

# Introduction

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*Parallax: The apparent displacement of an object as seen from two different points not on a straight line with the object. Example: the small **parallax** caused by our having two eyes with different angles of vision allows us to see three-dimensional images.*

In both France and the United States, anthropology emerged as an academic discipline in the twentieth century around a double aim: understanding the fundamental commonalities shared by all human societies and cultures while also grasping the full range of diversity among them. A key device for achieving this goal has been to conduct detailed study of societies that are radically different from our own. In both national traditions, the production of anthropological knowledge—about human society in general as well as about particular societies—was understood to require an encounter with a strikingly unfamiliar society by an outsider expert who took seriously the perspectives and experience of insider participants, but who retained a scientific distance from them. Further, anthropological analyses have generally been directed to audiences with no direct experience and little prior knowledge of the specific societies under consideration. In other words, twentieth-century production of anthropological knowledge conventionally rested on the shock of the unfamiliar: strongly marked alterity with respect to the anthropologist and her subjects in the first instance, and then her audience and those subjects.<sup>1</sup>

But such radical strangeness is seemingly harder to find in our twenty-first-century world: people drink Coca-Cola and wear Chinese-made sneakers across increasingly large swaths of the planet, and anyone with access to the internet or a television set can visit almost anywhere. It is easy to conclude that everything has become more or less familiar, partly because of increased blurring of cross-cultural differences and partly because of growing ease of access—direct or mediated—to most corners of the world. What future can possibly lie in store for anthropological expertise if its production has rested on forms of alterity that are apparently disappearing?

This line of reasoning undoubtedly underlies many of the soul-searching debates within anthropology on both sides of the Atlantic over recent decades, debates ultimately pitting competing ideas about legitimate and productive relationships among the anthropologist, his subjects, and his audiences. What, for example, are the possibilities and pitfalls for anthropology-at-home, where much of the classical “otherness” in the anthropologist’s relationship to his subjects is absent? To what extent is it possible to overcome the challenges of noticing and analyzing the taken-for-granted foundations of a society when the anthropologist is a habitual member as well as a trained observer? Can “real” anthropology be done only through the study of societies that are truly exotic to the anthropologist, allowing him to bring the fresh and potentially unimplicated eye of the obvious outsider? But in that case, might the claim to privileged understanding of someone else’s society amount to morally (and perhaps scientifically) unacceptable hubris? If so, then what might be the promise of collaborative anthropology, where the anthropologist works in partnership with her subjects to define relevant questions and to develop data analysis, thus simultaneously blurring conventional lines both between anthropologist and subjects, and between subjects and audience? Or can truly significant research questions be articulated and reliable results generated only by exercising specialist expertise and maintaining some degree of scientific distance? Finally, it must be asked what specifically anthropological forms of knowledge can usefully contribute to the vast amounts of information—academic, but also journalistic, cinematic, literary, touristic—already available about most of the contemporary world, its faraway corners no less than nearby vistas?

We aimed to explore such questions by using the well-established anthropological device of pushing such issues to their extreme limits: we organized a small workshop comprising an equal number of American anthropologists of France and French anthropologists with research experience in the US, creating a group in which each half was simultaneously foreign anthropologist, native subject, and colleague to the other. Further, the research focus on France or the US means that we all study settings that are familiar to our potential audiences. Consequently, claims to expertise cannot easily rest on “having been there” as a unique experience: even when our audiences comprise non-specialist compatriots, they are likely to bring considerable prior experience to anything we might have to say. These circumstances, particularly marked for the members of our workshop group, will undoubtedly become increasingly characteristic of the general conditions under which anthropological knowledge is produced over the twenty-first century. At the same time, our French-American encounters allowed us to simplify our experiment by deliberate elimination of one variable that certainly shaped classical anthropological inquiry and

may well persist—perhaps in diminishing forms—over the twenty-first century: the extreme differences of geo-political and social power that have typically colored the relationship of the anthropologist and her audiences to her subjects (colonial, post-colonial, or otherwise). France and the US arguably enjoy roughly equivalent world standing in a geopolitical sense; the two certainly stand on equal footing in terms of the considerable intellectual legitimacy reciprocally accorded the intelligentsia of each. Indeed, in each case, it is apt to be positively valorizing to cite scholarship produced in the other country. This circumstance allows us to explore the possibilities and challenges of practicing truly reciprocal cross-cultural research, without the distortions of uneven political or intellectual standing.<sup>2</sup>

