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# The End of Anthropology, Again: On the Future of an In/Discipline

John Comaroff

**ABSTRACT** The “End of Anthropology” has been predicted many times and for many different reasons—among them, its disappearing object of study, its political imbrication in colonialism, the loss of its distinctive concepts, and the effects of globalization in diffusing its received subject matter. And yet, both institutionally and discursively, the discipline is very much alive, producing new species of knowledge, new theoretical discourses, new empirical interests, new arguments. How, in light of this, do we read the history of its present? By what means is its “end” to be avoided, its future(s) assured? Where should it go from here, empirically, methodologically, theoretically? One answer lies in a new *indiscipline*, a discourse that, in dialectic tension with the contemporary world in which it is embedded, redefines the scale, the conceptual foundations, and the techniques of knowledge production of anthropology.

*Keywords:* *disciplinarity, ethnography, spatial and temporal scales*

In May of 1971, I underwent an initiation rite, one that stripped me all but naked before the world. This was the day on which I had finally to deal with the trauma of becoming adult. I refer to my very first job interview, at the University of Wales. To be honest, I had some forewarning. It came in the guise of an ethnographic film. Actually, the movie was styled as a farce, but I know high realism when I see it. Entitled *Only Two Can Play*, its high point was a job interview for the position of sublibrarian in a Welsh town.<sup>1</sup> Both the committee and its questions were notable for their absurdity: a few involved plumbing; one, how best to treat a woman who asked to borrow *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*. This should have primed me. When my turn came to meet my inquisitors, I faced a dean, a priest, an archaeologist, and an elderly matron, who, I think, represented the local community. Her name was Mrs. Evans. Their queries ranged widely. Had I, as a youth in South Africa, played rugby? This, clearly, was a job requirement. Did I take drugs? Whether that was also a requirement was less clear. What was my political past? In Wales, rugby is politics, so those two questions were really the same. The clincher came from Mrs. Evans. “I read somewhere,” she said, “that anthropology is becoming extinct.” I waited for the interrogative. There was none. Instead, excruciating silence. I was caught totally unawares. Could this everywoman from the Celtic fringe have read Margaret Mead, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and others who

believed that our discipline might die with the demise of the last primitive? Had she come to the same conclusion by a parallel process of induction? Of course, she could simply have been confusing anthropology for something else with the prefix *anth-*. Like anthropophagy, cannibalism. That, however, did not occur to me at the time. My reply was wholly vacuous. As it happens, I got the job, probably because I was the only candidate who actually had played rugby. But I left the room deep in thought: What are the conditions that kill off a discipline? Or ensure its continued life? So, although Mrs. Evans is long dead and I am almost 40 years late, here at last is my answer to what I take to have been her question: Is anthropology about to die? Wherein lies the future of its extinction?

Few believe any longer that our continued existence depends on the perpetuity of the primitive or the survival of *le savage*. As long as there are human beings living on the planet, we will, in principle at least, have an object of study. And after that, who cares? More seriously, the real question is not external to anthropology. It is internal. (Well, largely internal. As we all know, some of its “natives” have long censured the subject for being a brute instrument of Empire; or worse, the regime of knowledge on which colonial capitalism was founded. Which, in turn, has ensured our exile from a good part of the postcolonial world—although now that the politics of identity have made a return, so has

anthropology, the human science that dignifies difference.) As Clifford Geertz (1988:71) once suggested, we do seem to suffer from a proclivity for the autopathological; he referred to it as “epistemological hypochondria.” And yet, while we appear to stagger from one self-inflicted crisis to the next, anthropology lives on to tell the tale: it evinces palpably more rigor than mortis. Indeed, it is almost as though we actually require to look disciplinary death in the face to survive. Perhaps, with apologies to vampires and antifunctionalists everywhere, imminent demise is our necessary lifeblood. After all, as Greg Beckett (2008:50) observes in his analysis of the long history of the concept, recalling Reinhart Koselleck (1988) and Raymond Williams (1983:84–86), crisis and critique are closely connected, both alike a potential source of animation and emancipation. To the degree that ours is a critical practice, then—and it is not always that, by any means—it will always be imbricated in crises. Perhaps intermittent iterations of the End of Anthropology do not portend oblivion so much as prevent it.

I shall not dwell on the archaeology of anthropological crisis here; it is the future with which I am primarily concerned. But just a few words. As Matti Bunzl (2008:54–55) reminds us, the 1960s and 1970s brought an end to the hegemony of British structural functionalism and U.S. culture and personality, the two enduring orthodoxies of 20th-century anthropology. Both decomposed under the cumulative insurgency of colonial and postcolonial literary theory, early feminist anthropology, anthropological hermeneutics, various species of Marxism, Derridean deconstruction, and Foucauldian poststructuralism. For my own generation, though, it was the colonial critique that was most devastating. It held that the entire theoretical scaffolding of anthropological knowledge was rotten to the core: its commitment to closed systems, holism, and homeostatic models; its representation of the social by analogy to the biological; its stress on reproductive processes rather than dialectics; its inherent idealism; and, in the United States, its ahistorical, apolitical concept of culture were all said to be corollaries of the racialization of difference, not to mention of the radical “othering” (cf. Fabian 1983), at the dark heart of the discipline.<sup>2</sup> Hence Peter Rigby’s (1996) *African Images: Racism and the End of Anthropology*, a critique simultaneously political, ethical, epistemic. It called for a new kind of praxis, another metanarrative to replace the liberal idealism that had entrapped anthropology: for less cryptoempiricism, more critical theory; less localism, more contextualization in both space and time; less hermeneutics, more materiality; less description, more explanation.

By contrast, for the next anthropological generation, especially in the United States, crisis talk gave voice to a very different sensibility—one that, in retrospect, was not unrelated to the rise of neoliberalism. It began, famously, with the publication of *Writing Culture* (Clifford and Marcus 1986; cf. also Marcus and Fisher 1999; Marcus 2008), which congealed into a single discourse many of the diverse impulses that had led to the implosion of pre-

vailing paradigms (cf. Bunzl 2008:54–55). Whatever may be said on either side of the debate, it had a palpable impact on the discipline—largely by railing against metanarratives *sui generis*, against the authority of the authorial, against the finality of any representation, against generalization and, for the most part, explanation. Against culture, except in the most anticoherent, contingent, contested sense (Abu-Lughod 1991:147). Against exoticism, closure, dialectics, determination. Against theory. For partial truths (Clifford 1986) and provisional readings (Crapanzano 1986). For ethnography as textuality. Toward a new empiricism of ever greater descriptive complexity.

There have been counterarguments, of course. They stress the depoliticizing, dematerializing, unwittingly conservative tendencies of this kind of anthropology. And its reduction of ethnography to a solipsistic literary practice, one so obsessively reflexive as to be of no interest to anybody outside of itself (cf. Sangren 1988). There has also been a great deal written since 1986 that has looked elsewhere for its theoretical and critical inspiration: notably the important work, in the 1990s, of feminist (e.g., Behar and Gordon 1995) and black scholars (e.g., Harrison 1991). I shall have more to say about anthropology after 1986. My point here, simply, is that much present-day talk of the future of the discipline—and the substantive responses it has elicited—is haunted by some of the issues that surfaced during the *Writing Culture* moment (cf. Marcus 2008). To be sure, there is a direct line to be drawn between that moment and the symptoms taken by disciplinary pessimists, of which I am emphatically not one, to be prognostic of the End of Anthropology.

