris 1975:144; Keesing 1981:68; Kottak 1982:6; Peoples and Bailey 1994:21) but often without giving any alternative definition (Barnard and Spencer 1996*a*:137; Goodenough 1996:291; Seymour-Smith 1986:67). This makes me wonder (*pace* Brightman 1995:527) whether there really is a significant gap between what modern and "classic" social/cultural anthropologists take to be the core meaning of the word "culture"; rather, they seem to have different theories about the same thing. And what applies to modern definitions of culture applies to the older ones as well: in the above quotations as well as in the other anthropological definitions in Kroeber and Kluckhohn's famous collection (1952), there is none which explicitly denies that a culture has clear boundaries, is homogeneous, does not change, or is a thing or an organism. I find it significant, however, that none of them unambiguously says so either, leaving these aspects open for investigation instead. One might argue that many of the definitions postulate discrete cultures by attributing a culture to a specific "group,""society," or "area," but none of them says that these units are always clearly bounded or that they must be so to have a culture attributed to them. Most definitions are also mute on the evenness of distribution required for delimiting a culture. The few that mention it, however, speak of a "greater or less degree" of sharing (Linton above) or even of every individual's being a representative of at least one subculture (Sapir 1949:515–16).[3]

The majority of the definitions in Kroeber and Kluckhohn's volume see culture as a set consisting of identifiable elements and use a noun followed by "of" and an enumeration of the elements to define it, as in the above "integral whole of" or "sum total of." Clearly, this additive notion of culture is only one way of conceiving it. But while the nouns used for this purpose tend toward either the abstract (e.g., "summation," "set," "system," "class," "organization") or the concrete (e.g., "mass," "pattern," "body," "total equipment"), even the latter ones are almost invariably employed in a clearly metaphorical way (which, it should be added, is hardly unconventional even with a word such as "body"—who has ever touched a "body of evidence"?) Some of the older formulations are indeed suspect of conceptual animism, as when Kroeber and Kluckhohn themselves muse on how "the fate of a culture depends on the fate of the society which bears it" (Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1952:165–66), or when Richard Thurnwald defines culture as "the totality of usages and adjustments which relate to family, political formation, economy, labor, morality, custom, law, and ways of thought. These are bound to the life of the social entities in which they are practiced and perish with these . . ." (Thurnwald 1950:104 as translated in Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1952:84). Apart from these exceptions, however, the most reifying and essentializing definitions in the Kroeber and Kluckhohn collection do not come from social/cultural anthropologists.[4] And when Leslie White characterizes culture as "an elaborate mechanism . . . in the struggle for existence or survival" (1949:363; Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1952:137), he puts this into a context in which it is obvious that no more than a metaphor is implied.

At the same time, however, one also comes across formulations such as the following:

> We can observe the acts of behaviour of . . . individuals, including . . . their acts of speech, and the material products of past actions. We do not observe a "culture," since that word denotes, not any concrete reality, but an abstraction . . . [Radcliffe-Brown 1940:2; Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1952:253]

> Culture is essentially a construct that describes the total body of belief, behavior, knowledge, sanctions, values, and goals that mark the way of life of any people. That is, though a culture may be treated by the student as capable of objective description, in the final analysis it comprises the things that people have, the things they do, and what they think. [Herskovits 1948:154; Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1952:84]

> A culture is invariably an artificial unit segregated for purposes of expediency. . . . There is only one natural unit for the ethnologist—the culture of all

3. "Every individual is . . . in a very real sense, a representative of at least one subculture which may be abstracted from the generalized culture of the group of which he is a member. Frequently, if not typically, he is a representative of more than one subculture, and the degree to which the socialized behavior of any given individual can be identified with or abstracted from the typical or generalized culture of a single group varies enormously from person to person" (Sapir 1949:515–16; Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1952:247)

4. These speak of culture as a "stream" (Blumenthal 1937:12; Ford 1949:38; Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1952:130, 132), an "embodiment" (LaPiere 1949:68; Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1952:112), or a "self-generating . . . pattern-creating order" (Panunzio 1939:106; Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1952:106). Even here, however, I assume metaphorical intentions.

humanity at all periods in all places . . . [Robert Lowie, as quoted in Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1952:165]

It is difficult to attribute essentialism, reification, or organicism to these statements or to similar ones by Murdock or Sapir.[5] It rather seems that, at least on a general level, a good number of typical representatives of the ''classic perspective'' were no less aware of these dangers than are today's culture sceptics. Here I agree with Brightman that an ''expendable 'straw culture' is . . . being retrospectively devised'' (1995:528) by the critics as a selective—and itself rather essentialist—construct that excludes those disciplinary traditions that are more in line with current theoretical concerns (pp. 527–28).

Where, then, are the unwelcome aspects associated with the culture concept presumed to have originated? Kuper identifies Boas as a main culprit, taking him to task for importing and bequeathing to his students a notion that was heavily influenced by Herder's idea of the *Volksgeist*—the spirit of a people presumed to be inherent in all of its material and mental creations (Kuper 1994:539). Fox, however, emphasizes that Boas himself was not consistent and that his followers were divided about the coherence of cultures, some of them (including Kroeber, Benedict, and Mead) holding to a highly integrated notion while others (notably Lowie and Radin) spoke of ''shreds and patches'' (Fox 1991:102) or concentrated their research on diversity and individuals (1991: 101–6; see also Brightman 1995:530–34). Overall, it appears to me that the former perspective gained weight with the ''synchronic turn'' in anthropology, the replacement of an earlier diachronic orientation (in evolutionism, diffusionism, historical particularism, or *Kulturkreislehre*) with a focus on the analysis of cultural systems at a fixed point in time (as in the culture-and-personality school, structural-functionalism, structuralism, and, later on, culture-as-text interpretivism). In the latter approaches there was certainly a strong inclination to see more cultural coherence than actually existed. This was further exacerbated in American anthropology by Parsons's influential segmentation of culture and society as separate fields of study, a theoretical decision that discouraged what interest there was in the social differentiation of culture and supported a mentalistic conception (Brightman 1995:512–13; Kuper 1994:540–41).[6]

Especially for exaggerated assumptions of boundedness and homogeneity, however, I believe that responsibility cannot be simply deflected onto particular theoretical approaches. Rather, a number of rarely discussed but powerful assumptions implicit in traditions of ethnographic writing, traditions that are much older than the discipline of anthropology, must also be accused. These assumptions include the existence of a mosaic of territorially bounded, discrete cultures of which the world supposedly consists; the irrelevance of intra-and interindividual variation, the timelessness of the cultures under study (which either have no history or have acquired one only by coming into contact with colonialism), and the superiority of precontact cultures as an object of investigation. In much classic ethnographic usage, a culture was simply understood as synonymous with what formerly had been called a people, and the units so designated were taken as the natural, internally undifferentiated, and unproblematic reference units for description just as they had been—and continued to be—in most pre- and nonanthropological ethnography. As a consequence, many portraits of ''Japanese or Trobriand or Moroccan culture'' are indeed marred by the shortcomings deplored by the critics. And when Malinowski meritoriously reminds his readers of ''the natural, impulsive code of conduct, the evasions, the compromises and non-legal usages'' of the individual ''savage''/Trobriander (1976[1926]:120), he is somewhat like a statistician who gives the average, says that there is variance, but does not care to calculate the standard deviation. No doubt it would be mistaken to search for a full-fledged theory of praxis in the work of Malinowski, Lowie, or Radin (see also Brightman 1995:540).

Yet still, at least in their more general and theoretical writings, there was a clear awareness of the constructed nature of the culture concept among a good number of representatives of the ''classic tradition,'' and one of them even elevated ''allowance for variation'' to the status of a ''central problem'' (Firth 1951:478). Hence, if a disciplinary precedent is needed, anyone seeking to retain a nonreified culture concept as an expedient abstraction (see below) can find it here. Definitions, as I have tried to show, have been open in this regard anyway, and therefore I propose to hold apart the historical usage of the concept—what it has been taken to mean by many in the past—and its optimal usage—what it could mean if used ''to its best intents,'' so to speak. Sometimes a scientific concept can no longer be sal-

5. According to Murdock (1937:xi, Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1952: 251), ''culture is merely an abstraction from observed likeliness in the behavior of individuals organized in groups.'' Sapir (1949:515–6; Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1952:247–48) argues that ''the true locus . . . of . . . processes which, when abstracted into a totality, constitute culture is not in a theoretical community of human beings known as society, for the term 'society' is itself a cultural construct which is employed by individuals who stand in significant relations to each other in order to help them in the interpretation of certain aspects of their behavior. The true locus of culture is in the interactions of specific individuals and, on the subjective side, in the world of meanings which each one of these individuals may unconsciously abstract for himself from his participation in these interactions. . . . It is impossible to think of any cultural pattern or set of cultural patterns which can, in the literal sense of the word, be referred to society as such. . . . The concept of culture, as it is handled by the cultural anthropologists, is necessarily something of a statistical fiction.''

6. By contrast, leading proponents of British social anthropology such as Fortes, Nadel, and Firth continued to view society and culture as complementary ''concepts of which the significant elements phase into one another'' in such a way that they cannot be adequately studied in isolation (Firth 1951:483). According to Murdock, however, British social anthropologists rather one-sidedly neglected the analysis of culture for that of society, so much so that he suggested repatriating his trans-Atlantic colleagues into sociology, where they would constitute a specialized subfield (1951:471–72).

vaged; for example, that of "race" has been proved to be empirically unfounded, has been abused enormously, and in subtle ways keeps getting in the way even of some physical anthropologists who use modern, nonracist methods to assess human biodiversity (Keita and Kittles 1997). I am not convinced, however, that past and present misapplications of the culture concept are of a comparable degree and warrant similar avoidance.

## Culture as an Abstraction

Discussing the culture concept, one has to distinguish between "culture" (or "Culture") in a general and "culture/s" in a specific sense (in the same way as Mead did; see above). The former meaning refers to the general potential of human individuals to share certain not genetically inherited routines of thinking, feeling, and acting with other individuals with whom they are in social contact and/or to the products of that potential. It is not very clear-cut and mentioned only in few definitions; besides, it seems to be derived from the second meaning, on which most of the definitions concentrate. Here a culture is the set of specific learned routines (and/or their material and immaterial products) that are characteristic of a delineated group of people; sometimes these people are tacitly or explicitly included. The existence of any such culture presupposes that of other sets of routines shared by other groups of people, thus constituting different cultures. The debate in fact focuses almost exclusively on this second meaning, and I will concentrate on it accordingly. It is the act of identifying *discrete* cultures that is held to be empirically unfounded, theoretically misleading, and morally objectionable by the concept's critics.[7]

Of course, cultures are always constructed, but they are so not only because of being "written" (Clifford and Marcus 1986) within the confines of sociohistorically constituted tropes and discourses but also in a more profound sense. A culture—as the above quotation from Lowie reminds us—is not simply there in the unproblematic way that, for example, a cat or a bicycle is. Rather, the term refers to an abstract aggregate, namely, the prolonged copresence of a set of certain individual items, and thus is employed not too differently from other nouns such as "forest," "crowd," or "city." In identifying a culture, we have to abstract such a set of items from observed instances of thought and behavior, selecting that which occurs repeatedly rather than that which is singular. This is a mental operation that is not in principle different from, say, identifying a style in individual works of art, and the same capabilities of memorizing previously perceived instances and ignoring minor differences for the sake of commonalities are required of anyone who undertakes it. Since in the empirical world no two things are completely identical, the result of any such operation is always contestable, and therefore one can no more prove the existence of Japanese culture than prove that of the Gothic style. Cultures can have no "natural" boundaries but only those that people (anthropologists as well as others) give them, and delimiting a certain set of elements as a culture can therefore be only more or less persuasive, never ultimately "true." Nonetheless, we may consider it expedient to go on using the concept in the same way that we go on speaking of art styles, forests, crowds, or cities; and we may do so in spite of the disagreement that often arises over whether these terms really apply to the specific body of art works, concentration of trees, gathering of people, or settlement that is so designated or where precisely their boundaries are located in a given case.