This enterprise has its roots in a long history of informal discussions between the two of us, based on our shared experience as somewhat unusually placed anthropologists of each other's societies: Anne Raulin began her training in France, but earned her Ph.D. in the US in the 1980s with a dissertation based on research in New York; she has subsequently pursued her career in her native France, conducting urban research alternately in the two countries. Susan Carol Rogers was trained primarily in the US with some complementary coursework in France; since the 1970s, she has conducted fieldwork mainly in rural France with some short projects in the US, where she has pursued her career. From our conversations emerged the idea of bringing together a small group of colleagues who have similar experiences, to further explore the productivity of this kind of dialogue and its implications for defining research questions, as well as the methodological challenges and historic pertinence of anthropological practice under the conditions we had experienced.

In fact, until the 1990s, only a handful of American anthropologists had conducted research in France and almost none of them pursued it as their main specialty. With the development of Europeanist anthropology in the US over the past twenty-five years, it has become considerably less unusual to choose France as an ethnographic focus, although this specialty remains a relatively small one within the domain of Europeanist anthropology, itself a rather minor—though now well-established—geographic specialty among anthropologists based in North America.<sup>3</sup>

Among French anthropologists, there has been a parallel development of interest in the study of contemporary Western societies since the 1980s, but the focus has remained primarily on France or elsewhere in Europe. Leaving aside native North America, no more than a handful of French anthropologists have to date conducted research in the US, nearly all of them as a complement to a career of research mainly focused elsewhere. In fact, the United States, relatively ignored by American anthropologists, is undoubtedly one of the societies in the world that has drawn the least

attention from foreign anthropologists. Following the logic of reciprocal anthropology developed here, we would hope that the twenty-first century would see a substantial increase in ethnographic research conducted in the US by anthropologists of French nationality, among others.

In constituting our workshop, we were strongly committed to keeping the number of French and American participants strictly equal, even though this requirement posed challenges by forcing us to make extremely difficult choices on the American side and to make a considerable effort to identify appropriate participants on the French side.<sup>4</sup> Our group met for the first time in May 2007 at New York University in Paris. Our bilingual discussions, organized around pre-circulated papers based on each participant's fieldwork in France or the US, allowed us to begin developing a sense of collective purpose. In light of these exchanges, each participant reworked her or his paper for our second workshop session, held in February 2009 at Middlebury College. This set of essays, further reworked in the interim, form the basis of the present collection.

Our work reflects a strong commitment to some of the defining characteristics of anthropology as it developed over the twentieth century in both France and the US. For example, each contributor deploys *cross-cultural comparison*, at least implicitly, as a key device for achieving insight about the issue at hand. It should be emphasized that our collective purpose was never to systematically compare American and French societies; rather we all routinely use comparison as a valuable tool to sharpen the particular points each aims to develop. In some cases, such comparison is explicit: some authors make reference to field research they have conducted at home (e.g. Gaboriau, Beriss), while several draw comparisons with more exotic field sites (e.g. Capone). But insofar as each author is primarily concerned with a society that is foreign to him or her (even if not radically so), he or she inevitably notices and deciphers its characteristics from a comparative perspective.

Secondly, each contribution is based on ethnographic fieldwork, using conventional *participant-observation research methods* to explore in detail specific case studies. Following well-established disciplinary practice, these cases are strategically selected, not as being representative of the larger society in any statistical manner, but rather because they shed particularly strong light—often because of their peculiarity—on one or another characteristic of the larger setting.

Even though well-grounded in the legacies of twentieth century anthropology, this work also illustrates some twenty-first-century novelties in the conditions under which anthropological knowledge is increasingly likely to be produced. For example, while anthropologists classically wrote about settings that were largely unknown to their audiences, our work addresses readers who, if not necessarily members of the societies analyzed,

are likely to at least be regular consumers of their products (scholarly, literary, cinematic, touristic, etc.). Far from controlling most of what our audiences know about our subjects, we are obliged to take account of the heavy baggage of prior experience and knowledge they bring. Indeed, it is not the rarity of information but rather its surfeit, readily accessible to the anthropologist and to her audiences alike, that is apt to shape the ethnographic enterprise today. Unlike our ancestors who were largely concerned with discovering and reporting the unknown, we find ourselves navigating the (putatively) well-known and amply documented.