### TRIAGE: THREE SYMPTOMATOLOGIES OF CRISIS

Let me deal briefly with just the three most commonly cited of those symptoms.

The first is that the discipline has lost its brand—I use the commodity metaphor pointedly—in the form of its signature method, ethnography; its root concepts, especially culture; its research terrain, namely, comparative societies, and in particular, non-Western societies; and its paradigmatic theoretical landscape. In respect of method, goes the angst, many sociologists, political scientists, social psychologists, humanists, even some economists, claim these days to “do . . . ethnography,” the practice constitutive of our discipline (Geertz 1973:5). What is more, ethnographic technique itself—which, like all qualitative methodologies, has long been under siege from the “hard” social sciences—has become more inchoately imagined than it was in generations past, which may be why so many “how to” manuals are being produced (e.g., Atkinson et al. 2001; [Hobbs and Wright 2006](#)), why so many anthropology departments have added courses on the topic over the past decade,<sup>3</sup> why anthropologists sometimes lament how “thin” has become its modal practice,<sup>4</sup> and why so much institutional effort is being given to its defense. In the United States, the National Science Foundation has created what it calls, appositely in our

market-driven academy, a “Cultural Anthro Methods Mall”: an online facility intended “to provide skills to current and future colleagues who are conducting scientific research in cultural anthropology.”<sup>5</sup>

As with method, so with concepts. “While emblematic of . . . the discipline,” argues George Marcus (2008:3), echoing many others, culture “is longer viable analytically”; to wit, its use is typically hedged around with caveats about what it is not being taken to signify.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, as it has become commonplace to point out, the concept has disseminated itself quite promiscuously. Corporate law firms have courses on it. Sports teams invoke it. Nations brand it. But, most of all, “natives” insist on claiming it for themselves, often trademarking it, sometimes even charging scholars who study it (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009). Worse yet, other disciplines have muscled in on it. And, if that were not enough, our research terrain, “society” and its cognates (social order, system, organization), have been eroded from a number of sides. Existentially, for one. “There is no such thing as society,” Margaret Thatcher, organic voice of the 80s, said famously to *Woman’s Own* magazine (Keay 1987), anticipating Bruno Latour by several years. It was a view that had deep echoes across both the lay and the scholarly world, heralding not merely the age of the market but also an age in which nonsocietal metaphors would come to describe the domain vacated by a Durkheimian sense of the social: terms like *network*, *community*, *civility*, *citizenship*, and *biosociality*; terms, again, that cannot be claimed as its own by anthropology.<sup>7</sup> But even if we leave the existence of society aside, it is impossible, in this epoch of antisystem, of antitotalization and indeterminacy, to envisage any anthropologist believing that she would be taken seriously were she to rest an analysis on the concept. As with everything else, we can use it in its adjectival form to describe a contingent practice or a process but not as an abstract noun—we may speak of the social, not of society, of the cultural, not of culture (cf. Appadurai 1996:13)—which, I shall argue, actually does have a positive point to it. And something to say about a distinctive future for anthropology.

The adjectivalization of our concepts—the suspension of the noun form, and, with it, the flight from abstraction—points toward the idea that anthropology is threatened as well by the erasure of its theoretical landscape. Harri Englund and James Leach (2000) have argued, in effect, that any theory work that does much more than serve as a vehicle for vernacular voice, consciousness, or cognized experience is the illegitimate spawn of “[Euro-metropolitan] modernity,” of its “metanarrative.” As such, it undermines the authority, and the claims to an authentic identity, of our “native” subjects (Englund and Leach 2000:225)—and, hence, calls into question our *raison d’être*. As Jean Comaroff and I (2003) have countered, this is a position at once incoherent and self-negating. But it has some real support among those scarred by accusations of “othering.” And among those unwilling to be tarred as “modernists,” let alone as functionalists, structuralists, or Marxists. Perhaps it is this unwilling-

ness that has made so much of the discipline theory averse and—beyond descriptive analysis of the most limited, self-referential sort—explanation phobic. Perhaps it is this, too, that has led Marcus (2008:2) to declare that anthropology is “in suspension”: that it has “no new ideas, and none on the horizon, [that there is] no indication that its traditional stock of knowledge shows any signs of revitalization,” and that its best work has been energized less from its interiors than from its borders with feminist studies, media studies, postcolonial studies, science studies, and the like. To the extent that this is true—a matter to which I shall return—it is unlikely that our concepts and constructs, our propositions and dispositions, will ever again be subsumed within a specifically disciplinary paradigm. They may be political or philosophical or ethical or social, generically speaking, but not distinctively anthropological.

The second symptom said to prognosticate the End of Anthropology follows closely. It is that, in contrast to other disciplines that retain well-defined empirical terrains, we have no real subject matter of our own any longer. Why can an account of, say, the Indian advertising industry (Mazzarella 2003) not be as authoritatively done in cultural studies? Or one of fraudulent elections in Nigeria (Apter 1999) by a political scientist? Or one of fatwa councils in Egypt (Agrama 2005) by an Islamic law and society specialist? Or one of clothing and adornment in Africa (Hendrickson 1996) by an art historian? Or one of casino capitalism in Native America (Cattellino 2008) by an economist? The answer is that they could be. Some have been, which simply compounds the angst.

Hence the third symptom of crisis: that, having relinquished its object of study—namely, local “societies” or “cultures”—the subject matter of anthropology has diffused itself into anything and everything, anywhere and everywhere, and hence is about nobody or nothing or nowhere in particular. Marshall Sahlins commented recently that anthropology appears to have become little more than the production of “thin” ethnographic accounts of the myriad, dispersed effects of global capitalism.<sup>8</sup> These days, he added, there are forensic journalists who cover the same topics as do we—and often do so more thoroughly, more insightfully. It is true that, in South Africa, the most memorable recent ethnography of prison gangs is the work of one such journalist (Steinberg 2004), who treats their symbolic economy, their iconography, their legal anthropology, and their sociomaterial existence with extraordinary “thickness.”

The point? That, while Sahlins may have exaggerated somewhat to make a rhetorical point, his remark—which arises out of a genuine fear for the extinction of anthropology—packs a powerful punch. *Prima facie*, a discipline that takes to doing work that could as well be done, and be done as well, by journalists, technicians of ephemera, is indeed one without a distinctive subject, distinctive theoretical concepts, distinctive methods, or a distinctive place in the disciplinary division of labor. A discipline that hardly

exists at all, in fact, other than as an institutional trace waiting to be erased.

How, then, is anthropology responding to the threat of its banalization, its dissipation, its annihilation, real or imagined? What may we make of those responses? Are they likely to avert the End of Anthropology by charting new Ends for Anthropologists? Or are they merely deferring the inevitable?

Before I answer, two parentheses.