The core of the problem of identifying cultures can be illustrated with the three diagrams in figure 1. In these, capital letters stand for individuals and numbers for identifiable ways of thinking, feeling, and acting.[8] In the top diagram, there is perfect sharing among individuals A through F regarding features 1 through 6 and among individuals G through L regarding features 7 through 12. Identifying cultures is not difficult here: Features 1 through 6 represent one culture, features 7 through 12 another. Since there is perfect discreteness between the two groups of features as well as between the two groups of individuals carrying them, this partition represents the only possible way of distinguishing cultures. In contrast, features in the middle diagram are randomly distributed across individuals, and it is impossible to make out cultures in the same unproblematic way or perhaps in any convincing way.

The problems start with a situation such as that of the bottom diagram. This distribution is far from random, yet no discrete blocks can be discerned either. One possible partition would place features 1 through 6 in one culture and features 8 through 12 in a second. Each culture, however, would then contain features that are sometimes associated with features of the other. More-

7. One might object that culture is more than just the sum total of certain features that co-occur with a certain frequency in a group of people. This latter, additive view will perhaps appear entirely mistaken to those who see culture as a process rather than as a static distribution of traits or who follow Bourdieu (1977 [1972]) in assuming that the loose structures of habitus will guide people's everyday improvisations but never determine them in a strict sense. Neither of these ideas, however, can manage without determining distributions of features across people as a methodological starting point. Otherwise, there would be no recognition of processes—defined as that which causes the presence of certain features at one point of time and their absence at another—in the first place and no way of discovering that some specific habitus is at work leading to creative variations on a *common* (i.e., temporally and interindividually stable) theme in actual behavior. Wherever we locate culture and however dynamic we consider it, there will be no way around determining how given features are distributed over a given number of persons at a given time and how this compares with other times and/or other persons if we are to identify a culture, a cultural process, or a habitus guiding individuals' improvisations.

8. For the sake of this argument and also for the criticisms raised, it does not matter if any of the latter are excluded or if institutions or artifacts are added. Moreover, any observable feature can be included in such a matrix, including emic categories, ideal as well as observed behavior, norms and values, and people's cultural self-perception and self-categorization.

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | x | x | x | x | x | x | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| B | x | x | x | x | x | x | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| C | x | x | x | x | x | x | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| D | x | x | x | x | x | x | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| E | x | x | x | x | x | x | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| F | x | x | x | x | x | x | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| G | . | . | . | . | . | . | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| H | . | . | . | . | . | . | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| I | . | . | . | . | . | . | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| J | . | . | . | . | . | . | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| K | . | . | . | . | . | . | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| L | . | . | . | . | . | . | x | x | x | x | x | x |

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | x | x | x | . | x | . | x | . | . | x | . | x |
| B | . | . | . | x | . | . | x | . | x | . | x | x |
| C | . | . | x | x | . | x | x | . | x | . | . | . |
| D | x | . | x | . | . | x | x | . | x | x | . | . |
| E | . | x | . | . | x | x | . | x | . | x | x | . |
| F | x | . | x | x | x | . | . | x | . | x | . | . |
| G | . | x | . | x | . | x | . | x | . | x | x | . |
| H | x | . | x | . | x | . | x | x | . | x | . | x |
| I | . | x | . | x | . | x | x | . | x | . | x | . |
| J | . | x | . | x | x | . | . | x | . | x | x | . |
| K | x | . | . | x | x | . | . | x | . | x | . | x |
| L | x | x | . | x | . | . | x | x | x | . | x | . |

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | x | x | x | x | x | x | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| B | . | x | x | x | x | x | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| C | x | . | x | . | x | x | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| D | x | x | x | x | x | x | . | x | . | . | . | x |
| E | x | x | x | x | . | x | x | . | . | . | . | . |
| F | x | x | x | x | x | . | x | . | . | . | . | . |
| G | . | . | . | . | . | . | x | x | . | x | x | x |
| H | . | . | . | . | . | . | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| I | . | . | . | . | . | x | . | . | x | x | x | x |
| J | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | x | x | x | x | x |
| K | . | . | . | . | x | . | . | . | x | x | . | x |
| L | . | x | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | x | x | x |

FIG. 1. *Three hypothetical distributions of features across individuals.*

over, feature 7 does not readily group with either of the two cultures, and individual D may be seen as participating in both.

## Incomplete Sharing and the Identification of Cultures

No distribution of learned routines among real people will ever be much clearer than that in the bottom diagram, and consequently there will always be more than one way to cut out cultures from the fuzzy-edged clusters of habits that we observe. I suspect that most of the culture sceptics do not really want to imply that there are no such clusters of habits and that the distribution of cognitive, emotive, and behavioral routines among humans is as in the middle diagram. However, they seem to fear that by identifying cultures when confronted with a distribution like that of the bottom diagram anthropologists will invariably be misunderstood as implying a distribution like that of the top diagram. Ceasing to speak of cultures, however, also entails a cost, namely, being understood as saying that features are distributed randomly, as in the middle diagram. I doubt very much that this kind of misunderstanding is preferable, since it is not borne out by the results of anthropological research. Moreover, it flies in the face of the experience of the billions of amateur anthropologists who inhabit the world, who in their everyday lives continue to identify commonalities in the thought and behavior of different individuals and attribute these to their belonging to the same family, kin group, gender, age-group, neighborhood, class, profession, organization, ethnic group, region, nation, etc. Of course, they do so in an on-and-off, often semiconscious way that—true to its commonsensical nature—cares less about oversimplifications, contradictions, and incompleteness than anthropologists do and often explains difference incorrectly, for example, in terms of genetic or quasi-genetic transmission. But many of these amateur anthropologists would be puzzled indeed if we tried to persuade them that what until recently we would have advised them to call a culture (instead of, for example, "the way we/they do it") does not really exist.

Just as there is no way of deciding whether a glass is half-full or half-empty, there is no ultimate solution to the dilemma of being misunderstood as implying either perfect boundedness and homogeneity (when speaking of cultures) or perfect randomness of distribution (when denying the existence of cultures). Confronted with this dilemma, I propose that we go on using the concept of culture, including the plural form, because of its practical advantages. We should do so in a responsible way, attentive to the specific audience and also to the problem of communicative economy.[9] There are many situations in which "Japanese culture" is a convenient shorthand for designating something like "that which many or most Japanese irrespective of gender, class, and other differences regularly think, feel, and do by virtue of having been in continuous social contact with other Japanese." And I am confident that at least among contemporary anthropologists the first phrase will very often be understood as equivalent to the second. After all, anthropology did not discover intrasocietal variation only yesterday. While many classic studies of small-scale, out-of-the way societies certainly do not show any awareness of it, peasant studies, explorations of great and little traditions and of center-periphery rela-

9. By the latter I mean that, with space and time always scarce, simplification is inevitable, and therefore it is wise to decide circumstantially rather than in principle how much of it is permissible without distorting one's argument.

tions, research on gender, and the ethnographic study of complex societies and cities have been with anthropology for quite some time now and have frequently occupied themselves explicitly with such variation or at least acknowledged its existence.[10] Consequently, the danger of being misunderstood by fellow anthropologists when speaking of a culture is, I think, much smaller than the critics claim.

Moreover, when there is enough time and space, nothing prohibits us from representing the arbitrariness and internal variation of such cultures as faithfully as possible or resorting to formal methods of analysis for delimiting cultures instead of trusting our intuition or—as is commonly done when delimiting ethnic cultures—the judgment of the people we investigate. One could also specify a minimal numerical level of consensus required for a culture and then search for maximal sets of features that fit this requirement (standard statistical procedures such as cluster analysis offer themselves for this task). When describing the two cultures in the bottom diagram, we may distinguish between core features that are shared universally (feature 3 for the first, features 10 and—arguably—12 for the second) or close to universally by the carriers of the culture in question and others that are less widely and unequivocally distributed and may be seen as less central. Nothing prevents us from introducing temporal variation into the picture: searching for the same features in the same individuals at other points in time may produce different distributions which, however, could again be expressed in matrices and superimposed on the previous ones to introduce a third dimension. One may also think of replacing the simple dichotomy of presence/absence with quantitative values, since people will often act differently or with varied intensity in repeated instances of the same situation. All this increases complexity, but the distribution will very likely still be clustered, and we are still not necessarily thrown onto intuition as the only method for finding such clusters. Thus we are also left with the problem of naming them. It may be objected that the total matrix we are dealing with (Lowie's "only . . . natural unit for the ethnologist") has 6 billion rows—one for each living individual in the world, not to mention corporate actors that could also be regarded as culture carriers and dead individuals—and that it has an almost infinite number of columns, there being hardly any limit to identifiable features. On top of that, the matrix changes at a tremendous pace. Nevertheless, from all we know and from what social psychologists have found out about human striving for conformity (Lang n.d.), we can be sure that it will not show a random distribution but will be highly patterned. In an analogy with what I have said about historical and optimal usages, the fact that we are as yet not particularly well equipped to describe and explain this enormous matrix and the clusters therein does not mean that we never will be or that we are better off not even trying, and for this purpose, a word to designate the clusters will be useful.

Let me now turn to the way in which one culture sceptic arrives at the conclusion that positing "a culture" is something we should avoid. Borofsky, doing ethnographic fieldwork on Pukapuka, a small Polynesian atoll, learned that the islanders were all well acquainted with a certain "tale of Wutu" which according to most of them dealt with a man who cleverly escapes persecution by a couple of anthropophagous ghosts. However, individuals' renditions of the tale varied considerably, and even having it told repeatedly by the same person could produce different versions. These would deviate again from what the very same person presented when telling the tale in a group. Accordingly, there was no single content element of the plot that was included in every rendition of the tale, and even those elements that reached a 67% consensus in any gender or age-group were few. Only focusing on the 67% consensus of those individuals considered experts on the topic of tales by their fellow islanders would include enough elements to produce a version that approached the clarity and coherence which none of the individual renditions failed to display (Borofsky 1994*a*:331–34).

Clearly, there is no universal sharing here. Having a number of other Cook Islanders—or readers of this article—render the tale, however, would result in versions that would show hardly any commonalities either with one another or with the Pukapuka renditions. Most people would very likely reject the task, saying that they did not know the story. But among the tales Pukapuka individuals told, a general family resemblance is difficult to deny. Some elements appeared with greater frequency than others, and one may see these as more cultural and the rarer ones as more idiosyncratic or introduce an arbitrary minimal frequency of occurrence above which a specific element is to be considered cultural (and mention that limit whenever speaking of such cultural elements). Alternatively, one may search for those persons showing the highest consensus with each other and take their average version as the "most cultural"[11] or—in a kind of analysis that Borofsky does not consider—search for elements that co-occur with a certain frequency or that even implicate one another's

10. Thus, there is perhaps less need than Keesing has argued (1994: 303, 307–8) to turn to cultural studies as a guide in this regard.

11. This is commonly done in consensus analysis and is based on the assumption that, when asked for their judgment on cultural questions, experts will agree more often than laypeople. The latter base their answers on chance or improvisation, not on knowledge, and are therefore less likely to come up with identical answers to a given cultural question. Consensus analysis is a statistical model for determining whether there is a common culture behind informants' responses and, if so, how to estimate the "culturally correct" answer to a given question from those responses. The answers of each informant are weighted in proportion to the informant's average agreement with the others, a method which privileges the experts, since they tend to agree with at least some people (other experts). It should be noted that fairly small samples suffice to produce highly reliable estimates (Romney, Weller, and Batchelder 1986:326–27). Romney, Batchelder, and Weller (1987) and Romney in an annotated bibliography on his Internet homepage give overviews on the now numerous applications of this method.

presence, making for larger building blocks that can be subjected to the above operations instead of the individual elements. In any case, sequence seems to be unproblematic, since Borofsky offers without comment an apparently standard succession of all content elements (1994*a*:332). Whatever the approach, it is clear that all these content and sequential elements and aggregates which occur with significant frequency belong to a repertoire on which individuals may draw when telling the tale, constituting the material for their ''guided improvisations'' (Bourdieu 1977 [1972]). No Pukapuka individual is unaware of this repertoire, while most outsiders certainly are.