At least one further departure from earlier practice is clearly evident here: insofar as we live in a world similar to that of our subjects, the indigenous world views we wish to analyze largely overlap the conceptual frames we aim to refine or critique. Many of our workshop discussions turned on the ambiguities and confusions that inevitably result from the shifting meanings of terms or concepts as they move between vernacular and analytical uses. Further, our France–United States experiment highlights some of the additional challenges generated by the cross-national circulation of concepts. As in some other disciplines, the history of anthropology has followed largely parallel tracks in the US and France, with only occasional—and generally highly valorizing—transatlantic borrowing in both directions.<sup>5</sup> Such imports, though, often acquire surprisingly new meanings, as they are absorbed into their adoptive intellectual context.

These observations all suggest that the central twenty-first century challenge for those aiming to understand the diversities and commonalities defining the human condition is to recognize and correct *faux amis*,<sup>6</sup> those misunderstandings that result from apparent similarity. Indeed, if twentieth century anthropology taught us that a common humanity was to be found behind easily observable difference, the task for anthropology in our century is to illuminate the human diversity underlying apparent similarity.

To meet this challenge, we propose taking advantage of blurred distinctions among the anthropologist, his subjects, and his audiences. While classical anthropology rested on the notion that by studying “the other” we would arrive at a clearer understanding of ourselves, we suggest that it is through a reciprocal gaze—the juxtaposition of our observations of others with theirs of us—that we are most likely to be able to grasp the world in which we find ourselves today.

The collection of essays that follows, then, illustrates an anthropological project that is as dialogical as it is comparative, focusing on specific events or contexts to illuminate the fundamental complexities, internal contradictions and dynamics of a given culture. The dialogical dimension of our undertaking refers partly to the workshop discussions out of which each essay developed; it is also reflected in the organization of this

volume, alternating the insights of French and American anthropologists with respect to each other's society and the production of knowledge about it.

More precisely, each section of this volume corresponds to one of the points of entry we identified to grasp the societies of interest here, approaches that are certainly not mutually exclusive, exhaustive, or specific to the cases at hand:

- Analysis of *categories of distinction*: How do particular kinds of social difference (here, in terms of class, race, or culture) come to be defined, legitimized, protected, or erased? What forms of institutional action (or inaction), moral consensus, or judgments of value operate to reproduce, contest, or rearrange such understandings?
- Analysis of *key words*: Here, the focus is on concepts that carry strikingly different meanings in the anthropologist's own society and the one she studies (e.g. community/*communauté*), or where a concept's ubiquity in one national context contrasts to its more limited use in the other (healing/*guérison*). Careful analyses of such notions promise to illuminate more general characteristics of the larger society in which they are deployed.
- Analysis of *paths to the good life*: Utopian visions of the good life and how to achieve it are also apt to take forms that are both surprising to the outside observer and revealing of broadly persistent cultural or social characteristics. These ideals are illustrated here by analysis of American notions of limitless possibility and French ideas about the countryside.

## Categories of Distinction

### *Class, Race, Culture*

All societies are structured around the meaningful categories with which people identify themselves and others. These are apt to be routinely manipulated in practice as well as in theory, and have long been at the center of social scientific thought. But what might be further elucidated through an approach that straddles national boundaries? Particularly within societies possessing a highly elaborated sense of the moral superiority of their own social orders, how do people come to terms with categorical arrangements that are obviously out of line with the social ideals they claim? Jean Baudrillard's observations of the United States led him to pose just such a question:

What has become of this American revolution that consisted in the dynamic resolution of a clearly understood individual interest and a well-tempered collective morality? A problem that was not resolved in Europe ... In short, has the New World fulfilled its promise? Has it reaped the benefits of freedom to the full, or has it merely garnered all the unhappy consequences of equality? ... We remain unconvinced by the moral vision Americans have of themselves, but in this we are wrong. (Baudrillard 1988:88–9, 91)