One is this. While we attend here to the End of Anthropology, other disciplines may equally be said to be in crisis. Take economics. It may have become the most influential knowledge regime on the planet. But, to the degree that its theoretical models seek to account for and predict outcomes in the real world, it remains, well, a pretty dismal science. Hence the growing recognition, exacerbated by the global meltdown of 2008, that most economists get things badly wrong most of the time. This, says James Galbraith, is because they remain wedded to a “theoretical model that has been shown to be fundamentally useless” (Solomon 2008). Even Richard Posner (2009:231), leading scholar-ideologue of the law and economics movement, speaks of the “crisis of ‘08” as a “wake-up call to the economics profession,” a view recently echoed by the *Economist* (2009). Not that its spectacular capacity for error has had much practical effect: it continues to perpetrate its theories on living societies, whatever the consequences—among them, the political, social, ecological, and moral havoc wrought as a result of rising corporate power and the massive concentration of wealth in relatively few hands in recent decades. Thus, for example, a 2008 survey by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization reported that a billion people would go seriously hungry in 2009, despite “bumper harvests,” primarily because they cannot afford the cost of food; because currency depreciations in the global south have prevented those who most need it benefitting from falling basic commodity prices; because, despite soaring agrochemical and biotech profits, fertilizer and seed are priced beyond the means of most non-Western farmers; because, with shrinking labor markets across the global north, migrants are losing their jobs and, with it, their ability to send remittances home. Because, in other words, because the confident axioms of free-market economics have been proven catastrophically untrue.<sup>9</sup> This, in part, is why the so-called post-Autistic movement of French economists seeks to “liberate” the discipline from its “obsession with formal models [with] no obvious empirical reference” (Fullbrook 2003:17, 22f). Post-Autism challenges the “neoclassical mainstream” to embrace the analysis of nonmarket phenomena, of human intersubjectivity, and of “cultural and social fields” (Fullbrook 2003:17, 22f), a view, apparently, shared by a growing number of economists elsewhere too. Could it be that the next step for them, their way out of their own crisis, is to sidewind silently onto our terrain?<sup>10</sup>

Or take sociology, a house deeply divided. As Joseph Lopreato and Timothy Crippin (1999:xi–xii) note, it stands

accused of having “produced ‘no . . . theory’ of worth,” of importing much of its methodology from other disciplines, of “failing to define [its] concepts” adequately, of producing knowledge that has “little or nothing in common . . . [with] the real world”; so much so that it faces imminent “decomposition,” even “deletion from the academy.”<sup>11</sup> As in anthropology, talk of crisis in sociology is neither new nor a matter of consensus: Raymond Boudon (1980) and Alvin Gouldner (1970) famously wrote about it almost 40 years ago. In doing so, each in his own way raised important philosophical, political, and theoretical questions. Contemporary crisis talk tends to be more mundane. The discipline is “tired,” says Satish Deshpande (1994), and lacking in distinction: its qualitative end has become a mere shadow of anthropology, relying increasingly on ethnography; the work of its subfields—politics, economics, law, culture—is more substantially done in other disciplines; and its quantitative end typically celebrates method above all else, evolving ever more exquisite techniques for measuring phenomena that are often poorly conceptualized or reduced to their most superficial manifestations. Hence Lopreato and Crippin’s anxieties about both the epistemic and the empirical scaffolding of contemporary sociology. This is not to deny that it, or economics, yields much of value. It is to observe that, as regimes of knowledge, other disciplines too have critical challenges to meet.<sup>12</sup>

The second parenthesis. Many prognoses of the End of Anthropology have presumed a rather monolithic view of the discipline, one circumscribed by its “traditional” concepts, objects, and methods. And yet it was never so bounded, so self-limiting. After all, contemporary network theory had one of its sites of origin in the Manchester School in urban Central Africa (see, e.g., Mitchell 1969), whence it found its way into U.S. organizational sociology—and beyond; Godfrey Wilson’s (1941–42) economics of detribalization, also in Africa, was a remarkable harbinger of world-systems theory; Frederik Barth’s (1997) deployment in 1959 of “The Theory of Games” to Yusufzai Pathan political processes foreshadowed later applications of rational-choice models and transactional analysis; and so on and on. Ours has long been an undisciplined discipline, whose heterodoxy has always made its future hard to predict. And ultimately, to its great advantage, irrepressible.

I shall return to both of these parentheses.

### DEFYING DEATH, or VIGOR MORTIS

Back to my question, then: How have anthropologists reacted to talk of the imminent demise of their discipline? Most do not bother with it at all. Like the vast majority of sociologists (Lopreato and Crippin 1999), they treat it as so much background noise. Among those who have chosen to react, however, three primary tendencies are discernible.<sup>13</sup>

The first is a retreat back into the local—often still, although we rarely admit it, the exotic local. This is owed to the fact that, for many anthropologists, the uniqueness of the discipline remains its “ability to get inside and understand

small-scale communities, to comprehend [their] systems of knowledge” (Graeber 2002:1222). Herein lies our sense of security, our source of solace in the face of epistemic or ethical uncertainty. This is in spite of the fact that much contemporary anthropological practice deviates far from the foundational fiction of fieldwork: the conceit that, given sufficient time “on the ground,” it is possible to comprehend “the totality of relations” of a “society” or the essential workings of “a culture” (cf. Gupta and Ferguson 1997). The elemental faith in fieldwork nonetheless survives because it rides on the methodological myth that ethnography may “function well without a theory to guide it” (Marcus 1994:44).<sup>14</sup> It is also buttressed by a long-standing chimera: that anthropological wisdom consists of generalizations about the particular that are also particularizations of the general—in short, empirical aggregates, not propositions or explanations. Hence the oxymoron “descriptive-analysis” so strongly favored by my teachers’ generation.

One corollary of the fetishism of the local has been a denial of the relevance to anthropological concerns of macro-cosmic forces and determinations in the world, forces and determinations referred to, dismissively, under the sign of globalization. This, in turn, is founded on two assertions: one, of the efficacy of indigenous agency against those global forces; the other, of the banal truism that different peoples do things differently.<sup>15</sup> What follows is a species of relativism, and an intractable realism, that repudiates any “general” theory and method grounded in political economy, history, philosophy, whatever; indeed, any form of knowledge that threatens our distinctiveness. Thus, for example, in the early 1990s, when rural South Africa was awash in mystical violence—in the murder of alleged witches and other technicians of evil—a few social scientists, Jean Comaroff and myself included (1999a, 1999b), argued that these outbreaks were local effects, figurations really, of changes in the production of social, moral, and material life. Those changes had been occasioned in part by the impact on the countryside of so-called structural adjustment. They manifested themselves in growing joblessness, in a crisis of social reproduction, and in the emergence of a virulent occult economy, all of which bespoke the modernity of witchcraft (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993; cf. Geschiere 1997). The details are not important here. What is, though, was the skepticism of anthropologists both within the country and outside (e.g., Moore 1999; Niehaus with Mohlala and Shokane 2001). They countered that the phenomenon had a profoundly parochial character, which is self-evidently true—and that, therefore, to pursue explanations beyond the local is to court the dual dangers of abstraction and theoreticism. Which does not follow logically at all. In point of fact, our argument was that contemporary African witchcraft is reducible neither to “the local” nor “the global”—that it has to be understood with reference to the complex, multilayered mediations in between.