In contrast to Borofsky, who would not venture beyond ''the cultural'' (see above), I do not consider it problematic to call this repertoire a part of Pukapuka culture. Moreover, a description of the tale's elements and their frequencies and likelinesses of co-occurrence or even—if such can be found—the identification of larger clusters that constitute alternative versions of the tale would in my eyes constitute a faithful ethnographic representation of that specific part of Pukapuka culture, without confusing anyone about the fact that individuals will disagree with each other and even with themselves in their ways of making use of that repertoire. Representational techniques such as bell curves of certain features' distributions or identifying center and periphery within a cultural inventory—or domain, or schema, or semantic network—may help us here. This would perhaps come close to what Keesing seems to have had in mind when he expressed the hope that '' 'a culture' as a bounded unit would give way to more complex conceptions of interpenetration, superimposition, and pastiche'' (1994:310) and what Appadurai is looking for when he proposes ''that we begin to think of the configuration of cultural forms in today's world as fundamentally fractal, that is, as possessing no Euclidean boundaries, structures, or regularities. . . . we have to combine a fractal metaphor for the shape of cultures (in the plural) with a polythetic account of their overlaps and resemblances'' (1996:46).

The approach just outlined can easily be extended to other domains not only of knowledge but also of observed behavior. Everywhere we find sets of certain learned features that are shared more extensively by people who interact with each other than between these people and others with whom they do not interact or among those others. And everywhere we will find that people are aware of this fact, while they are certainly not ignorant of individual variation even among those who have much in common. We should try to describe the unevenness of any such ''differential distribution'' (Hannerz 1992) as well as we can, and it is clear that as yet the precise extent of interindividual conformity and variation within human groups has received insufficient attention, and therefore we do not have a clear theory, for instance, about how much social interaction gives rise to how much culture. We must also face the fact that once culture is found to be incompletely shared it will have that much less explanatory power for specific instances of individual thought and behavior. But sometimes communicative economy may make it expedient to speak of ''a culture'' and identify the constituent units of such a cluster as ''elements,'' ''features,'' ''parts,'' or ''traits'' of that culture. In doing so we at the very least avoid the impression that there is no such thing as the tale of Wutu on Pukapuka.

In my view, speaking of culture while making it clear that universal sharing is not implied does not automatically privilege coherence. Just as we may concentrate on explaining why a glass is half-full as well as why it is half-empty, sharing is as good a theme for anthropological research as nonsharing, and I wonder how we can avoid either when attempting to portray and explain people's ways of life realistically. And neither does such an approach preclude temporal variation or presuppose that the always arbitrary, abstract entity that we call a culture becomes a thing, an essence, or a living being. Moreover, defining anthropology as the science of culture does not mean that culture must be the sole focus of analysis: obviously, we do want to know what ''events, acts, people, and processes'' (see Barth above) do with culture and what they let culture do to them. Dropping ''culture/s,'' however, will leave us without a word to name those clusters that, ill-shaped though they may be, are nonetheless out there and do play an important role; and it also makes it difficult to define the discipline in short and positive words, at least if we do not content ourselves with practicing ''the fieldwork science.''

As pointed out, there is no ultimate logical reason to retain ''culture/s'' (or to abandon it), but there are pragmatic ones even beyond that of communicative economy. They have to do with the success of the concept, and it is to them that I will now turn.

## Pragmatic Reasons for Retaining ''Culture/s''

The concept of culture has undoubtedly exerted an influence beyond the borders of the discipline (Hannerz 1996:30):

> Suddenly people seem to agree with us anthropologists; culture is everywhere. Immigrants have it, business corporations have it, young people have it, women have it, even ordinary middle-aged men have it, all in their own versions. . . . We see advertising where products are extolled for ''bed culture'' and ''ice cream culture,'' and something called ''the cultural defense plea'' is under debate in jurisprudence.

It is concern for the nation's culture that makes the French government establish commissions to search for indigenous equivalents of unwanted loanwords, and it is again in the name of culture that the Chinese and Indonesian leaderships reject the claim to universal application of the Declaration of Human Rights, declaring it a product of Western culture unfit for exportation. ''Ev-

eryday ways of contemporary talk have been heavily influenced by our anthropological concept of culture'' (Keesing 1994:303). Thus, it is no longer certain that an ''evaluative, elitist view of 'culture' '' (Goody 1994:254–55) prevails, and it cannot be taken for granted that laypeople will invariably associate the word with the original meaning, in which it was reserved for improvement and its results (first of gardens, then of individuals, and finally of societies [see Clifford 1988:337; Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1952:15, 44]). Instead, they will often understand us fairly well, and this is quite remarkable, since the word in its anthropological meaning did not enter standard dictionaries of the English language before the late 1920s (Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1952:63). It is precisely this success that makes anthropology's brainchild difficult to control (Eller 1997:253, 251):

> As many commentators have noticed, the first thing to realize is that anthropology no longer owns the concept of culture (if it ever did). Virtually all elements of society—across the political spectrum . . . —have learned the language of culture. . . . American society has become culture-conscious, to the point of a ''culture cult'' in civic society. . . . Culture and difference have become the dominant paradigm of the day, and individuals are being encouraged, even driven, to conceive of themselves in these terms.

Moreover, this trend is by no means restricted to postindustrial societies or those aspiring to such a position. On the contrary, Sahlins (1994:378) states that

> the cultural self-consciousness developing among imperialism's erstwhile victims is one of the more remarkable phenomena of world history in the late twentieth century. ''Culture''—the word itself, or some local equivalent—is on everyone's lips. . . . For centuries they may have hardly noticed it. But today, as the New Guinean said to the anthropologist, ''If we didn't have *kastom,* we would be just like white men.''

Within the academy, the culture concept is also gaining popularity. At least in Germany, major feuilletons keep announcing the ''cultural turn'' in the humanities (e.g., Bachmann-Melik 1996), and the replacement of *Geisteswissenschaften* with *Kulturwissenschaften,* centering on a less high-brow notion of culture (Schlesier 1996), has its proponents. Cultural studies has fast established itself in many countries, and its adherents have moved into a more anthropological direction of conceiving culture (Keesing 1994:303), with, for example, scholars of high literature descending onto the worldly levels of popular novels, comic strips, soap operas, and advertisements. And after the demise of the two-block paradigm in the field of international relations, the Harvard political scientist Samuel Huntington predicts a ''clash of civilizations'' (1993, 1996) in which cultural differences give rise to multiple new blocks that are no less incompatible than the old, ideological ones.[12] While far from controversial within his own discipline (see Axford 1995: 191–94), Huntington's writings have certainly had a greater influence on the general public than any contemporary anthropological study can claim, extending to, for example, the German president Roman Herzog, who found Huntington's work a useful companion when visiting China (Nass 1996).

Huntington is an extreme representative of a more general figure of thought that is identified as culturalism or ''cultural fundamentalism'' (Stolcke 1995). It posits the existence of a finite number of distinct cultural heritages in the world, each tied to a specific place of origin. Since these are taken to be ultimately antagonistic and incommensurable, they and the individuals associated with them are considered best kept separate, ideally in their respective homelands or, if that fails, in ethnically defined quarters, as is currently being suggested by some urban planners in Germany (*Die Tageszeitung,* November 26, 1997). Stolcke finds that in European reactionary political discourse the new rhetoric of culture has largely supplanted the older one of race. Culture is a more egalitarian notion, since everyone is supposed to have it (although, of course, in distinct variants). But this is still unlike racism, in which some people are believed to be genetically defective while others—usually ego's group—are not. Cultural fundamentalism, therefore, will not serve as ideological buttressing for new colonialisms, but for fueling xenophobic tendencies in the Euro-American immigration countries it is already being amply used (Stolcke 1995: 4–8).

The notion of incommensurable cultures best kept distinct is not restricted to the political right wing, as Stolcke emphasizes (1995:6). It can be detected in recent papal encyclicals that introduce the concept of ''inculturation,'' that is, synthesizing elements of two cultures while maintaining the integrity and identity of each (Angrosino 1994:825), on either side of the current multiculturalism debate over educational contents in the United States (Eller 1997:252; Amit-Talai 1995: 140), and among those Greek anthropologists who deny foreigners membership in their association because they consider them not really able to understand Greek

12. There are whole passages in Huntington's article which read as if copied from anthropological textbooks. Consider the following: ''Villages, regions, ethnic groups, nationalities, religious groups, all have distinct cultures at different levels of cultural heterogeneity. The culture of a village in southern Italy may be different from that of a village in northern Italy, but both will share in a common Italian culture that distinguishes them from German villages. European communities, in turn, will share cultural features that distinguish them from Arab or Chinese communities. . . . People have levels of identity: a resident of Rome may define himself with varying degrees of intensity as a Roman, an Italian, a Catholic, a Christian, a European, a Westerner. . . . People can and do redefine their identities, and, as a result, the composition and boundaries of civilizations change'' (Huntington 1993:23–24). Especially the last sentence, however, is all but forgotten in the further course of Huntington's argument.

culture (Kuper 1994:545–46). It is also never far from most contemporary nationalist, ethnic, and fundamentalist movements. Here, at last, one finds culture being used in the way denounced by the culture sceptics, with, for instance, routine references to questionable megacultures such as ''African culture'' or ''Western culture'' (Eller 1997:252, 253), reductionist conceptions that restrict culture to, for example, ritual (Angrosino 1997:828), or vague *Volksgeist*-like ideas of a mystical substance or ethos that suffuses a given culture and the community of its carriers (Eller 1997:252; Angrosino 1997:827). Whether anthropologists like it or not, it appears that people—and not only those with power—*want* culture, and they often want it in precisely the bounded, reified, essentialized, and timeless fashion that most of us now reject. Moreover, just like other concepts such as ''tribe,'' culture has become a political and judicial reality, requiring any attempt to authorize more deconstructed notions to reckon with considerable institutional inertia (see the experience of the expert witnesses for the Mashpee Wampanoag claim to cultural continuity [Clifford 1988:277–346]). In my view, however, this should not discourage us from deconstructing such understandings and developing our own truths (which does not necessarily mean ''speaking for'' others in any case). For this purpose, I think that three fundamental insights about culture require special emphasis.

First, the social reproduction of culture is always problematic and never guaranteed. Maintaining cultural consensus across time and individuals requires considerable effort. This point is almost always sidestepped by cultural fundamentalists, who seem to presuppose stability as the natural condition of cultures and speak unproblematically of, for example, the—usually old but unspecified—''age'' of a given culture. Moreover, culture has often simply been adopted as a less controversial word by people who—consciously or unconsciously—still hold to racist ideas of pseudo-genetic transmission and its relatedness to phenotype (a point that is also made by several of the commentators on Stolcke's aforementioned article). Almost automatically, recognition of the problem of reproduction will lead to the role of power in achieving cultural consensus. Here it will be necessary to overcome the remnants of the ''Parsonian divide'' and re-sociologize anthropology—not simply by reciting the Foucault-inspired ''discourse↔power'' mantra and by routinely ascribing discourses, and culture in general, to very large and vague forces (such as ''technoscience,'' ''colonialism,'' or ''the German imaginary'' [Linke 1997][13] but rather by tracing them as far as possible to the interests of specific individual and corporate agents, thus giving ''authors'' (Fox 1995:277–78) to culture. I am fully aware that if there is one thing that Foucault wanted to discredit it was the idea of individual authorship, but what may be appropriate for the very large discursive formations he investigated need not be so for all of culture.