The two anthropologists opening this volume, one French and one American, each explore the way that such moral values, forcefully proclaimed within each national context, are experienced by those who are supposed to most need the protections they offer. No one would deny that there inevitably exists a discrepancy between legal equality and the inequities of daily life but how, asks Patrick Gaboriau, is this gap experienced by homeless persons? How do they account for their situation of extreme poverty, in apparent contradiction with some of the fundamental principles of French and American society alike? Are homeless persons in Los Angeles and Paris inclined to refer to the same causes, hold accountable similar institutions, or denounce the same kinds of miscarried justice? In fact, the differences are striking: in Paris very poor persons often see themselves as victims of a system that has evicted them, and understand their plight in terms of a logic in which state responsibility is considered paramount; whereas in Los Angeles homeless persons, though clearly articulating the appeal of an American Dream, are much more inclined than their French counterparts to abandon the idea that there is any discoverable reason for anything that happens to them. They thus understand their plight (as do those who achieve the Dream) as the product of a profoundly incoherent and arbitrary social non-order.

Indeed, one theme that runs through many of these chapters concerns the way that social difference is defined, managed, and understood as a way to determine individual identities as well as collective belonging. For example, the relative pertinence of—and relationships among—cultural and racial difference are central to Beth Epstein's study of a French New Town and Sara Le Menestrel's on Franco-Louisianan music; these themes are also treated in David Beriss's comparison of Antillean activism in France with post-Katrina restaurant culture in New Orleans, as well as in Stefania Capone's analysis of *Orisha* religion in the US. Each author is especially concerned with deciphering the vernacular understandings of these kinds of difference in particular study settings, drawing varying degrees of distinction between these everyday understandings and the ways these concepts are used analytically. Not surprisingly, the salience of race in the US is most striking to French observers of the US, while its relative absence from discourse about France—together with the ubiquity of references to culture – invites comment from American observers of France.

It is interesting to note that while the notion of culture has generally not provided a very important analytical tool for twentieth-century French anthropology, the culture concept was a cornerstone of the American version of the discipline as elaborated by Franz Boas and his followers. Seeking an alternative to racial explanations for observable differences in behavior, Boasians, by most accounts, drew a sharp distinction between those characteristics determined by race (biologically transmitted and extremely slow to change) and those attributable to culture (transmitted by teaching/learning and relatively malleable), radically constraining the kinds of traits that they considered legitimately explainable in racial terms. One could argue that the Boasian legacy persists in the US today, in the form of ubiquitous reference to—indeed celebrations of—cultural difference within routine American practice. However, as the chapters by Le Menestrel, Beriss, and Capone illustrate, “culture” in contemporary American usage is frequently inextricably tangled with “race”: they show cultural categories of musical style, cuisine, or religious practice all to be fundamentally grounded in racial distinctions, assumed to be immutable. Each of these cases refers to the simple black/white binary that most obviously constitutes race as it is understood in the US. But the habit of interweaving racial and cultural distinctions undoubtedly does not stop there. It could be argued more broadly that the notion of ethnicity is most frequently used by Americans to mean a race/culture mix. Further, as something transmitted from ancestors, understood to be relatively immutable over time and naturally inalienable, ethnicity is more similar in some important ways to Boas’ notion of “race” than to his “culture.”

As outsiders to American society, Le Menestrel and Capone are both inclined to notice and effectively articulate—rather than simply take for granted—some examples of American entanglements of race and culture. Insofar as Americans are inclined to internalize and naturalize this connection, American observers of France are apt to be suspicious of French claims to conceptualize cultural differences independent of race. Beriss takes note of such attitudes in his own reaction to Antillean activists in Paris, as well as in his compatriots’ response to his work among them. Epstein’s analysis addresses such suspicions head-on, using the example of a suburban French New Town’s sizeable immigrant population to decipher routine ways of thinking about belonging that are not necessarily grounded in primordial racial/cultural differences. Shaped as much by the preconceptions of her American interlocutors as by her observations in France, her analysis (like Beriss’) offers striking insights into French ways of thinking about difference that simultaneously cast light on contrasting American habits of thought. Epstein’s suggestion that social distinctions have been considered more pertinent in her French case find an interesting echo in Le Menestrel’s comments about the relative insignificance of social

criteria in her example from Louisiana. Although a shared class position once provided the basis for asserting a fundamental commonality across the diversity of Franco-Louisianan musical genres, she argues, this claim has been largely displaced—in scholarly and vernacular contexts alike—by assertions of a primordial culture/race-based distinction between Creole (zydeco) and Cajun styles.