For Arjun Appadurai (1997:115), the refusal of explanation beyond the compass of the immediate is owed to

anthropological angst over the loss of the “space of intimacy in social life,” classically the stock-in-trade of the ethnographer. Whether or not this is so, it certainly is true that the ethnography of the local is being depicted as an endangered art. Englund and Leach (2000:238; see above), for instance, argue that “it” is engaged in mortal struggle with “generalizing perspectives.” In other words, with Theory, upper case: Theory represented by an ensemble of “familiar sociological”—note, sociological—“abstractions,” among them, commodification, modernity, disenchantment, neoliberalism; theory that seeks not merely to describe the world but to account for what goes on within it; theory that opens our scholarly patrimony to the encroachment of an ever-more-generic social science. This sort of self-ghettoization, it seems to me, is less likely to stave off the End of Anthropology than to assure its death by descent into an exquisite form of irrelevance.

The second reaction to perceptions of disciplinary crisis complements the first. It is a retreat into fractal empiricism: the description of acts, events, experiences, images, narratives, and objects in the phenomenal world—in all their concrete, fragmentary, unruly manifestations—without reducing them to any more coherence than is required to render them into words, without imposing any authorial order on them, without seeking meaning “beneath” their surfaces, thus to allow them to speak for themselves. Matti Bunzl (2008:56) offers as the prime exemplar of this species of anthropological practice Anna Tsing’s *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen* (1993). In it, Tsing, a prose poet of rare gift, lays before us a wealth of descriptive detail, enunciated from a variety of vantages and voices. On principle, however, no gesture is made toward integration or explanation. Which raises a problem: Wherein lies the anthropological value-added? Why call this anthropology at all? Why not literary nonfiction? Literary nonfiction of the highest quality, no question. But unless we ask what it is that gives shape to a social world—how it is imaginatively made social in the first instance; how its internal incoherencies and fractiousness are to be understood; who in it can speak or cannot; what is or is not thinkable and actionable within it; how its realities are constructed, negotiated, empowered, embodied; how its materialities materialize—what makes this particular text, any text, specifically anthropological? And how might it serve to sustain the singularity, or the *raison d’être*, of the discipline?<sup>16</sup>

The same might be asked of contemporary anthropological writing that shares a commitment to the empiricist but eschews the fractal by resorting to ordering metaphors. Metaphors, I stress, not explanations. Network analysis is a case in point. Here the use of the fecund imagery of reticulation, of the assemblage or the ensemble, stands in for theory, the descriptive tool being an alibi for the presentation of the particular as if it might portray something beyond itself. From this vantage, the concrete itself is the highest permissible form of abstraction. But, again, there is nothing anthropological about this. Network analysis might have had one of its points of origin in the Manchester School

(see above)—where, incidentally, it was never mistaken for theory—but it has dispersed itself widely across the social sciences.<sup>17</sup> For all the fact of it being a response to epistemic crisis, in other words, a resort to empiricism does not, even when coupled with a focus on the intimacy of the local, add up to disciplinary distinction.

This brings me to the third response, especially manifest in the United States. It is to return to basics, so to speak: to the concept of culture—albeit hedged about by caveats, albeit transposed into a lexicon of more contemporary vintage, most usually that of semiotics, of image, representation, voice. Or of phenomenology, of experience, belief, being-in-the-world. A vivid instance has been the recent effort to essay something called the “anthropology of Christianity” (see, e.g., Cannell 2005, 2006; Robbins 2003, 2007). This endeavor, Chris Hann (2007) has argued, is reductionist, incoherent in defining its subject matter, contradictory in the claims it makes about that subject matter, and unreflective in its idealism. What is more, he adds, it yields little we do not already know from the comparative anthropology of religion. So be it. My own concerns lie elsewhere. Joel Robbins (2007:5f), in making the case for this “new” field of study, asserts that anthropologists, Jean Comaroff and I being the worst offenders, have taken pains to make Christianity “disappear” from anthropological discourse, to “airbrush [it] out” of historical ethnographies, largely by writing it into a narrative that embraces such things as its connections to capitalism and, in Africa, its imbrication in colonialism; largely, also, by giving too much weight to the ways in which its message has been indigenized by “native” populations—and too little to its own intrinsic substance and determinations. Robbins concedes implicitly that Protestantism may indeed have been interpellated in these broader historical forces, that its southerly march may have been integral to the rise of colonial capitalism, that some African peoples may have vernacularized its content.<sup>18</sup> But “empirical adequacy,” he asserts, is insufficient (Robbins 2007:8).

Why? Because anthropologists persist in “assum[ing] that Christianity [is not] culturally important” in its own right (Robbins 2007:7–8). Here is the crux of the matter: what is particular about the anthropology of Christianity is that it treats the faith primarily as culture. Robbins himself appears to “airbrush out” of it anything other than its putative cultural content, which, at a glance, would seem greatly to diminish its complexity as a world religion. He also presumes that it actually has a cultural content, as opposed to a theology, independent of the social worlds in which, historically, it has sown itself. This is ironic, because the Protestants who exported it in the 19th century bore with them a faith heavily inflected by the secular cultural contexts (plural) from whence they came. It was a faith that contained, within its own Euro-ontology, a credo actually called “Christian political economy” (Waterman 1991), one explicitly embedded in the capitalism of its time. This is why the likes of John Wesley wrote at such length about money and other materialities. And why evangelists thought that

teaching Africans to shop and to cultivate cash crops opened a pathway to their souls, whatever their would-be converts made of their theological message. They understood clearly that the political economy, theology, and semiosis of Protestantism were one—and that all alike were embedded deeply in the “civilization” of a rising Euromodernity. Neither did it take them long to conclude, in southern Africa at least, that even the most enthusiastic of African Christians, deeply separated from them by culture, seldom shared their ideas of time, personhood, and divinity. Or of conversion.

My object is not to squabble over Christianity or its anthropology.<sup>19</sup> It is to argue that a return to cultural accountancy as the signature of a quintessentially anthropological contribution to the understanding of this or any other phenomenon—and hence as a justification for the continued existence of the discipline—is deeply problematic. Not that culture is unimportant. In dialectical engagement with the sociomaterial, and framed in appropriate theoretical terms (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991:19–31, 1992:27–31), it is indeed critical in making sense of the world. But the reduction of a global religion to it, conceived immaterially and ahistorically, is precisely what gives anthropology a bad name. After all, evangelical Christianity has changed the political and economic face of the planet. All manner of conflict is being conducted under its sign. Christian political economy has returned to haunt us. To distill it to culture is to ensure for the discipline not prolonged life but death by trivialization.

If, then, the three major panaceas for disciplinary perpetuity—retreat into the local, resort to the empirical, and return to the cultural—are part of the problem not the solution, is there a way to speak of the future of anthropology in different terms?

### **ANTHROPOLOGICAL FUTURES: FIRST THOUGHTS, SECOND GUESSES**

There is no easy answer to this question, of course. But let me offer a few thoughts. They lead away from received ideas of the discipline toward a sense of indiscipline, a knowledge regime that seeks to rethink the conceptual foundations, the empirical horizons, and the methodological coordinates of anthropology.