Secondly, there are limits to culture.[14] On the one hand, culture does not suffocate the idiosyncratic, and individuals can never be reduced it. To conceive of culture as a toolkit that can be put to manifold uses but will never do anything of itself, however, is hardly controversial now for the numerous anthropologists who have taken up a concern with praxis and the relation between structure and agency. More neglected is the other limit of culture, between it and what is common to all of humankind. Anthropological research on human universals has not flourished recently, to the point that there are no entries or index entries on universals in two major new encyclopedias (Barnard and Spencer 1996*b,* Ingold 1994; but see Brown 1991). Cross-cultural studies leading to the identification of universals have not fared much better, if their share in major journals is any evidence. Moreover, research on the expanding level of ''global culture'' (wearing T-shirts, mourning Lady Diana, having heard about global warming, knowing how to use a thermometer, liking soccer, etc.) that is socially transmitted but no longer tied to any specific location or group (Hannerz 1996:38) is only just emerging (Brumann n.d.). Yet it is precisely with reference to (genetically generated as well as acquired) universals that we can reject exaggerations of cultural difference and the notion of incommensurability, pointing also to fieldwork experiences in which anthropologists and their informants frequently develop common understandings and emotional affinity relatively quickly. And it is also—possibly only—from here that legitimation for universalist projects such as basic human rights can be drawn and their rejection as ''merely Western culture'' denounced. I do not agree that ''anthropology is fundamentally about difference'' (Eller 1997:251) if this is intended to be a programmatic—instead of merely historical—statement.

Thirdly, culture is not always ethnic culture, and neither is it always tied to identity. Yet anthropological as well as lay expositions of culture are frequently premised on a presumed synonymy of the three, quite irrespective of any commitment to cultural fundamentalism. For example, the *Encyclopedia of World Cultures* (Levinson 1991–95) lists ethnic cultures, and although thought is being given to including national cultures in

13. This article demonstrates how even the deconstruction of racist ideas can sometimes border on cultural fundamentalism. Linke observes an interesting obsession with blood imagery in ''the German public imaginary.'' That the latter is homogeneously distributed and clearly bounded and has been handed down unproblematically from the Nazi period to the present seems, however, to be taken for granted throughout her analysis. This appears questionable, since the metaphors of ''floods'' of immigrants—which, representing another kind of liquid, are found to be related to blood (1997: 564–65)—are hardly unique to Germany and since many of the extreme utterances of politicians that are quoted (1997:560–61) provoked public outcries showing that ''German political fantasy'' is, at the very least, divided. While I do not want to deny continuities in the history of German racism, I think that an analysis of public discourses which does nothing to gauge their distribution and influence over time must remain incomplete and suspect of arbitrariness.

14. On this point, Hannerz, borrowing from Redfield, has an insightful discussion (1996:30–43).

the Human Relations Area Files (Ember 1997:12) there is still no talk of including, say, academic culture, punk culture, or gay culture in their clearly trans-ethnic manifestations. Not that I would envy anyone who wanted to undertake such a difficult task, but I still think that we should be careful not to overethnicize anthropology and pay due attention not only to gender cultures but also to age (Amit-Talai and Wulff 1995), regional, professional, and class cultures, as well as to the global cultural level mentioned above. We should also more closely analyze the interplay of ethnic cultures with these other cultures that often do not stop at ethnic or national boundaries. On the same account, I do not consider it a wise move to follow Appadurai in restricting the concept of culture (or "the cultural," as he prefers) "to those differences that either express, or set the groundwork for, the mobilization of group identities" (1996:13) or to agree with Knauft that "culture is now best seen . . . as a shifting and contested process of constructing collective identity" (1996:44). To do so would prevent us from showing that not all culture is relevant to identity formation and that what collective cultural identity exists need not be ethnic. I believe that anthropology's critical potential with regard to ethnic and nationalist movements and to cultural fundamentalisms in general would be seriously hampered as a consequence. After all, it could be a healthy reminder that what people of a given nation really have in common is often trivial things such as familiarity with certain soap brands, commercial slogans, or TV stars and not an ever-present awareness of their common history and heritage. Anthropologists should remain capable of showing people that what they see as "their culture" is often a rather arbitrary selection.

These insights, of course, cannot be allowed to obscure that the reified notion of culture has become a social fact that itself deservedly receives anthropological attention. Nor will they rescue us from the dilemma that the demand for unproblematically reproduced, overlarge, and ethnicized cultures often comes from precisely those people we sympathize with and that this kind of culture is often deployed or commoditized more effectively than what we have to offer as an alternative. Moreover, any—anthropological or amateur—identification and description of one's own or another culture is potentially reactive, that is, capable of influencing that specific culture and the people carrying it when it becomes publicly accessible. Consequently, ethnographic innocence is a vain hope in an age in which mass media proliferation can very quickly turn any statement about cultural affairs into a political asset—or target (see, e.g., the public debate about Hanson 1990 as documented in Hanson 1991, Linnekin 1991, and Levine 1991, or the controversy about Karakasidou 1997[15]).

Still, there is no denying that many ordinary people have grasped at least part of anthropology's message: culture is there, it is learned, it permeates all of everyday life, it is important, and it is far more responsible for differences among human groups than genes. Therefore, I think that retaining the concept will put us in a better strategic position to transmit the other things we know than we would achieve by denying the existence of culture/s.[16] Choosing the former strategy, we can try to establish anthropology as the expert on—if no longer the owner of—culture, whereas opting for the latter places us in the difficult position of denying something about which we rightly claim to be more knowledgeable than others.

Staying with culture/s, we could object to Huntington that he is justified in paying attention to the role of culture but that the drive to power and wealth that underlies much of global politics is very likely universal and more often clothes itself in cultural differences than is caused by them. We could add that there are indeed anti-Western or anti-Islamic feelings in the world but that currently none of the pannational "civilizations" he identifies can count on a degree of internal solidarity that is in any way comparable to what frequently develops in smaller culturally defined groups such as nations or ethnic groups. We could alert him to the fact that almost any of the eight major "civilizations" he identifies conceals so much cultural diversity that their analytical value must be doubted and that global communication, migration, and cultural diffusion will certainly not make the picture any clearer in the future. We could point out that political salience seems to be more important than cultural diversity when categories as narrow as "Japanese civilization" and as broad as "African civilization" are considered to be of the same order. We could refer him to anthropological studies that try to identify wider cultural areas with less intuitive methods (Burton et al. 1996) and arrive at units far from congruent with the "civilizations" he proposes. We could sensitize him to the degree to which his separating a "Confucian civilization" from a "Japanese civilization" disregards important East Asian cultural commonalities (including precisely the influence of neo-Confucianism) and thereby falls prey to a myth of Japanese uniqueness that Japanese and foreigners alike have done much to maintain (Dale 1986, Miller 1983, Yoshino 1992).[17]

15. This is an ethnography about Greek Macedonia which in 1995 was rejected for publication by Cambridge University Press not because of qualitative deficiencies but for fear of retaliation from Greek nationalist sources (see the Internet documentation of events, opinions, and protests under http://www.h-net.msu-edu/ /sae/threads/CUP).

16. One anonymous reviewer considered the idea "to 'educate' the general public . . . a strangely sanctimonious view of anthropology's role in the world." I agree that a scientific discipline as such is not obligated to anything, but those of its practitioners who are paid for teaching or for research, often out of public funds, should feel some responsibility for disseminating truth. I also sympathize with pleas "to integrate the discipline more centrally within academia, and in public policy debates" (Weiner 1995:14). As I see it, all this leads to one or another form of educating the general public.

17. I restrict myself to the objections we can raise as experts of culture. There are other, equally serious flaws in Huntington's model which, however, need no anthropologist to denounce them, such as the claim that armed conflicts arise more often at the fault lines between his "civilizations" than within them—the inhabitants of

Moreover, we could tell practitioners of cultural studies and other disciplines that they are indeed right to extend their study of culture to the more mundane and everyday, but we could go on to argue that an internal analysis of the products of popular culture alone (as, for example, in most contributions to Schwichtenberg 1993) remains ungrounded if it is not complemented by ethnographic field research on recipients' engagement with these products and the resulting practices, discourses, and fantasies, referring them to, for example, anthropological research on television (Kottak 1990, A. P. Lyons 1993, H. D. Lyons 1993, Mankekar 1993*a,* Pace 1993, Wilk 1993) as a source of inspiration.

Of course, if a sufficient number of anthropologists agrees that the use of the term "culture" undermines such a strategy and contradicts all our scientific results, its meaning will eventually converge with this assessment and the term will have to be dropped (Brightman 1995:541). But I am not convinced that this is inevitable, and I regard the resulting speechlessness as too high a price to pay. We might consider a move similar to that of the pop star Prince, who lately gained much attention by renaming himself "The Artist Formerly Known as Prince," or "TAFKAP" for short.[18] If only for the more difficult pronunciation, however, I doubt very much that "TCFKAC" would become a comparable success. Therefore, I propose that we retain "culture" the noun in its singular and plural form and clarify for those non-anthropologists who are willing to listen what the phenomenon so designated really is—which, as I have tried to emphasize, requires very clear and definite formulations about all the things it is *not.*

## Conclusion

There is no immanent justification to be drawn from the empirical world either for using or for discarding the culture concept. Any set of persons who have specific routines of thinking, feeling, and acting in common will invariably be different with regard to other such routines, and therefore wherever we find sharing there is also nonsharing. If we agree, however, to "imagine the world in which people dwell as a continuous and unbounded landscape, endlessly varied in its features and contours, yet without seams or breaks" (Ingold 1993: 226), we will still need a vocabulary for describing its mountains, plains, rivers, oceans, and islands. The anthropological concept of culture offers itself for that task, all the more so since it has persuaded many people outside anthropology of its usefulness. There is no denying that it has often been applied wrongly and that it continues to be so, especially in the hands of cultural fundamentalists. But, weighing the successes and failures, I am not convinced that the concept really entails the criticized connotations, and I think that it can be dissociated from them and used "to its best intents." Staying with culture—while emphasizing its problematic reproduction, the limitations imposed on it by the individual and the universal, and its distinctness from ethnicity and identity—will enable us to retain the common ground it has created within anthropology and profit from the fact that the general public increasingly understands what we mean when we employ it. Denying the existence of culture and cultures will be difficult to transmit to the many that see them out there, and they will very likely turn to others who may then disseminate their questionable expertise without serious competitors. Any scientific concept is a simplifying construct and has its costs, but once the advantages have been found to outweigh these costs it should be employed with a clear conscience.

Ruanda certainly did not need cultural differences of a "civilizational" order to slaughter each other, and the Europeans for centuries did not need them either—or the specter of an "Islamic-Confucian" alliance forming against "Western civilization," which, to my mind, is simply unfounded.

18. An interim as "symbol"—graphically expressed by a symbol and never written out—attests to this artist's versatility in the field of applied semiotics.

# Comments

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Brumann has done us a service in laying out, side by side, many of the attempts by contemporary anthropologists to question the culture concept. He also reminds us of the complexity and richness of the anthropological tradition with regard to this central concept. There is a tendency these days to close out the history of the discipline—to forget that those who came before us reflected carefully on a range of theoretical problems and represented a variety of approaches.

His intelligent arguments in defense of the culture concept, however, miss the mark. I think he needs to ask why it is that so many of us might want to question the concept. What is at stake? As he is careful to note, the anthropologists in his collages come out of different theoretical traditions and make their arguments for different reasons. I will let others speak for themselves. My own argument for writing against culture was developed in the context of trying to think how I might write an ethnography of a Bedouin community (in which I had worked for many years) that did justice to the complexity, uncertainty, and contestations of everyday life and to the individuality of its members. I was hoping to achieve in my text some fidelity to my experience of being there. I was also working with a strong sense, following Edward Said's critique of Orientalism, of the ways in which representations of people in other parts of the world, particularly parts of the world that are viewed with antipathy in the West, might reinforce—or undermine—such antipathies. I

concluded that the idea of "a culture," with its inevitable generalizations and typifications, had become a central component of the distancing and othering against which I wanted to work, even while I recognized that humans are, in the broadest sense, "cultural" beings.

I now feel even more strongly that the concept is problematic, mostly because I do not agree with Brumann that "usages" can be separated from "the concept itself." I cannot accept the idealism that distinguishes "historical usages" from "optimal usages." Perhaps this is a disagreement about language. I favor pragmatics over semantics. I do not think that concepts have transcendent or true meanings. Concepts are human creations and socially embedded. They are employed only by real people in real situations. To quote the definitions, many very subtle, offered by anthropologists of the past is to be too literal. Such definitions tell us nothing about the contexts in which they arose or, more important, the contexts in which the concept is put into play and with what impact.