The contrast between the state's absence from Le Menestrel's account and its pertinence as an actor in Epstein's analysis, which addresses the principles and practices underpinning French notions of legitimate categorical differences and collective interests, is consistent with Gaboriau's observation about its roles in the explanations for their plight offered by homeless persons in the two countries. Despite such clear consistencies, these articles as a set do not offer a seamless or entirely consistent picture of either French or American society. Beriss' treatment of culture and race among Antilleans in France and in post-Katrina New Orleans, for example, complements—but also departs in some provocative ways from—those of Epstein and Le Menestrel. In any case, these juxtapositions shed stimulating light on a number of definitive characteristics of the two societies.

## Key Words

### *Community, Healing*

In the context of cross-cultural comparison—whether implicit or explicit—certain words may take on particular importance, seeming to summarize key characteristics of each case and the divergence between them. The term “community” offers one example with respect to France and the United States. Highly charged in political or media discourse as well as in sociological analysis in both settings, this word almost always carries positive or neutral (rarely negative) value in American usage but, consistent with the logic of French Republican integration discussed by Epstein, is usually negative or neutral (rarely positive) in French. The two American authors in this section, William Poulin-Detour and Deborah Reed-Danahy, are drawn by their French encounters to reexamine taken-for-granted uses, meanings, and contrasts in the two countries. The two French authors, Stefania Capone and Anne Raulin, focus on “healing,” a term that strikes them for the contrast between its ubiquity in the American setting—in public, private, vernacular, analytic, literal and metaphorical contexts—and the limited medical or religious meanings associated with its French counterpart (*guérison*).

Poulin-Deltour uses the example of gay activism to explore how the familiar binary of American good community/French bad community may be reversed by dissident groups as a way to critique dominant national val-

ues. His primary focus is on the mobilization of French gays in the 1990s, particularly on their use of an American model of “gay community” (as they understood it) to make claims about the legitimacy of a distinctive identity based on sexual orientation. He contrasts these with contemporaneous claims about the “romance of community” from American queer activists, many inspired by their reading of French theory to critique the essentialist and exclusionary implications of claims to community among gays in the US. This case of two-way contestatory borrowing leads Poulin-Deltour to caution against both overstating simple cross-national contrasts and underestimating the culture-specific adaptations of such imports. But his material also offers an intriguing example of the potential political expediency of such misunderstandings.

In her consideration of the community concept, Reed-Danahay is concerned with the potential for misunderstandings that result more from importing vernacular meanings into analytical tools than from cross-national exchange. Drawing on her work in a French farm community, as well as among Vietnamese ethnic communities in the US and France, she argues that the considerable baggage associated with American common-sense uses of “community” undermine its usefulness for ethnographic analysis. Instead, she proposes that a better choice would be “social space” (*espace social*), a strictly analytical term first developed by French sociologist Henri Lefebvre and then further elaborated by Pierre Bourdieu. In this move to replace the baggage of an everyday term with the precision of specialized scientific vocabulary—all the more legitimized by its Gallic origins—Reed-Danahay addresses a perennial challenge of the social sciences. To resolve it, she follows the precedent of a number of influential predecessors on both sides of the Atlantic, including most notably perhaps the work of several mid-century French scholars of rural France who sought to escape the preconceptions implied by such everyday terms as *village*, *paroisse*, *commune* or *pays* by borrowing from Anglo-American “community studies” the notion of *communauté rurale* or *communauté paysanne* (e.g. Lefebvre 1963, Bernot 1975) as more analytical terms that further benefited from the luster of overseas origins. In the context of rural France, the term *communauté* in this technical sense has since been absorbed into administrative language (e.g. *communauté de communes*)<sup>7</sup> but not into ordinary vernacular usage, nor has it acquired the negative associations with communitarianism connoted in France by groupings based on either religion or foreign ancestry.