To begin with, the claim that we have lost our distinctive subject matter, methods, concepts, theoretical scaffolding—and, with it, our unique place in the disciplinary division of labor—rests on a fallacy of misplaced typification. This has it that anthropology is a species of knowledge defined by its topical reach and received techniques. In sum, we are what we study and how we study it. It goes without saying that many social scientists subscribe to this view; so do lay people, like the late Mrs. Evans of South Wales. For them, our work lies in the ethnographic documentation of small-scale, non-Western cultures. Historically speaking, we have also tended to typify ourselves largely in these terms. To continue to do so, however, is at once anachronistic and counterproductive; worse yet, it leads to silly wrangles over

what is or is not properly anthropology. In this day and age, it seems to me—if not to those who seek panaceas in neoempiricism, cryptoculturalism, or brute localism—the discipline ought to be understood as a praxis: a mode of producing knowledge based on a few closely interrelated epistemic operations that lay the foundation for its diverse forms of theory work, mandate its research techniques, and chart its empirical coordinates. They belong, I stress, to the domain of Methodology, upper case: the principled practice by which theory and the concrete world are both constituted and brought into discursive relationship with one another. And they are epistemic in that they entail an orientation to the nature of knowledge itself, its philosophical underpinnings and its notions of truth, fact, value. None of them is new, none of them absent from anthropologies past. Together, they underscore the point that our topical horizons ought to be configured by our praxis, not the other way around.

Let me clear. I am not suggesting that the discipline shares a single episteme. That is patently not so. The contrasts in this respect between, say, anthropological phenomenology and Marxist anthropology, or structuralism and actor-network theory, are all too plain. However, as we shall see, these epistemic operations, because they belong to the domain of Methodology, transect substantive paradigmatic divides: they may as well chart the anthropology of a practice theorist as a structuralist or a Foucauldian. What is more, they permit anthropologists to converse critically across lines of theoretical difference, topical interest, even ethical cleavage. Note, too, that my argument is at once an account and an aspiration, at once description and prescription: it describes what many anthropologists do and makes a case for the kind of anthropology I believe should survive into the future.

First among these operations is the critical estrangement of the lived world, itself founded on a double gesture—on the deconstruction of its surfaces and the relativizing of its horizons—thus to pose the perennial question: What is it that actually gives substance to the dominant discourses and conventional practices of that world, to its subject positions and its semiosis, its received categories and their unruly undersides, to the manner in which it is perceived and experienced, fabricated, and contested? This goes way back. Recall Bronislaw Malinowski's (1927) effort to rewrite Sigmund Freud on the Oedipus complex by demonstrating its very different manifestation among the matrilineal Trobriand Islanders. Here boys were said to evince their first love for their sisters (not their mothers) and hostility toward their maternal uncles (not their fathers), a dramatic transposition of affective patterns found in Europe. The corollary? That the phenomenon has less to do with innate human sex drives than with culturally specific relations of authority and their concomitant ambivalences. Whether or not he was right (cf. Spiro 1983), Malinowski's general point was that Western perceptions of family, kinship, sexuality, and desire required critical decentering if they were to be analytically useful, something that only a comparative anthropology might accomplish.

Ever since, anthropologists have insisted, with great profit, on making sense of the phenomenal world by estranging its observable forms. Vide, for instance, Monica Wilson's (1951) extraordinary insight into the McCarthy-era hearings in the United States through the defamiliarizing optic of the African occult as ethical etiology. The red agent of "the Senator's fevered dreams" and the accused witch, she observed, were linked not only metaphorically by the trope of the witch hunt but also by a positional equivalence (p. 313): both were "standardized nightmares" of a moral order fraught with contradictions that defied ordinary discourse, contradictions sharpened by transformations of scale in the social universe. Her genius, in short, was to discern, and to historicize, the connection between the visible and the invisible, the audible and inaudible, beneath the contours of everyday existence. This is the generic genius of anthropology as a critical practice, one that continues to infuse its most creative work. It is what, for example, led Andrew Apter (1999; discussed earlier) to see behind the elaborately ritualized exteriors of a Nigerian election the same kind of counterfeit—the same play on the disconnect between signifier and signified, the same effort to render imaginative fictions into material facts—on which are based the 419 scams that bombard the Internet daily. These scams are themselves an artifact of the speculative culture of deception pervading the "casino capitalism" that has come to infuse the global economy (Strange 1986). Here, in short, is a political anthropology that estranges normative discourses of failed states, corrupt regimes, and procedural democracy so as to give account of a politics in which the essential political act, the very essence of power, is to determine what is or is not politics in the first place. A far cry, this, from the usual horizons of a conventional social science.

The second operation involves being-and-becoming: it is the mapping of those processes by which social realities are realized, objects are objectified, materialities materialized, essences essentialized, by which abstractions—biography, community, culture, economy, ethnicity, gender, generation, identity, nationality, race, society—congeal synoptically from the innumerable acts, events, and significations that constitute them.<sup>20</sup> This operation, in other words, is concerned with establishing how it is that verbs of doing become nouns of being—common nouns, collective nouns, abstract nouns, proper nouns—thus to illuminate the pathways by which lived worlds are pragmatically produced, socially construed, and naturalized. Take, for example, Appadurai (1995) on the "production of locality": it is not the received nature of the local, goes his thesis, but its fabrication that is critical in comprehending the salience of place in social life. Appadurai's (1986) "social life of things" evokes the same sensibility: namely, an impulse to situate the "thingness" of objects, their simultaneous materiality and meaning, in the diachrony of their becoming.

There is, again, an archaeology to this: the classic work of E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1940) on the Nuer, one of the most nuanced pieces of conceptual anthropology ever

written, albeit one that has not a word of theory in it. Evans-Pritchard's achievement, famously, was to show how, in a stateless polity, an immanent grammar of social formation—inscribed, in the Anthropologese of the time, in patriliney—hardened into actually existing lineages under conditions of conflict. His ethnography pointed to the fact that African descent groups, far from being observable aggregations *ab initio*, existed as a potentiality, contained in the semiotics of blood; that they took on their manifest character through material practices occasioned by ruptures in everyday life. Contemporary anthropologists did not all understand *The Nuer* in these terms, seeing in it an empiricist account of African life, but this reading is powerfully present in the text. Similarly, if in counterpoint, alliance theory, developed in Lévi-Strauss's (1969) masterwork on kinship, arrives at an ontology of human society by treating its elementary forms as the sedimented effect of exchanges of conjugal partners and prestations according to a range of grammatical rules. Social order, the noun form, is a predicate here of modes of becoming realized through marriage practices. Each, therefore, has to be theorized as the condition of the other's possibility.<sup>21</sup> Or take, in a different theoretical vein but similar revisionist spirit, Frederick Barth (1969) on ethnicity.<sup>22</sup> Reversing received truths, Barth argued that there is no one-to-one relationship between ethnicity-as-experienced and the sociology of difference (1969:14). It is the act of drawing boundaries among populations, not their inherent "cultural stuff," that constructs ethnoidentities. The implication? That ethnicity is less a thing than a virtual relationship whose objectification is rooted in a dialectic of identification and contrast (Barth 1969:15); that the cultural content of ethnic consciousness may be a product, rather than the constitutive basis, of "ethnic group organization" (Barth 1969:11); that, by extension, the concept of identity itself is a historically sedimented abstraction with no ontological substance of its own. And the general point? That mapping process of being-and-becoming is a vital element not merely in our theory work but also in the antiessentializing sensibility of a critical anthropology.