Brumann says that there are pragmatic reasons for staying with the concept; I think that there are pragmatic reasons for questioning it. He gives us two reasons for reclaiming the concept: communicative economy or expediency (it is a shorthand for the notion of shared routines which surely we all recognize exist) and the preservation of our authority as experts to intervene when nonanthropologists such as cultural fundamentalists (a wonderful term!) misuse the concept. In some ways, I grant him the first. We all know in some sort of rough way that different groups of people share certain things, ways of thinking and doing. Who could deny it? And what other name is there for this? Despite the virtues of Brumann's definition of culture as an abstraction, though, I doubt that anyone today would be willing to undertake the formidable task he proposes of drawing up matrices of shared and nonshared features. The larger problem is that refining and redefining cannot solve the problems created by the fact that the culture concept carries historical accretions and takes its meaning from the many contexts in which it is and has been invoked. The concept is always contaminated by the politicized world in which it is used, the same world in which anthropology was born and flourished. That "billions of amateur anthropologists" would find us strange to deny what they "know" is precisely the problem.

This, I believe, is the crux of our disagreement. Brumann admits that the concept of "race" had to be abandoned as scientifically invalid and so subject to devastating political uses as to be dangerous. Culture, he claims, is different. But is it? The fact that it is such a "successful" and popular concept should be cause for suspicion, not self-congratulation. That the concept lends itself to usages so apparently corrupting of the anthropological ones as the pernicious theses of Samuel Huntington's clash of civilizations is, for me, serious. Huntington's glorification of Western superiority and gross simplification and reification of cultures and cultural difference resonate with popular sentiment and racist politics. It seems to me that our role is not to use our expertise in "culture" to correct him (by showing that his cultural units are too big or too incommensurate, too homogenized or too crude) but to criticize the very notion of setting up groups of people defined by shared cultures as hostile and opposed. If civilizations are extensions of cultures and cultures depend on culture and we do not question the notion of culture, then we are not in a position to mount this critique.

There are other arguments to be made about the way in which the culture concept is unhelpful. These can best be made by taking up a small, perhaps throwaway point that Brumann makes in defense of "culture." He points to the contributions that anthropological studies of television might make to cultural studies. I agree absolutely that we must complement the study of the products of popular culture with "ethnographic field research on recipients' engagement with these products and the resulting practices, discourses, and fantasies," but as someone who has been engaged in exactly such field research for almost eight years now I fail to see how this will vindicate "culture." Quite the opposite.

In a recent article dedicated to Clifford Geertz (surely the most influential American theorist of culture, inexplicably absent from Brumann's discussion) entitled "The Interpretation of Culture(s) After Television," I reflect on how and why anthropologists should study television on the basis of some thoughts on Egyptian television serials' place in the lives of some villagers in Upper Egypt. I conclude one section (1997:121) as follows:

> Taking television seriously forces us to think about "culture" not so much as a system of meaning or even a way of life but as something whose elements are produced, censored, paid for, and broadcast across a nation, even across national boundaries. The hegemonic or ideological—and thus power-related—nature of mass-mediated cultural texts in the service of national, class, or commercial projects is undeniable. This, in turn, should lead us to think about the ways that aspects of what we used to think of as local culture, such as moral values about the proper age of marriage or the propriety of women's education, are themselves not neutral features to be interpreted but the sometimes contested result of other, more local, projects of power that are worth analyzing.

I go on to note that ethnographies of television (because its cultural texts are produced elsewhere and inserted into local households, communities, and nations) "confirm for us the need to rethink the notion of culture in the singular, as a shared set of meanings distinct from those held by other communities sometimes called 'cultures' " (p. 121). I do not deny the existence of reactive processes of cultural assertion, the same ones that Brumann, following Sahlins, notes. I see these as politicized processes of identity formation in global contexts where culture has already been made (through colonialism and neocolonialism) definitional. But I also point

out that these reactive uses of ''culture'' are balanced by many other processes in the world today that unsettle the boundaries of cultures. The encounters that television stimulates among lifeworlds, sensibilities, and ideas make especially problematic the notion that cultures are localized communities of people ''suspended in shared webs of meaning''—or, to use Brumann's terminology, with shared routines. I conclude a long section on the different forms of cosmopolitanism that four Egyptian village women embody by calling for analysis of the cultural hybridizations and forms of cosmopolitanism we find in places like Egyptian villages. I argue (as perhaps Appadurai does not) that we need to trace them to particular configurations of power, education, and wealth in particular places (p. 127). Looking at the best of other research on television by anthropologists, such as that by Ginsburg (1993), Mankekar (1993*a, b*), and Rofel (1994), I find similar attention to social fields of power and national ideologies, not ''culture'' or ''cultures.''

In short, although I am impressed by Brumann's attempt to distinguish the different usages of the culture concept and his insistence that the slippage between ''culture'' (as an abstraction signifying shared features) and the notion of bounded localized ''cultures'' is not intellectually necessary, I give greater weight to the social and political life of the concept as it has developed historically. I thus question its continuing usefulness. It is, perhaps, as Brumann suggests, a case of the cup half-full or half-empty.

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What a breath of fresh air this piece is! And how encouraging to see an article so clearly out of line with postmodern orthodoxy published in a major anthropological journal! Admittedly, the concluding section reveals that the author shares the postmodern belief in the myth of ''global culture,'' as well as the confusion between culture and ethnicity, on the one hand, and culture and subculture, on the other. But the article does such a good job at revealing the ''emperor-has-no-clothes'' aspect of fashionable critiques of the anthropological culture concept and highlights so well the danger of abandoning this concept just when it is increasingly being misused at the popular level that it must be heartily welcomed in spite of its drawbacks.

The points the article argues are not new; in fact, eloquent clarifications of these issues have been made before (e.g., Goldschmidt 1985). What is valuable is the presentation of such a discussion now. More than two decades of postmodern indoctrination have induced extreme theoretical fatigue in many anthropologists. As a consequence, most dissenting voices—at least in North America, and especially among younger scholars—have been silenced. As another consequence, there has been an enormous growth of what Barrett has memorably called ''no-name anthropology'' (1996:179): ethnographic writing which avoids theoretical issues altogether but continues to be built upon the application of traditional anthropological research methods.

Indeed, the issue of method—which Brumann does not address—is a crucial argument in support of this article's thesis. The way sociocultural anthropologists have been conducting research, at least since the beginning of the 20th century, is fundamentally based upon the assumption that there is a particular form of human organization—called ''culture''—that can be described and analyzed through participant observation, collection of documentary materials, and interviewing. And postmodern anthropologists have not been able to suggest—let alone implement—one single, minuscule, peripheral research method that differs in any substantive way from those developed around foundational disciplinary assumptions (see Bernard 1998). Therefore, not only does the emperor have no clothes, but if he did they would be the very same old clothes he has been wearing all along. This point needs emphasizing, because it preempts Brumann's concession that ''if a sufficient number of anthropologists agrees that the use of the term 'culture' . . . contradicts all our scientific results, . . . the term will have to be dropped.'' Even the anthropologists who most criticize the culture concept do research by applying methods based on the assumption of human ''culturality.''

Furthermore, as Brumann points out, this assumption has *never* implied the reification process critics have imputed to it. The reification of culture, however, has become intrinsic to the folk use of the concept and fuels its politicization (Wright 1998). Thus, far from justifying the wanton abandonment of our discipline's core concept, the times demand that anthropologists actively engage in counteracting the dangers of ''cultural fundamentalism'' through the judicious dissemination of disciplinary insights.

But, alas, intellectuals operate within specific cultural contexts, and postmodern anthropology has been greatly influenced by the increasingly popular ''consumer view'' of culture, according to which cultural practices are ''invented'' and cultural identity is ''negotiable.'' In the postmodern world people often believe, with Margaret Thatcher, that there is no such a thing as a society—there are only individuals. Consequently, personal identity becomes a major preoccupation, and consumption is the only tool for defining it. In this context, culture becomes the ultimate commodity (Cerroni-Long 1995:5–6; 1996).

Brumann's paper usefully reminds us that anthropology's original aim was *not* the analysis of identity politics; rather, it was the holistic study of our species for the purpose of better understanding its overall characteristics. In particular, sociocultural anthropology set out to document and analyze the features of group behavior of a very particular kind—the one involving the definition of enduring aggregates of people, recognized as such by their members, within which all functions

necessary for the continuation of communal life are performed by in-members.

Calling the patterns of behavior emerging in such circumstances ''culture'' does not make it into a ''thing'' any more than defining a human disease in terms of its symptoms implies that it would exist independently of its carriers. But a bout of fever does not malaria make; to reveal a disease symptoms must have specific intensity, consistency, and configurations. Similarly, not just *any* type of group behavior is necessarily correlated with cultural membership, nor is it sufficient to define a culture. Can wearing T-shirts, liking soccer, or mourning Lady Diana be seriously related to membership in a ''global culture,'' as Brumann suggests? Moreover, while various factors—such as age, gender, and material conditions—may lead to the formation of specific subcultures, there is no convincing evidence that they create what Brumann calls ''cultures that often do not stop at ethnic or national boundaries.'' In fact, comparing subcultures cross-culturally highlights their cultural specificity.

Ingold's call to ''imagine the world in which people dwell as a continuous and unbounded landscape, endlessly varied in its features and contours, yet without seams or breaks'' is answered by Brumann with the commonsense observation that, in such a world, we ''still need a vocabulary for describing its mountains, plains, rivers, oceans, and islands.'' But successful map making requires consensus on what constitutes a mountain, or a river, or an island. In particular, in a world in which mountains and molehills are increasingly confused, it is crucial to clarify our definitions. Just arguing for the continued use of the culture concept may not be enough. Perhaps, now that modern anthropology has introduced the distinction between ''Culture'' and ''culture/s,'' it is time to introduce yet another term—paraphrasing Hartman (1997:35) I shall propose ''kulcha''—to distinguish the ''culture of everything'' from anthropology's real pursuit. This might offer a new perspective from which to view anthropological expertise and redefine its application.

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Brumann argues that the concept of culture is, given certain modifications, still useful. The main thrust of his argument is that imperfect sharing of learned traits does not invalidate the concept of culture because, while not perfectly bounded, different groups of people display enough boundedness in the sharing of learned traits to make it reasonable to speak of ''Japanese culture'' or ''punk culture.'' There are three comments I would like to make about his piece.

The first is about his identification of culture with ''shared learned routines.'' One of the central debates of anthropology in the fifties and sixties was about just this issue. The position taken by Geertz (1973), Schneider (1976), Goodenough (1957), and others was that the concept of culture should be defined not by the behaviors and artifacts shared within a society but by meanings, symbols, understandings, knowledge, ideas, etc. One reason for shifting the locus of culture from behavior to idea was that if culture is defined as shared behavior one cannot then use the concept of culture to explain why the Japanese or Pukapuka do what they do. If the term ''culture'' refers to what some group of people does, then we add nothing except confusion when we say that some group of people does what it does because of its culture. *In the ''totality of behavior'' sense, the concept of culture has no explanatory value.* Whether the shift of the term ''culture'' from behavior to idea was a good move can be debated, but in most current anthropological writing ''culture'' is defined as meaning or knowledge (D'Andrade 1995, 1996). It is dismaying that Brumann's review does not include the literature on the nature of culture by psychological anthropologists such as Wallace (1960), Roberts (1987), Spiro (1987), Shweder (1990), Romney, Moore, and Rusch (1997), and Strauss and Quinn (1997). However, this comment does not affect Brumann's main thesis, since one could make the same distributional argument about mazeways, propositions, schemas, or cultural models that Brumann makes about behavior traits.