The example of *communauté*/community is an especially telling one, but a number of the other authors in this volume also note such shifting meanings across space, time, or social context. Vernacular terms may circulate far from their points of origin, acquiring new connotations—or the authority of scientific abstraction—along the way. Terms that begin

as analytical concepts (Boasian culture, for example) may work their way into common usage, picking up diverse baggage on the trip. Clearly, in the course of moving between common sense and scholarly usage, between one national context and another, between one political stance and its opposite, words acquire new meanings that can themselves illuminate the conceptual stakes and local circumstances producing them.

It is the relative richness of the term “healing” as it is widely used in American society that draws the attention of the two French observers whose papers close this section. Capone focuses her attention on North American versions of *Orisha* religious practices, imported to the US by immigrants from Cuba and Haiti and embraced there by small groups of African-Americans. Capone argues that a key specificity of mainland versions of this religious practice is its emphasis on efforts to reconnect with African ancestors, largely absent from versions elsewhere in the Americas. Indeed, her analysis adds a useful strand to those of Le Menestrel and Beriss, with respect to the management of (black/white) racial identity as an important preoccupation in the US. Here, African ancestors are seen by *Orisha* practitioners as a crucial source of moral guidance; re-establishment of ties with them is considered the best way for their American descendants to achieve both spiritual healing and moral reawakening. But the notion of healing at the center of this religious practice is broader yet: affirmation of an ancestral black identity is understood to have potent healing powers, not only for *Orisha* practitioners but for the broader African-American community, bringing social and cultural as well as political and spiritual redemption to the whole collectivity.

If the *Orisha* religion is a relatively marginal one, even among the racial minority from which it draws its practitioners, the Episcopal Church is clearly a mainstream religion that has long been associated with American elites. It is undoubtedly significant then, that the notion of healing is no less important in this context, and here too is not only liturgically meaningful but is also central to private, individual acts of conscience. In her essay, Raulin captures the conceptions of healing that shaped post-9/11 activities in the Episcopal parish located next to the Twin Towers site. She shows healing and reparation to be connected to the immediate need to bear witness and minister to the trauma experienced in the aftermath of the attacks, but also that healing is extended to include a sense of forgiveness that can transform the enemy-other. In this case, the power of healing is invoked, not so much to reinforce a sense of collective belonging (as in the *Orisha* example) but to dissolve hostile boundaries through a broad transnational movement for reconciliation that has drawn in the Episcopalian Church. In this context, healing again includes a political agenda aiming to repair the wounds caused by social, ethnic, religious, or national conflict, but here this goal is extended to the human race and aims for a

kind of universal solidarity: nothing short of the reconciliation of all of humanity with itself.

This shared use of a language of healing in the American versions of two very different religious traditions suggests that the significance of the religious idiom in US society resides largely in its potency as a frame for interpreting political/social realities or individual understandings of self, independently of rates of church attendance or declarations of orthodox belief. Moreover, the similarities between these two examples illuminate other characteristics of American society, such as a widely-shared three-way conception of the person (comprising body/mind/spirit) that contrasts with habitual French conceptions as well as with particular kinds of linkages between science—psychological, clinical, but also natural and physical—and religious belief of many kinds.

## Utopias

### *Endless possibility, Country living*

The notion of healing in much the same sense reappears centrally within the New Age milieu of San Francisco analyzed by Christian Ghasarian, even though this context obviously occupies a very different position in American society than do either the *Orisha* practitioners described by Capone or the New York Episcopalians studied by Raulin. Nonetheless, Ghasarian too encounters a concept of healing that posits an inextricable linking of body, mind, and spirit; concerns both individual and collective (even global) well-being; and draws on wide-ranging forms of knowledge, including ancient and modern science as well as diverse forms of spirituality. Again, the appearance of this concept in such sharply contrasting contexts exposes a ubiquity that makes it largely invisible to natives, but by the same token makes it a promising locus of widely shared ideas that help define the particularities of everyday life in the United States.