The third operation is the deployment of the contradiction, the counterintuitive, the paradox, the rupture as a source of methodological revelation.<sup>23</sup> Again, this has a long genealogy. It begins with the use of the social drama by the Manchester School; in particular, with Victor Turner's (1957) account of Sandombu, *Homo politicus* incarnate in rural Africa, whose rise and fall was deconstructed through its drawn-out dramaturgy to lay bare foundational contradictions between structure and process in Ndembu society, to disinter the paradoxes and impossibilities inherent in political ambition in that context, and to reveal the aporias in domestic life intrinsic to matriliney; in sum, to make sense of the interiors of the Ndembu world. The story may have been underhistoricized, the depiction of "the Ndembu" too mechanistic for present-day sensibilities. But the methodological gesture itself underscored the capacity of the unexpected and the counterintuitive to disclose deep truths about everyday existence. Echoes here of Edgar Allan Poe, who spoke long

ago of the forensic value of that which falls "out of the range of ordinary expectation" (1975:191).

This is why anthropologists have continued to return to them—to the unexpected, the counterintuitive, the rupture—to lay bare worlds both familiar and strange. Noteworthy in this respect is Michael Taussig's (1983) celebrated analysis of a Faustian devil compact to elucidate the contradictions of capitalism, and its misperceived magic, for Colombian cane-field workers. So too, a generation later, is Mateo Taussig-Rubbo's (2007) astonishing image of a one-way mirror in a Californian immigration camp, inverted so that the inmates can see the guards but the guards cannot see the inmates; Taussig-Rubbo commissions this image to interrogate the sorts of sovereignty exercised over "illegal" entrants to the United States in recent times—and, thereby, to illuminate the increasingly contrarian nature of its borders, which are at once ever more both open and closed. Similarly, Fernando Coronil's (1997) account of two deaths, the demise of a factory and the murder of a lawyer, alike theatrical moments of rupture, are used to great effect in dissecting the "system of circulation" at the core of the Venezuelan petroeconomy in the 1970s. Patently, recourse to contradiction, rupture, and the counterintuitive as a methodological stratagem is closely related both to critical estrangement and to mapping processes of being-and-becoming. It is often by such means that the other two operations are enabled, that the interiors of the phenomenal world, in space and time, begin to reveal themselves.

Space and time. The phrase itself points to the fourth epistemic operation: the embedding of ethnography in the counterpoint of the here-and-there and the then-and-now—in a word, its spatiotemporalization.<sup>24</sup> In recent times, the notion of situating almost anything in its broader context has, as often as not, been banalized by reduction to the language of the local-and-the-global; just as the historicization of almost everything tends to be translated into the argot of the epochal, into framing terms like *colonialism*, *empire*, *modernity*, *postcoloniality*, and *neoliberalism*. Blunt instruments, all of them. It goes without saying, or should, that neither spatial nor temporal contextualization is given empirically, nor is it an *a priori*. Context is always a profoundly theoretical matter.

Spatiotemporalization, as I said earlier, is eschewed by many anthropologists, especially those who repudiate explanation with reference to anything much beyond the enclosed edges of the ethnographic gaze. By contrast, I would argue that anthropology at its most productive is anthropology most comprehensively positioned in the here-and-there and the then-and-now—in proportion, of course, to its analytic object. Thus it is that Jessica Cattellino (2008; see above) embeds her ethnography of the Florida Seminoles, a study of the impact of casino capitalism on their world, in several pasts (U.S. colonialism, local Indian history, recent turns in U.S. political economy) and in several spatial frames (contemporary pop culture, the entertainment industry, rez [reservation] imaginaries, the politics and economics of identity, the

realm of the law). As a result, she is able to show how this people has succeeded in deploying their new wealth, despite all the contradictions it has brought in its wake, to reconstruct their indigeneity and sovereignty—in such a way as to belie the notion, characteristic of much on-reservation anthropology, that they are sacrificing their culture to the solvent of capital. Thus it is, too, that Harry West (2005), in explaining why sorcery is so important on the Mueda Plateau in Mozambique, situates the occult in multiple dimensions: in the here-and-there of the regional, national, and global economies and in the then-and-now of a past that begins with Portuguese overrule, moves through the Frelimo socialist period, and ends with the neoliberal reforms imposed by the IMF and the World Bank. For those who live on the plateau, it is these intersecting dimensions out of which arises the mystical, life-threatening evil that they must control to make a habitable future for themselves. Thus it is, as well, that Kaushik Sunder Rajan (2006) accounts for the character of contemporary genomics by contextualizing it along two axes: vertically, in the rise of biocapital and bioscience, a corollary of which has been the rendering of “life [as] a business plan” (p. 138f); and horizontally, in the market logic and the political sociology of research in the United States and India, respectively, which affect directly what goes on in laboratories. In the absence of this spatiotemporalization, Sunder Rajan’s narrative would be just another addition to science and technology studies.

All of the anthropology I have cited in exemplification of the various epistemic operations underscores the final one: the founding of the discipline on grounded theory, on an imaginative counterpoint between the inductive and the deductive, the concrete and the concept, ethnographic observation and critical ideation; also, in a different register, between the epic and the everyday, the meaningful and the material.<sup>25</sup> This, self-evidently, implies a respect for the real that does not conflate the empirical with empiricism. And a respect for the abstract that does not mistake theory work for theoreticism. In the absence of one half of this counterpoint (the ethnographic, the inductive, the concrete), we risk becoming second-rate philosophers, or worse, ideologues who deploy “facts” purely in defense of a priori positions. Without the other (the deductive, the concept, critical ideation), we limit our horizons to forensic journalism, to bearing witness, to literary nonfiction or the poetics of pure description. Elsewhere, Jean Comaroff and I (2003) have made the case in extenso for grounded theory. I shall not rehearse the argument, because it has saturated everything I have said so far, save to suggest that the counterpoint between the empirical and the conceptual offers the most productive pathway for the discipline, maybe the only one, between the Scylla of brute descriptivism and the Charybdis of bloodless abstraction.

Also between triviality and obscurity. Hence the anthropological value added of, say, Andrea Muehlebach’s (2007) ethnography of ethical citizenship and the “new” voluntarism in Italy, which informs, and is informed by, a theoretically

provocative analysis of the changing nature of labor and nationhood in neoliberal Europe. Or of Rocio Magaña’s (2008) thick description of death in the Arizona desert, which, in telling of the dramaturgy of immiserated Mexican migrants, theorizes anew the relationship between the violence of the law, sovereignty, the politics of the body, and the paradox of national borders at once porous and policed. Or of William Mazzarella’s (2003; discussed above) account of advertising in India, a narrative of condoms and commodity aesthetics that rewrites key elements of European critical theory by grounding them in the exigencies of situated cultural practices. Or any number of other recent works written with a similar eye to the fecund counterpoint of the concept and the concrete.