More problematic is Brumann's argument that various groups of individuals can be characterized by a partially unique core of traits. In his figure 1 he presents an example of two groups of individuals and two groups of traits in which each group has a large core of traits unique to it. The issue is whether this is a reasonable model of the real world. If one goes back to Driver's maps of culture traits of North American Indians (Driver 1961)—one of the more thorough attempts in anthropology to examine trait distributions—one finds that the actual situation with regard to the distribution of traits is very complex. Very few societies have any traits that are unique. Society A shares trait 1 with societies B and C, trait 2 with society D, traits 3 and 4 with societies B, E, and F, traits 5 and 6 with societies D, E, and G, and so on. American society, for example, shares the English language with other societies, the worship of a single high god with other societies, the norm of nuclear families with other societies, a strong value on equality with other societies, etc. This pervasive sharing of culture traits across group boundaries is not just a modern phenomenon, as the work of Murdock, Driver, and other attests. Of course, there may be a few traits that are unique to a given society—perhaps only in Japan, for example, is there an emperor who is venerated but lacks administrative authority—but unique traits at any level of group aggregation are rare.

There is a different sense in which the traits of a society do tend to be distinctive which Brumann does not consider. Often what is distinctive is not the individual's traits but particular *combinations* of traits. There is a joke that Canada could have been a wonderful country—it could have had American technology, British

government, and French cooking. However, it ended up with British technology, French government, and American cooking. According to the joke—its ethnographic validity could be questioned—what is distinctive about Canada is its combination of traits, not any set of traits unique to Canada.

Finally, a comment about culture, reification, and essentialization: There is nothing wrong with reification and essentialization if what one reifies and essentializes has strong causal properties. "Motor oil reduces friction in a car engine." This proposition reifies motor oil and gives it essentialized causal properties. The proposition is useful and true because motor oil has causal powers which reduce friction. To categorize the great quantum flux of the universe into "somethings" is to engage in reification, and to treat any category of flux as "doing something" is to essentialize it, that is, to attribute to it causal powers. Without reification and essentialization there is no way to explain things.

The real issue concerns what can be truly and usefully reified and essentialized. Most social scientists agree that that race as a biological construct does not have the causal properties that racists give it. On the basis of the preponderance of the evidence, it is an empirical error to essentialize race by giving it causal properties. But does *culture* have causal properties? Does it, *as a totality,*reproduce itself, give meaning to life, legitimate institutions, etc? Can we reasonably essentialize and reify culture? Can we say that *culture is a big thing that does things?* Brumann at one place in his article seems to agree with the current critique that we cannot. He seems to hold that particular traits are the real things that do things, the "tools" in the "tool kit" we call culture. If that is the case, then we need to identify, name, reify, and find the proper essentializations for these particular tools. These complexes may be cultural in the sense that they are part of what Spiro (1991) calls the social heritage, but that does not make the vast totality of any society's social heritage of much explanatory interest. If culture as a totality can't do anything, why should one care about *it?* What makes *it* important?

In an answer to exactly this question Brumann asserts, later in his article, speaking of culture, that "it is far more responsible for differences among human groups than genes." Here the term "culture" reemerges as a thing with striking causal powers. Even if Brumann really means that it is the particular cultural tools that are causally powerful, how can "specific learned routines (and/or their material and immaterial products)" be *responsible* for differences in behavior? To identify a culture by grouping individuals on the basis of differences in behavior and then to attribute differences in behavior to culture simply reinvents the classic tautology mentioned above.

But, more important, *what is in this tool kit anyway?* Certainly most anthropologists believe that some things in the social heritage have causal powers. What are these things, and what are their causal powers? In my view, this is the underlying issue that motivates the current debate about culture. Strauss and Quinn (1997) present a detailed analysis of this problem. One might start from there.

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Brumann is "writing for culture," and this rhetorically positions him in diametric opposition to Abu-Lughod's "writing against culture." Interestingly, the argument comes out of German academia. From the perspective of intellectual history, concepts of culture have never attained the significance in international anthropology that they have had in anthropology's regional U.S. and German variants. Politically, however, that is, in view of closed borders for refugees and migrants and national and ethnic violence in many parts of the world, the debate addresses issues of global significance and is therefore important for all anthropologists.

Brumann emphasizes a number of basic points that are sometimes overlooked. In particular, his reminder about the epistemological value of concepts is refreshing. Research concepts are always based on abstractions and thus imply fuzzy boundaries, internal diversity, and some degree of change. For this reason, conceptual abstractions per se should not be the focal point of an anthropological debate in an interconnected, postcolonial, and global world. More than ever, the world needs comparative concepts. By contrast, some participants in the debate, as Brumann implicitly reminds us, run the risk of perhaps unwittingly advocating a new variant of naive empiricism. What is sometimes held "against culture" is so ill-informed epistemologically that it in fact applies to research concepts in general. If misunderstood and misinterpreted, conceptual abstractions may easily become reified. No concept is immune to this danger, yet this is no reason to abolish concepts.

Many "proculture" writers are well aware of these intellectual and political forms of reification of conceptions of culture. Nevertheless, a number of them—for example, Hannerz (1996), Yanagisako and Delaney (1996), Sahlins (1995), and Barth (1994)—have tentatively argued for maintaining some variant of a renewed and redefined anthropological concept of culture. Virtually all of these writers have emphasized fuzzy boundaries, change, heterogeneity, and authors' positioning. Brumann also quite rightly points out that the main problem is not whether to maintain or to "abolish" an anthropological concept of culture. It is much more important to write against the contents of absolute discreteness and difference between local societies and to demonstrate that (and under what conditions) humans have much more in common than not. For these reasons, I find Brumann's epistemological points a useful contribution to the debate. I am, however, more skepti-

cal about the historical, analytical, and political implications of his paper.

In terms of historical self-reflexivity, the debate would benefit from a more critical approach than is advocated by Brumann. Take, for instance, his somewhat superficial and encyclopedic overview of earlier (or "classic") definitions of culture. It is no coincidence that Boas's definition, as quoted by Brumann himself, speaks of culture as "all the manifestations of social habits of a community." Boas thus explicitly combined his understanding of culture with a concept of community. It is important to clarify whether a writer, despite his inconsistencies, usually adopted a "community" (*Gemeinschaft*) or a "social/society" (*Gesellschaft*) version of culture. Not only Adam Kuper but a wide range of other scholars have pointed out that the concept of "community" is closely intertwined with prevailing concepts of culture in U.S. and German anthropology. A very old-fashioned community version of culture is still influential: its early phases are associated with Herder's work and its influence on German ideology (Dumont 1994, Gingrich 1998). Boas's profound impact on U.S. anthropology was based in part on this Herderian or communal set of ideas, combined with the holistic museum version of culture that prevailed in German studies of material objects at the turn of the century. The present debate about culture, including Brumann's own paper and my comment, is therefore situated in heterogeneous intellectual local contexts: some of them are more deeply embedded in a Herderian and communal intellectual genealogy, while others are less so. From this perspective, I have more understanding than Brumann seems to have for those in U.S. and German anthropology who argue that some important work remains to be done in criticizing prevailing Herderian conceptions of culture. It may indeed be very important to "re-sociologize" these two branches of international anthropology, but an old-fashioned community conception of culture still presents a number of obstacles to this endeavor which need intensive reassessment (Das 1994). Writers coming from a social anthropological background will have fewer problems with a concept of culture which can be contextualized in terms of a sociological and historical intellectual genealogy rather than a communal one. A notion of culture that is inspired by the work of Mauss, Gluckman, Leach, Barth, Hannerz, or Yalman, for instance, would certainly not be burdened with implications of discrete key symbols or exclusive folk meanings and would need very little re-sociologizing. In pursuing the debate, it will be useful to specify exactly what kind of concept of culture one wants to retain or to deconstruct instead of supposing that the word implies any one particular intellectual context. For Brumann, however, culture (in the specific, empirical sense) "is the set of specific learned routines . . . that are characteristic of a delineated group of people." I do not yet see why such a broad conception of any kind of clustering of routinized behavior should be more useful than anthropological and social science concepts such as ideology, religion, ritual, or professional style. Brumann's own usage of the term therefore suggests a rather inflationary application which would devalue other and perhaps more useful concepts. If some concept of culture were to be retained, it would have to be more precise than merely referring to clusters of (local or transnational) routinization.

From such a social anthropological perspective, I also see a number of merits and advantages in Brumann's analytical arguments. His three final points are well taken and deserve to become standard inventory if they are not already. Also, it is useful to distinguish between past usages and best present options and to consider pragmatic aspects for the discipline in today's world when discussing and assessing pros and cons. An increased "local demand" for and "success" of a reified concept of culture in today's world, however, is as much an argument against as it is for retaining some kind of research concept of culture. Tales of profound, age-old cultural traditions may serve local ethnic violence on the Balkans or in Sri Lanka as easily as tales about the profound equality of all humans worldwide may serve the worldwide expansion of McDonald's, Coca-Cola, or the military industry. The possible political implications of any concept are therefore important, but both extremes of the debate about culture can be abused for political purposes that anthropologists usually do not, or should not, support and share. Instead, I suggest a more differentiated debate that is critical of such abuses in an effort to arrive at better and more precise research tools. It is in this direction that Brumann's paper, with all its shortcomings, offers a number of useful and interesting contributions.

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In the current debate among anthropologists over the culture concept, there are abolitionists and reformists. Like Brumann I am a reformist and thus am inclined to agree with him.

Indeed, it seems that the conception of culture which abolitionists criticize (and with which reformists are obviously likewise unhappy) was never really fully dominant in explicit anthropological theorizing. A recent set of historically oriented papers edited by Boddy and Lambek (1997) also portrays continuous diversity and flux in views of culture within the discipline; Darnell's (1997) discussion especially of Sapir's views and Urban's (1993) intricate analysis of contrasting metacultures show that Boas and his early students cannot easily be held collectively responsible for the imagery of bounded, timeless cultures either. Brumann is probably right in linking this imagery of the mosaic more to the conventions and conveniences of ethnographic practice. Beyond that, I think one glimpses the early natural-history heritage of anthropology: as one could describe species of animals and plants without much attention to

internal variation or to change over time, so one handled the "species" of human life.

But however culture in its singular or plural forms may have been understood in the past of the discipline, what should be the role of the concept in the present and the future? As does Brumann, I believe that the answer has much to do with anthropology's presence in the public arena. Within the discipline, quite possibly we can find ways of doing without the culture concept—just as it is possible, with enough effort, to avoid almost any other word. Even now it obviously plays a more limited part in some anthropological tendencies, and in any case we require more differentiated vocabularies for specialized analyses of most matters we may regard as cultural. The culture concept, however, is now part of a public vocabulary, and anthropology is fairly closely identified with it in the public mind. If we do not approve of some of its uses, it will probably have little impact on the world if among ourselves we decide to drop it. If, however, after a century or so of promulgating the idea of culture to whatever outside audiences we have been able to reach, we should now dramatically turn around and attempt to persuade these audiences to reject it, too, the likelihood that we would lose such intellectual credibility as we may have seems rather greater than our chances of eradicating pernicious uses of the concept. It would seem wiser to stick to the core understanding of culture as consisting of meanings and practices acquired (in varied ways) in social life, to keep emphasizing the potential for human diversity (individual as well as collective) linked to that premise, and to try and share with our audiences our understandings of how different conditions may lead to more or less change over time, more or less blurring of boundaries, and more or less variation within whatever are taken to be relevant population units. In that way we contribute constructively to a public conversation and make better use of such intellectual authority as we may have accumulated.

Within the discipline (although I do not think the distinction between academic and public anthropology should be too sharply drawn), perhaps the strategic role of a reformed conception of culture might be to problematize precisely that which has too often been quietly and unthinkingly assumed: to raise questions about boundedness and mixing, about internal variation, about change and stability over time, about integration and coherence (see Hannerz 1983:143 ff.). Brumann exemplifies such a research interest in his discussion of the social distribution of "learned routines" and the mapping of complete and incomplete cultural sharing. Distributive understandings of culture have a fairly extensive genealogy in 20th-century anthropology, extending at least from Sapir by way of Ralph Linton, Anthony Wallace, and Ward Goodenough to Theodore Schwartz and a very recent discussion by Lars Rodseth (1997). Perhaps Brumann's version should be understood more as a figure of thought than as an actual research agenda; in any case, it reminds me somewhat of the attempt by another predecessor, John M. Roberts (1951), to map the cultural inventories of three Navaho households. There should undoubtedly be some room for varying research tastes here, and sometimes just getting a sense of the scope of microvariation within communities or populations may be eye-opening and thought-provoking. Yet such comprehensive mapping efforts would seem to require both very careful consideration of the nature of units and an enormous amount of sheer ethnographic diligence, yielding somewhat uncertain intellectual satisfaction.