As in the other examples, healing is understood here as a key process for overcoming obstacles on the way to the “good life.” In Ghasarian’s view, the New Age version of that good life, as well as ideas about what is required to achieve it, rest on a kind of fundamental optimism best summarized by the ubiquitous phrase “anything is possible.” The quest for the good life—bringing together personal accomplishment, physical and spiritual health, and planetary improvement—is believed to demand considerable effort but also to foster the full realization of individual and collective potential. Indeed this “world of possibilities” can be seen as a contemporary version of the American Dream. Ghasarian’s analysis shows this utopian vision to remain remarkably powerful, though neither static nor monolithic: continually reworked over time and social context, it

persists as a potent guide to individual and collective behavior in contemporary American society.

If the theme of endless possibility expresses the forward-looking optimism characteristic of the American Dream, whether functioning as a positive inspiration or (as Gaboriau's work among the homeless of Los Angeles suggests) as a mirage, French attraction to the countryside suggests instead an inclination to define the "good life" with reference to the past. Susan Carol Rogers is struck by the powerful and deeply ambivalent connotations of countryside in France to symbolize both a world happily left behind and one tragically lost: the good life can require leaving the countryside, just as well as it can imply returning to it. This double valence stands in sharp contrast with the positive simplicity of American conceptions of "endless" possibility that exclude negative options: social mobility is never imagined as downward, nor is the American Dream ever expected to turn into a nightmare.

Like the American Dream of endless possibility analyzed by Ghasarian, French images of the countryside do not necessarily describe any observable reality. Indeed, Rogers suggests that by many empirical measures rural life in France and the US has evolved in broadly convergent ways over the past century without blurring the sharp contrasts in the two national imaginaries. Nonetheless, as in Ghasarian's American example, French ideas about the countryside function as a highly consequential—and therefore illuminating—framework for articulating and acting upon widely shared aspirations. If neither author offers explanation for why recipes for the "good life" draw on such different elements in each national setting, both suggest that the force and persistence of such utopic visions reside in their association with an adaptable repertoire of meanings. In its late twentieth century New Age version, the American dream, for example, remains recognizable as such, even if it is not identical to the version that drove nineteenth century pioneers across the continent. Rogers focuses more squarely on this kind of flexibility, exploring some of the variations across time and social context in the meanings attributed to rural space in France to illustrate the dynamics—simultaneously persistent and malleable—that shape such repertoires.

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This set of essays illustrates how a well-grounded reciprocal anthropology can render explicit the myths, ideologies, conceptual reflexes, and habitual practices that implicitly shape our everyday experience. This style of anthropology deploys carefully chosen cases that, while not necessarily statistically representative, draw attention to contextual variability and stretch our imaginations with their consideration of paradox: acceptable terms for articulating a moral social order—and one's position in it—vary

considerably from one context to the other; and borrowed ideas or things may be pressed into service to reaffirm well-established identities or to promote novel ones sometimes only to be rejected in the name of those very constructions.

The term “parallax” (from the Greek *parallaxis*, alteration), meaning the difference in the apparent position of an object when it is viewed along two different lines of sight,<sup>8</sup> seems especially useful for our purposes. In effect, it identifies the results of a reciprocal anthropology, one in which novel insights about a given society result from the juxtaposition of outsider and insider perspectives. If one of our aims is to invite a play of mirrors held up in a way that allows us to see the image of ourselves perceived by the other, it is with the full awareness that this exercise is a risky one, likely to be unsettling to those seeing themselves from this unaccustomed angle. In this regard, Claude Levi-Strauss’s view of the anthropologist as an “astronomer of human constellations” takes on a double meaning, referring both to the transitivity necessarily characterizing a reciprocal production of knowledge and to the kind of non-hierarchical epistemological order that would be required to legitimize future anthropologies of this kind.

The realities of contemporary globalization concern anthropology as much as any other domain. Emergent recognition of world-class intellectual centers in countries such as Brazil, India, or China may signal a “provincialization of Europe,” the continent that until the end of the twentieth century considered itself the brains of the planet, with North America presumptively positioned to carry on its legacy. The reciprocal anthropology proposed here is both motivated by and dependent upon the potential for upending such old center/periphery models. We have focused here on a play of mirrors between France and the US as an early experiment with what we have in mind. But the ultimate interest of this approach lies in its general application among a wide array of societies, western or not. Our example only begins to lay out the methodological and theoretical challenges and potentials of such an undertaking.