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I reiterate that the epistemic operations of which I have been speaking lie at the core of much contemporary anthropological praxis. Self-evidently, moreover, the various ways in which those operations have been and are given analytic life have begotten different theoretical orientations and species of explanation—and, with them, the kinds of argumentation that animate disciplinary discourses, which, inflected by world-historical conditions, have, in turn, shaped the content of anthropology, its intellectual trajectories, its inner turbulence, its intermittent transitions, its futures-in-the-making. This is why I have illustrated them with instances drawn from both the past and present, from diverse ethnographic domains, and from a variety of paradigmatic approaches. Together they underscore the fact that our praxis is capable of yielding a wide spectrum of theory and method; hence, my parenthetical point earlier about its long-standing heterodoxy, about anthropology as an immanently undisciplined discipline. Ours really is an indiscipline whose conceptual foundations and techniques of knowledge production have almost infinite potential to open up new horizons.

#### **INDISCIPLINARITY: TOWARD INCONCLUSIVE CONCLUSIONS**

Without a principled praxis, I submit, what pretends to be anthropology is not. Without it, the discipline would indeed be nothing in particular. And difficult to distinguish from others. This is true, too, when it conceives of itself in purely topical terms. That way lies anachronism or indistinction at best, extinction at worst. Conversely, if it remains epistemically grounded in the manner I have described, there is little by way of subject matter that anthropologists cannot take on and address in a distinctive manner, whether it be the Indian advertising industry, Nigerian electoral politics, Egyptian fatwa councils, African adornment, or casino capitalism—or, for that matter, Islamic banking (Maurer 2005), vigilantism and death squads (Abrahams 1998), the U.S. nuclear uncanny (Masco 2006), the changing nature of money (e.g., Guyer 2004; Hart 1999), and many things besides. This is why we are not forensic journalists, even when journalism and anthropology cover similar things; why we

are not simply creative writers and poets, even though we may aspire to write creatively. And why we are not dissolving into the other social sciences.

In point of fact, from the perspective advanced here, the difference between us and them could not be more marked. Normatively speaking, those disciplines continue to be topically driven—which abets their crises (see above).<sup>26</sup> For the most part, they are not given to critical estrangement or the deconstruction of their *ur*-concepts. Political scientists, by and large, study political institutions and processes, conventionally understood, just as economists study economic institutions and processes. They rarely ask what politics or economics actually are.<sup>27</sup> Anthropologists do, repeatedly. Unlike political scientists, we also spend a great deal of time trying to discern what taken-for-granted terms like *democracy* or the *rule of law* might mean for “natives,” both as signifiers and as species of practice, which often turns out to be anything but obvious. Likewise, most sociologists presume the concrete existence of such “social facts” as, for instance, ethnicity. While they may differ over definitional details, they see no epistemic problem in taking the measure of its manifest significance or its material impact on human lives, usually by means of survey instruments. We, however, are more likely to begin by calling into question the very notion of “identity” and then proceed to interrogate the production of ethnic consciousness, the objectification of ethnic populations, the phenomenology of “being ethnic,” and the like—which, parenthetically, is why we are such a pain to the policy industry.

The contrast is stark. And this is not even to mention the vexed matter of quantification, which many social scientists take as the evidentiary basis of all truth, paying no heed whatever to foundational critiques of statistical knowledge or the means of its production. Anthropologists don’t count. But we like to think we know what does—and it is rarely measured numerically. For many of us, numbers are a fetish. Although they may reveal important things, they are just one mode of construing the world, one that often reduces complexity beyond recognition, one based on the occulting of probability. Even history, which, in its mainstream is predominantly qualitative, has a very different relationship to topicality, epistemology, and facticity from that of anthropology. For its orthodox practitioners, who are empirically driven to a fault, the divine is in the detail, in fealty to the fact; the devil lurks in interpretation. This is why analysis-heavy historical anthropology is such a scandal to them, why it has provoked such bitter attacks in defense of their discipline against ours.<sup>28</sup> Those historians who are theory prone, who indulge in the imagination beyond the narrowest confines of the datum, risk being accused of “committing” . . . anthropology. So do political scientists and sociologists who concern themselves with “soft” political and social phenomena: the cultural, the meaningful, the phenomenological.

Of course, there are others who engage in critical estrangement, in mapping processes of being-and-becoming,

in the methodological deployment of rupture, contradiction, and the counterintuitive, in spatiotemporalization and grounded theory. The more they do, however, the more they become like us. There are increasing, if unacknowledged, signs of this in diverse places; recall the rise of post-Autism in economics and the ethnographic turn in sociology. But that—the anthropologization of other social sciences—is a topic for another time. Here we are concerned with our futures, not theirs—except to say one thing. To the extent that anthropology is a critical in/discipline, this ought to chart its scholarly practice in university and other institutional settings, vexing the social sciences at large about the production of knowledge, about pedagogy, about the human predicament—and how best to make sense of it in the perplexing history of the present. To be sure, it is only by essaying our praxis in positive, even provocative, terms that anthropology, the generic study of the human, may claim a unique place for itself in the world. How, precisely, are we to configure our indiscipline as a scholarly practice in educational and other contexts? That, it seems to me, is what we ought to be arguing about among ourselves right now.

There is much more to say, patently. I have merely scratched at surfaces. And, no doubt, will elicit some angry reactions. This is all to the good. What is most likely to assure the Future of Anthropology is that those who inhabit its Very Small Planet continue to argue with one another. As long as we do, we will remain a scholarly community. For my own part—and here I return to my prescriptive voice—I should like to see the discipline perpetuate itself by recourse to the praxis that I have sketched above. While we ground our work in its various epistemic operations, there is every reason to believe that we shall not kill ourselves off by trivialization, irrelevance, or indistinction, which is more or less assured by a retreat into neoempiricism, cryptoculturalism, or brute localism. Or by repudiating ethnography altogether, which has manifested itself in a few powerful places of late. For me, there is no such thing as a postethnographic anthropology just as there is no such thing as a posttheoretical one.

But there is a more positive basis on which to prognose the future of the discipline. It lies in a younger generation whose work distinguishes itself by its sheer energy, by the imagination that drives it, by its critical edge. I have offered many examples of their work along the way. Others that come immediately to mind—an invidiously small, random selection from a substantial body of work—include Cori Hayden (2003) on bioprospecting and the uneasy tapestry of relations to which it has given rise among local communities, scientists, and drug companies in Mexico; Janet Roitman (2004) on the economics and ethics of (il)legality, militarized commercial networks and organized crime, and sedimentations of the state in the Chad Basin; Caitlin Zaloom (2006) on the operations of global finance, from the trading pits of Chicago to the digital dealing rooms of London; Daniella Gandolfo (2009) on urban renewal in Lima, Peru, read through the dramaturgy of struggles between female streetsweepers and a corrupt state over the privatization of

public services; Kim Fortun (2001) on the Bhopal disaster and the litigation that followed it, a process in which the hidden workings of power interpellated themselves awkwardly into advocacy, the rights of victims, and environmental politics; Tom Boellstorff (2008) on the cyberworld of Second Life and its virtual culture, interrogated from the vantage of an avatar. All of them evince a capacity to estrange, to ground their theory in an ethnographic optic at once wide angled and close up, to demystify received orthodoxies. By these means does our own verb-to-be become a proper noun. By these means does the critical practice of ethnography become Anthropology, upper case.