In terms of "the organization of diversity" (in Wallace's useful term), I am more attracted to an agenda of focusing directly on interactions at points where difference is at hand, subtly or conspicuously. Frequently it is such interactions which raise public concern, and often it is also here that we now find varieties of culturespeak used in ways which we would want to criticize. Here, for example, are Huntington's more sophisticated form of "cultural fundamentalism" (described on the back of the German edition of his book, as I remember it, as *Kulturknalltheorie*), as well as the more benign essentialism of the quickly growing interculturalist profession of consultants and trainers (on such matters, see also, e.g., Dahlén 1997, Hannerz 1997, and Herzfeld 1997).

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Brumann's article introduces two useful arguments to an otherwise often rather confused and ideologically charged debate on the concept of culture. Both are arguments for continued use of the term in anthropological discourse. He first makes the empirical point that we can observe nonrandom distribution of cultural traits such as marriage rules, mythical tales, greeting behavior, etc., across the world's population. By calling these clusters of traits "cultures," he maintains, we can avoid a reified, essentialized, and ahistoric notion of cultures and continue to use the term in a meaningful way. He then goes on with a political argument: With the help such a redefined term, anthropologists will be in a better position to fight cultural fundamentalism than they would be without it. He recommends using "culture as distributional cluster" as a Trojan horse to enter the fortress of cultural racism and xenophobic nationalism.

I am not altogether comfortable with the level of analysis on which Brumann develops his first point. According to current understandings of the nature of scientific discourse, definitional problems can be discussed only in relation to the paradigmatic framework within which they are situated. Thus, the meaning of the term "culture" depends not only on definitions but on the theoretical context in which "culture" is related to "society," "nature," "meaning," "practice," and other master terms of the social sciences. Seen from this broader perspective, much of the critique of the classical notion of culture is a critique not of definitions

but of the functionalist (and later hermeneutic) strategy of analyzing cultures as bounded, integrated, and stable wholes (or, later, coherent texts). The main problem is not definitions but their use in what a French philosopher has called ''theoretical practice'' (see Wimmer 1996*a*).

Brumann's paper remains largely on the level of definitions, and this has unintended consequences for the course of his argument: Trying to ''save culture'' from its critics by redefining the term, he has to resort to a prefunctionalist, prehermeneutic understanding of culture. Since this is surely not his intention. I shall briefly outline two points in his article that reveal this theoretical retreat:

First, the functionalist (''classical'') concept of culture was intimately linked to the idea of a clearly definable society. It was a society, group of people, community, etc., that could be characterized by a certain culture (see the definitions cited by Brumann). In functionalist anthropology, moreover, ''society'' was usually thought to be synonymous with an ethnic group (the Tallensi, the Zinacantecos, the Hopi). Culture, ethnic group, and society were conceptually perceived as congruent entities. The empirical salience of individual and subcultural variations were easily acknowledged in the accounts of the time (e.g., Fortes 1949) but did not have a place in the theoretical framework (nor do they in hermeneutic theories of culture as text). Brumann drops this assumption of congruence and looks at distributional patterns of cultural traits without limiting the analysis to the members of ''a society.'' His approach is inductive, the limits of cultures being defined by the structure of clusters that the analysis produces and not by the predefined ''society'' or ''ethnic group'' whose ''culture'' is to be studied.

Secondly, Brumann drops the functionalist (and hermeneutical, structuralist, etc.) notion that cultural traits are systematically interrelated and cannot be studied in isolation from each other—the famous ''integrated whole'' in definitions of culture has become a powerful guiding principle of analysis only under the influence of the functionalist and hermeneutical paradigm, and, as Brumann convincingly shows, tendencies to ''essentialization'' are to be attributed to these theoretical contexts rather than to definitions as such. In trying to avoid such tendencies, Brumann seems to go back to a prewar understanding of the term ''culture'': it is implicitly understood as being the sum total of pottery styles, hunting techniques, modes of greeting, ritual dances, warfare strategies, and the like, whose distribution is to be described for each trait independent of the others.

The notion of a straightforward relation between society and culture having been abandoned and a notion of culture as an assembly of traits having been reintroduced, we get back to the principles of cultural area studies and diffusionism so prominent in German and (via Boas) American anthropology before World War I. And we inherit the analytical and empirical problems of those times: The items included in the package will determine the number and borders of the ''cultures'' that our computers can nowadays produce via cluster analysis and other advanced techniques. For example, if we include mostly items regarding family structure, household composition, etc., an ''individualist culture'' might emerge including most members of Western late capitalist societies and many hunteres and gatherers; if we focus on mythological production and language. Western Europe belongs to something like an Indo-European cultural area (see Dumézil 1968). Such an exercise of data collection and description may indeed be extremely useful in combating cultural fundamentalism, because it will show the arbitrariness of any attempt to distinguish ''cultures'' from each other. Brumann's political argument is thus very helpful and well placed.

However, I am not convinced of the analytical value of such an exercise in cultural typology unless it is firmly embedded in a healthy theoretical environment. Instead of trying to ''save culture'' on the level of definitions, one can do this by resituating the concept in a paradigmatic framework that avoids the pitfalls of functionalism and hermeneutics. Brumann's argument would gain much strength and avoid the unintended retreat into the spheres of ''butterfly-collection'' anthropology if it were situated more clearly within the currents of thought that he himself surveys in the second part of his paper. This could be done along the following lines:

Most anthropologists, including these ''writing against culture,'' and, indeed, almost every member of world society would agree that people do things and think and feel differently and similarly at different times in different places and that these differences and similarities can be grouped into clusters. However, given the arbitrariness of a purely inductive delineation of cultural areas or cultures, we should concentrate our efforts on a better understanding of the mechanisms of the production and transformation of these cultural patterns.

Since the mid-seventies, a number of theories have developed that focus on the logic of cultural practice without neglecting or denying its distributional outcome in terms of ''cultural clusters'' or, in Weberian terms, lifestyle groups (see, of course, Bourdieu 1990; Wimmer 1995: chap. 6.7). This can only be done by reintroducing society (and power) as key concepts helping to explain the dynamics of cultural transformations—albeit a post-functionalist notion of social structure and power enabling us to avoid essentialist and reifying understandings of cultural processes. In recent decades, anthropology has made some progress in the development of such a theory of cultural production, and it is well known what the elements of this new approach are (see Borofsky 1994*c*, Wimmer 1996*b*, and the many references in Brumann's text). If not rooted firmly in a coherent theory of cultural production and transformation, a typological exercise will lead us back to a notion of culture as a potato sack with all sorts of ''traits'' packed into it.

Resituated in this way, Brumann's argument reads

like an appeal to a renewed effort at understanding the distributional outcome of cultural practices and becomes—in my view—much more convincing. Whether we focus on these outcomes or on the process of their production might then be a matter of privileging different aspects of the same research program and no longer a matter of saving ''culture'' from ''cultural.''

# Reply

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Reading the six thoughtful comments, I am happy to realize that we all are talking about the same thing: nobody denies the existence of learned routines of thought and behavior in social groups. (D'Andrade's reaction suggests that ''routines'' is probably not the best term, since it is more easily associated with behavior than with thought; however, I meant to include ''meanings, symbols, understandings, knowledge, ideas, etc.'' under ''routines of thought.'') As expected, there is less agreement whether it is advisable to call these routines cultural and the set of routines specific to a social group the culture of that group or, perhaps, whether to give it any name at all. Such sets of routines, however, are central to the questions social/cultural anthropology is trying to solve. Therefore, I think that a simple word for them is desirable, and in the light of its intellectual history and in the absence of any better candidate I argue that ''culture/s'' may do, as it has been doing for quite some time now.

Were it only a classificatory tool, we might probably dispense with the concept of culture, especially if classification is a purely self-serving project. Taking up D'Andrade's remarks on the nature of scientific concepts, however, I argue that culture is useful because the thing so designated makes us do things. Culture does not do things itself, but then, as I have outlined, it is an abstraction from single items, in the way that the Gothic style or malaria (as Cerroni-Long proposes) is, and different from motor oil—or cats or bicycles—which can be more unequivocally said to ''do things.'' Such abstractions are certainly constructs, but this does not mean that the realities to which they refer are not powerful and not causally related to other parts of reality. Walking the streets of my current field research site, Kyoto, I observe that people habitually bow when greeting one another instead of shaking hands, kissing one another's cheeks, or rubbing noses. I do not find much fault with saying that it is their culture that makes Japanese bow, especially when I do not want to delve into this too deeply. One could be more precise, relating bowing, for example, to concepts of the body, physical contact, and politeness that are held by (most) Japanese. Certainly not everything in the ''vast totality'' of Japanese culture is equally influential for making bowing a standard option for its carriers. When space is scarce, however, I think that ascribing causal qualities to culture as a whole—as a convenient shorthand in the way I have argued—is not so misleading after all. D'Andrade rightly reminds us that we are not yet very good at explaining how culture arises and makes us do things. But there are quite a few other things that we do not fully understand but still give names to and reason with, such as gravity, global warming, or ethnocentrism. These also ''don't do things'' in a strict sense, but does this make it unreasonable to say that they hold the atmosphere attached to our planet, let the ocean water level rise, and make people reject what they are not accustomed to? Culture is certainly a working tool, good only until we invent something better and more precise, but is there any scientific concept that is different in this regard? And should we really throw out culture *without having anything better*?

As Hannerz points out, anthropologists need not refer to culture/s all that often for the sometimes very specific research problems they are dealing with. I also agree with Gingrich that ''ideology, religion, ritual, or professional style'' should be referred to explicitly when they are meant. (It should be noted, however, that there are socially transmitted routines which are none of these.) Furthermore, most anthropological explanations stay ''within culture'' anyway, linking cultural domains to one another—such as gender status to patterns of descent—rather than a culture as a whole to something else. But I do not think that this justifies D'Andrade's doubts that ''the vast totality of any society's social heritage [is] of much explanatory interest.'' Just like any other scientific concept, culture allows to distinguish a particular part of reality from the rest of reality, and it becomes necessary whenever the view is widened (explicitly or implicitly) to include that remaining reality. This is when we want to define what our discipline is occupied with—culture, not the infinite number of other possible subjects—but also when we want to stress the results of a particular form of social acquisition that is very highly developed among humans against other, noncultural factors. Thus, it is one of our basic insights that most differences in thought and behavior between human groups are caused by cultures, not by their genes or phenotypes. It is here that we can refer to ''culture as a totality'' without being tautological in the way D'Andrade outlines.

D'Andrade recommends a restriction of culture to cognition, arguing that anything else renders us unable to explain behavior. This presupposes, first, that behavior can always be explained in terms of cognition, which I am not entirely sure of because there are cognitions which can only be formed on the basis of previous behavior. Secondly, it assumes that behavior can always be explained by the *cultural*—that is, socially shared—part of cognition. I rather believe that there are individual, cultural, and universal components to thought as well as behavior, with no a priori explanatory primacy for any of these. Moreover, as I have already said, many anthropological explanations proceed not from thought

to behavior but from one cultural domain to another without necessarily crossing the thought-behavior divide. As D'Andrade himself concedes, however, the validity of my argument is not touched by this problem (see also my n. 8).