It should be noted that the tone taken here is neither judgmental nor ironic; our aim is not to celebrate or to mock the national characteristics we encounter (or those we routinely live with). Particularly within western literary traditions, there is certainly an honorable and much-loved genre of cross-national commentary that has just such purposes, including many notable examples of French or American chroniclers whose assessments of each other’s country are often used to judge their own (e.g., Alexis de Toqueville, Mark Twain, Edith Wharton, Georges Duhamel, MFK Fisher, Jean Baudrillard, etc.). Our goal here is rather to cast thought-provoking light on revelatory characteristics that otherwise seem banal or counter-intuitive to the inside observer, no less than to identify and decipher those whose interest lies in their pervasiveness, internal contradiction, or appar-

ent elusiveness. Casting aside the license among equals to use a language of value judgment or comedy, we have aimed instead for a kind of critical distance—in the strictly analytical sense of the term—as the best way to capture the places and cultures that we reciprocally care about, admire, and respect. Ultimately our undertaking is one that rests on the legacy of classical anthropology, a body of knowledge and methods that we are grateful to have inherited and are eager to bequeath.

## Notes

1. This observation arguably applies to all four fields conventionally comprising American anthropology. In this volume, however, our focus is on sociocultural anthropology.
2. In some important ways, our undertaking overlaps and complements those of such groups as the World Anthropologies Network Collective (Ribeiro and Escobar 2006, WAN 2005), the Lausanne Collective (Saillant et al 2011), and the Workshop on Anthropologists and Indigenous Scholars (Hendry and Fitznor 2012). Rather than focusing on the power relationships among various national and regional anthropologies or scholars, however, we have devised an experimental situation allowing us to explore the possibilities for a dialogical production of knowledge in the absence of such inequalities.
3. Today, there are about thirty American anthropologists whose primary research focus is in France, many more than was the case a generation ago. Nonetheless, the number remains small compared to the roughly 500 members of the Society for the Anthropology of Europe (SAE) or the 10,000 members of its parent organization, the American Anthropological Association (AAA). Europeanist anthropologists in the US, it would appear, generally continue to follow well-established disciplinary preferences for relatively unfamiliar societies, such as those in Southern or (since 2000s) Eastern Europe (Rogers 1991).
4. This dearth of French anthropologists of the US (and absence of a substantial network among them) is reminiscent of the situation of American anthropologists of France a generation ago: when Jacqueline Lindenfeld and Susan Carol Rogers organized a session on the anthropology of France for the 1985 AAA meetings, they were hard-pressed to fill out a panel of eight (including themselves).
5. This relationship can usefully be compared with that of Anglo-American anthropology. Somewhat distinct, at least over most of the twentieth century, the British and American traditions nonetheless developed in explicit reference to each other, underpinned by regular transatlantic exchanges of students and faculty. In contrast, French anthropology is grounded in quite a different intellectual history, intersecting only sporadically with its Anglo-American counterpart. Like some other anthropologies (e.g. Dutch), British, American and French all lay claim to a universal purview. One might therefore expect national differences to have faded away over the twentieth century, much as has arguably happened in the cases of such other universalizing disciplines as physics, biology, or economics. Rather, anthropology seems in this respect to have followed the model of those disciplines

- generally focused on the study of the particularities of one national setting, usually the scholar's own (e.g. literature, history, sociology). In those cases, dominant styles of scholarship are apt to vary cross-nationally.
6. Literally, "false friends": this term refers to a technical error of translation in which words that resemble each other in two different languages are mistakenly supposed to share a common meaning.
  7. *Communauté de communes* is an official administrative unit, created by a 1992 law and involving the federation of several contiguous townships (*communes*), usually in rural areas.
  8. In its literal meaning, parallax is measured by the angle of inclination between those two sight lines; because nearby objects have a larger parallax than those farther away, the principle of parallax can be used to determine distance (e.g. in astronomy).

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