So, in a word, Mrs. Evans: no. Anthropology, into which I was initiated on that grim day in South Wales in 1971, is not about to die. Nor is it “in suspension.” It is very much alive, producing new kinds of knowledge, new theory work, new empirical horizons, new arguments. The future of the discipline, in short, lies, as it always will, in its indiscipline.

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**John Comaroff** *Department of Anthropology, University of Chicago, Chicago, IL 60637; American Bar Foundation, Chicago, IL 60611; Department of Social Anthropology, University of Cape Town, Cape Town 7701, South Africa*

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## NOTES

**Acknowledgments.** Many of the ideas in this article have been developed in collaboration with Jean Comaroff. My title—which invokes a well-known essay by Peter Worsley (1970)—also plays, ironically, on her “The End of History, Again: Pursuing the Past in the Postcolony” (Comaroff 2005). Thanks, too, to Andre Gingrich, for his insightful reading of an earlier draft article, and to Molly Cunningham, my excellent research assistant. Finally, I acknowledge the anonymous reviewers for the *American Anthropologist* and, above all, its editor-in-chief, Tom Boellstorff, for their gently critical, highly constructive comments of the draft submitted to the journal. Its talented managing editor, Mayumi Shimose, tolerated my innumerable questions and editorial alterations with grace and good humor. I am immensely appreciative of her efforts.

1. Directed by Sidney Gilliat (1962), the film was based on Kingsley Amis’s novel, *That Uncertain Feeling* (1955).
2. See, for example, the essays in Asad 1973, especially Forster’s “Empiricism and Imperialism.”
3. I base this statement in the fact that, when I first designed a graduate course in anthropological methods at the University of Chicago in 1998, I actively sought syllabi both online and from other departments. But few were available. A recent Internet search produced a remarkably large number, most of recent vintage.
4. See, for example, Ortner’s (2006:61–62) critique of the anthropological study of resistance on grounds of its ethnographic thinness.
5. See <http://www.qualquant.net/training/>, accessed May 30, 2008; a 2009 online version was announced by e-mail circulation from H. Russell Bernard on December 8, 2008.
6. Perhaps because this text is the transcript of an interview, Marcus does not justify his claim. Presumably, it is founded on the critique of the concept in *Writing Culture* (Clifford and Marcus 1986) and other contemporary publications; see above.
7. The term *biosociality* was coined by Paul Rabinow (1992). It has since taken on a vigorous life of its own beyond anthropology.
8. Marshall Sahlins, June 2, 2008. The comment was made in a faculty discussion at the University of Chicago. I cite it with his permission.
9. See Lean 2009. This account, first printed in the *Independent* (U.K.), was widely syndicated. For the original report from which Lean drew his information, see FAO 2008.
10. Or onto the terrains of bioscience (vide the rise of behavioral economics) and human psychology (especially its nonrational, noneconomic dimensions, a.k.a. its “animal spirits”; see, e.g., Akerlof and Shiller 2009).
11. Observe here the parallel with the critique of economics, especially (but not only) from the post-Austrian movement. Given the convergence between the two disciplines in some areas—not least those that resort to rational choice models and the analyses of very large, highly abstract data sets—this parallel is not altogether surprising.
12. This is itself part of something more general. With the epochal changes in economy and society of the late 20th century, the social sciences have found their received division of labor, their subject matter, the boundaries between them, and many of their concepts called into question. As a result, they are scrambling to recast their horizons. Hence the explosion of knowledge communities defined either as supradisciplinary “studies” (gender studies, race studies, queer studies, science and technology studies, area studies) or by means of the conjunctural (law and society, law and economics).
13. This triangulation, I hasten to add, is not correlated with the triangulation of symptoms discussed earlier.
14. The original sentence in Marcus’s text (1994:44) has been truncated for purposes of quotation.
15. This paragraph borrows heavily from Comaroff and Comaroff 2003.
16. I stress that this is not intended at all to devalue the importance of Anna Tsing’s remarkable corpus of work in anthropology. Quite the opposite. Like many others, I hold it in the highest esteem. My point is to pose a generic question about the specifically anthropological value of a particular form of fractal empiricism.
17. Clyde Mitchell, perhaps the leading figure in the development of network analysis at the time, repeatedly emphasized this to us when we were colleagues in Manchester between 1972 and 1978.
18. McDougall (2009:483) reiterates Robbins’s point by arguing that anthropologists “must engage [the Christian] ideology” of conversion “because it is shared by the subjects they are studying.” This is an extraordinary piece of Oceanocentrism. Our whole point is that many black South Africans in the 19th century did not share that ideology—which would seem to render the critique of our work somewhat beside the point.

19. Were I to do so, I would dispute Robbins's assertions about the inattention of anthropologists to Christianity and to its cultural dimensions. I would also debate his understanding of the nature of Christianity itself, which seems to me to be rather narrow. And I would contest his readings of the work of others—including our own, which, as he concedes, was never intended as a contribution to the anthropology of religion.
20. The term *being-and-becoming* evokes more than one genealogy in classical and modern philosophical thought—perhaps most obviously, although not only, Heideggerian phenomenology. I intend it in a specifically anthropological sense here, however, where it refers to the domain of Methodology.
21. Back in the 1970s, I made an analogous argument about African marriage payments in an effort to forge a synthesis among structuralist, functionalist, and Marxist perspectives. I suggested that the collection and distribution of bridewealth—critical to processes of social reproduction—sedimented a kinship ideology, to be understood again as a virtual grammar of relations, into concrete property-holding associations (Comaroff 1980).
22. Barth's (1969) analytical lexicon is now dated. As a result, I have translated some of his terms into more contemporary anthropospeak.
23. In Marxist theory of various stripes, of course, contradiction has a very specific theoretical status, being fundamental to the analysis of class, the commodity, and the dialectic. But that is beyond my present scope.
24. Although this epistemic operation seems similar to the second, the one involving being-and-becoming, they are not identical. One refers to the mapping of the processes whereby social and cultural phenomena come to be realized; the other, to the contextualization of those phenomena and their production in space and time.
25. I intend "grounded theory" here quite differently from the manner in which it has been deployed in sociology—and famously criticized by Michael Burawoy (1991a, 1991b)—in the wake of Glaser and Strauss's *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967), which treats it as a purely inductive practice.
26. This is by partial contrast to "the studies"—gender studies, cultural studies, critical race studies, and the like (see N. 12)—which, although topically named, have been sites of deep epistemic self-reflection and autocritique.
27. Of course, political theorists do address such things. As my colleague Lisa Wedeen has reminded me, so do some political scientists who work on comparative politics from an interpretive vantage. Institutionally, these scholars tend to find homes in political science departments. But, for the most part, critically important although their work may be, they inhabit the margins of their discipline, not its normative core.
28. See, for example, Vansina's (1993) attack on historical anthropology at the University of Chicago.

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