Having established, then, that the phenomenon called culture does exist and sometimes needs to be referred to in anthropology, the next question is whether culture is a good name, given its intellectual genealogy. Contrary to Abu-Lughod and also to Wimmer, I do not find it unduly idealistic to distinguish between a concept and its usage, especially when that concept has been explicitly defined and can therefore be tested against what is being made of it (would anyone want to renounce such a distinction in the case of, say, "democracy"?). Yet concepts do indeed have a social history, and ignoring this history runs the risk of ending up with rather private understandings of what one wants to say. Precisely its history, however, makes me argue that the concept of culture should be retained. Setting up "optimal" against "historical usage" may have been somewhat misleading, but what I propose is not a *new* culture concept (or a redefinition, as Wimmer has it) but rather the replacement of a dominant historical usage with another, less prominent but equally historical approach that—as confirmed also by Hannerz—has been waiting backstage all along, so to speak. I am calling for revitalization, not revolution, and I feel all the more motivated to do so since it was not a conscious theoretical decision but rather the unreflected premises of ethnographic writing and specific theoretical orientations—and beyond it anthropology's natural-history heritage, as Hannerz is right to suggest—that have pushed this approach into the background. I am charged with historical superficiality by Abu-Lughod and Gingrich. I do indeed not claim any outstanding expertise in the history of our discipline, but what I have found in my limited search I believe leaves no doubt that—even if imperfectly developed and inconsistently adhered to—there has been a more fruitful way of thinking about culture than the supposedly traditional one all along (as Hannerz also confirms). It is this—historical—approach that I am building on when I propose an "optimal usage."

The success of the culture concept is also a part of its recent history, and Abu-Lughod and Gingrich find that our alarm bells should be ringing. I cannot see, however, what is so wrong with this success. Consider for a moment how the phenomena that nowadays are explained with culture—and cultural difference—would have been explained 50 or 100 years ago. I think this not just a matter of a word's acquiring prominence but that the attribution of differences in group-specific thought and behavior to social acquisition instead of biological heritage has also become better established. Of course, culture is being "kulcharized" and "culturespeak" being engaged in, but it is often for things that have nothing much do with culture, with the result that—as Cerroni-Long also emphasizes—nothing prevents us from speaking out against such verbal hijacking. (Would anyone want to abolish the concept of democracy because the word is abused?) As for the connection that Abu-Lughod draws between distancing, "othering," Orientalism, and the concept of culture, I am not convinced that it is really so close. The former three were all there long before "culture" came into being, and none of them really requires it. Anthropology may indeed have had an interest in reproducing the strangeness upon which it has long been premised (if only, as should not be totally overlooked, for familiarizing that strangeness in the next step). I am not convinced, however, that *the concept of culture* has so significantly contributed to this dynamic. Hasn't the invocation and intellectual domination of strangeness flourished at least since Herodotus, and has the situation been exacerbated in any way by the invention of "culture"? Even if believed to be especially powerful for being a scientific concept backed up by the status of an academic discipline, is it any worse than other concepts that (might) have been used in its stead, or worse than the absence of any concept? I believe that it isn't and argue that culture taken seriously is a tool for working against exaggerated assumptions of strangeness precisely by showing that culture is there but rather differently from the way it is sometimes imagined.

The same also holds when we want to argue against the "clash of civilizations." Abu-Lughod advises us "to criticize the very notion of setting up groups of people defined by shared cultures as hostile and opposed." Whether this is meant as a moral or an empirical argument is not entirely clear to me. Responding to the former, Huntington would probably say that "setting up groups of people defined by shared cultures as hostile and opposed" may be bad but that such groups and their mutual enmity are there, like it or not, and therefore holding back warnings about the catastrophe that we are running into is much the more immoral thing to do. With regard to the empirical argument and to the many examples of peaceful coexistence across considerable cultural differences we might provide, he would very likely refer to the also numerous cases of culturally defined groups' committing any variety of atrocities on one another. Therefore—and optimistically assuming public interest in what anthropologists have to say on this matter—I believe that the most promising strategy is to take his remarks about culture seriously, as I have already detailed. By doing so we can show that in the chain Abu-Lughod builds the first link itself is fallacious: Huntington's "civilizations" are "extensions of cultures" only in his nightmares, since the members of these units share too few traits with one another and too many traits with nonmembers to make the units extensions of cultures. Anything built on such premises, then, must be at least equally faulty. These are claims that other people can test and find to be warranted, whereas a purely moral argument would be easily refuted by simple reference to "sad but undeniable facts."

Both in regard to Huntington's theses and also to the debate about the cultural effects of globalization I think that some degree of systematic cultural mapping might

be wholesome. Nonetheless, Hannerz is right in assuming that I introduce the idea of matrices rather as a figure of thought than as an actual research program. I am convinced that we will profit from thinking about culture in this way. And start with culture we must, be it for focusing on interactions where cultural difference is at stake (Hannerz), concentrating on the production and transformation of culture (Wimmer), or writing ethnographies that demonstrate how individualistic—that is, unsubjugated by the exigencies of their culture—the members of a society are (Abu-Lughod). All of these sound research programs—which to me as well appear more rewarding than drawing the world cultural map myself—still require developing at least a rough idea of what is taken to be culture.

Part of the rejection of the culture concept may be due to the tacit and unquestioned assumption that as experts on culture we are somehow supposed to find as much of it as we can. Quite the contrary is true, as I have outlined by emphasizing the limits of culture. Working against those abuses of the culture concept that presuppose too much culture, then, requires a methodology of *researching* against culture, rather than writing against it: when explaining the phenomena we are studying, we should start from the null hypothesis that they are not culturally caused and resort to culture only after explanations on the basis of the individual and the universal level have failed. This will of course not wipe out culture, and its role should be duly acknowledged. But doesn't individuality come out all the more strongly if we do so? And wouldn't "the complexity, uncertainty, and contestations" of Kamla's life (Abu-Lughod 1993:205–42) be even more apparent if we said that she is creatively although not always successfully maneuvering the three partly parallel, partly crosscutting cultures of Awlad's tribal society, Egyptian urban modernity, and Muslim Sisters and Brothers fundamentalism?

Contrary to what Wimmer assumes, I do not abandon the assumption that the constituent elements of a culture are systematically interrelated. I regard the holistic view as a very important part of our disciplinary heritage and one of its great strengths in comparison with, for example, sociology. We have perhaps grown too accustomed to relating totemic systems to marriage rules and food taboos to worldviews to realize how foreign this linking of separate domains is to many other scientific disciplines. (Holism, however, is not "wholism"—as which it is all too often misunderstood—and therefore does *not* presuppose that cultural systems are harmonically integrated, clearly bounded, or stable.) But then, again, the pursuit of systematic links within cultures requires that we first of all take stock of the distribution of cultural traits—as a prerequisite, not as a goal in itself.

To the possible disappointment of Cerroni-Long, I did not intend to write an essay against postmodernism. I think, however, that culture scepticism has indeed been encouraged by a "deconstruction fever" spreading within anthropology. Moreover, I think that it is because of postmodernist influences that proposals that to me appear logically contradictory, impossible, or unfounded—such as description without generalization or typification, reasoning without concepts, debate without rebuttal (as proposed by Downey and Rogers [1995]), or the rejection of generalizations as in principle immoral (as denounced by D'Andrade [1995])—continue to be made in total seriousness. I share Gingrich's impression of a great deal of epistemological confusion in current anthropology, and I think that if we wish to remain a scientific discipline that explains how a particular part of reality works we will have to become clearer, including about our use of basic concepts. Cerroni-Long may be pleased to hear, however, that the conflict over postmodernism is not everywhere as intense as in the United States, and, even if side by side with poetry, almost all anthropological journals continue to publish the more clearly scientifically minded work whose academic market share I believe will expand within the next few years.

I have stressed that culture should not be equated with ethnicity and identity. I probably should have added locality and community, since Abu-Lughod and Gingrich rightly find these and the concept of culture too intimately associated in many cases. We really should be careful not to say "culture" when we mean "society," "group," "tribe," or some other social and/or territorial unit. Culture is the socially acquired patterns within what people think, feel, and do, not the people themselves. And culture does not require physical proximity or a specific type of gemeinschaft ties, only social interaction, however (mass-) mediated and casual this may be—just seeing, hearing, or reading of one another may suffice for mutual imitation. In contrast to Gingrich's assumption, I therefore find it as important as he does to "criticize prevailing Herderian conceptions of culture," although I believe that abolishing the concept of culture will not help us with this task. And contrary to Cerroni-Long, I consider it justified to speak of a "global culture." By this I do not mean that people are forgetting their local cultures to become enthusiastic world citizens totally alike in their habits. Yet more people than ever are exposed to the same mass media programs, news of world events, and a school education based on the standards of Western science. Thus, they end up with a common cluster of knowledge items. On the basis of the premises I have outlined I find it reasonable to call this layer of global knowledge a culture, different though it is from those local cultures we are more used to. Since this layer does not include all the knowledge people have socially acquired this is of course not the only culture they are carrying, just as any individual may participate in several cultures at a time (see Brumann 1998 for a more thorough discussion). As to the local character of subcultures, I fully agree with Cerroni-Long. German academics write papers, grapple for tenure, complain over their teaching loads, and feel they deserve more public attention just like academics elsewhere, and they also speak German, prefer German bread, watch soccer rather than baseball, and debate the

*Rechtschreibereform* (the new orthographic system) just like other Germans. But then, they have also developed their own particular customs, such as knocking the knuckles on the table after lectures instead of applauding or demanding a second big Ph.D-like thesis before granting tenure—customs that are largely unknown to non-German academics and German nonacademics alike. Thus, three cultures are involved, with two of them overlapping and the third one—the habits specific only to German academia—being a subset of that overlap. Speaking of a general analytical tool, I think that we should not define too strictly how large or how small such a cluster and the group of its carriers may be and how much awareness of the cluster is required for calling it a culture; after all, social sharing may arise with almost any degree of these variables. This surely makes culture a very encompassing term, and we should strive to be more precise when possible, but still, all of this social sharing is of interest to us, and there are, as outlined, occasions when we need to refer to it and to the clusters thereby created.

Let me briefly turn to two of the finer problems D'Andrade raises: The last of the three example diagrams does indeed contain unique traits, and D'Andrade justifiably asks whether there are still enough of them in the present-day world to rely on them for distinguishing cultures. (Chinese also bow when greeting, after all.) My argument, however, does not rest on unique traits, and I would not mind adding a few crosses in the bottom diagram to let them disappear. What is important is the combinations of specific traits that—although probably not unique—do often appear together, and here I think I meet with D'Andrade. (Although a die-hard sophist might say that a characteristic combination of nonunique traits such as in the Canadian example is itself a unique meta-trait . . .) The culture that "is more responsible for differences among human groups than genes" is culture in the first of the two senses that I distinguish. Phrased more precisely, it is the capacity to develop cultures (in the second sense) that I am speaking about. Thus, culture is an active agent only metaphorically in this sentence.

Without doubt, building a research program on the conceptual clarifications I propose is the hard part. I believe that it is crucial to take account of individuals and individual variation, developing answers to D'Andrade's question of how culture arises and how far it goes. Consensus analysis seems a promising and underutilized tool in this regard, and although it has mainly been used in cognitive research there is in principle no obstacle to applying it to behavior as well. As outlined, a focus on individuals connects very easily with the analysis of how intracultural variation is linked to social structure and power relations, as called for by Gingrich and Wimmer and also implied by Cerroni-Long, who rejects the view that culture is a totally negotiable expedient of identity concerns. I share Gingrich's impression that German and American anthropology are in need of resociologization, although I am unsure whether that list is complete and how clear-cut national anthropologies still are at present. I think that the feedback processes provoked by the public appropriation of and reflection about culture are particularly worthy of further study, challenging though they are in both an intellectual and a moral sense. But all this should lead back with some regularity to the big questions raised above and in the comments: how does culture work, where are its limits, and whither does it develop in the age of globalization?

All in all, I agree with Abu-Lughod that this is perhaps a case of the cup half-full or half-empty. When there is an entire novel that manages to avoid the letter "e" (Perec 1983) and that novel has even been translated, it should not be too difficult to cease speaking of culture. Brightman has already observed such a self-conscious avoidance in recent anthropological writings (1995:510). But is this really necessary or fruitful? Try to rewrite the last four paragraphs of Abu-Lughod's comment (or some of your own more general work) without using "culture" or "cultural"—both with and without quotes, of course—and then decide for yourself.

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