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RETHINKING TIME'S ARROW: BERGSON, DELEUZE AND THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF TIME

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ABSTRACT:

Since the early 1970s, time has come to the fore as a constitutive element of social analysis. Anthropologists of multiple theoretical persuasions now take for granted that social life exists in “flux”, and this *temporal ontology* is commonly accepted as a universal, if habitually unquestioned attribute of human experience. Similarly, it underpins today’s dominant paradigm of “processual” analysis, in its many forms. Yet the concept of flux is notably under-theorized, in keeping with a history of uneven study by social scientists of time. This article draws on anthropological work by Gell and Munn, and philosophical work by Bergson and Deleuze, to propose a more precise definition of flux as *la durée*. It then discusses the ramifications of this critical analysis. Ultimately it argues that a more nuanced

approach to flux enables a rapprochement between the anthropological study of time and history, sociality and temporality, and an enhanced role for temporal analysis in anthropological theory.

KEYWORDS:

time, temporality, history, Bergson, Deleuze, *la durée*, flux, processual analysis, temporal ontology

To restore to practice its practical truth, we must therefore reintroduce time into the theoretical representation of a practice which, being temporally structured, is intrinsically defined by its *tempo*.

Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* [1972], p. 8

“Action” or Agency, as I use it, thus does not refer to a series of discrete acts combined together, but to *a continuous flow of conduct*.

Anthony Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory* [1979], p.55

The central assertion of this book is that the world of humankind constitutes a manifold, a totality of interconnected processes ...

Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History* [1982], p. 3

As soon as culture is no longer primarily conceived as a set of rules to be enacted by individual members of distinct groups, but as the specific way in which actors create and produce beliefs, values, and other means of social life, it has to be recognized that Time is a constitutive dimension of social reality.

Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other* [1983], p.24

TIME'S FLOW: A THEORETICAL LACUNA?

Social scientists and philosophers, even physicists, often quote St. Augustine's perplexed remarks on time when beginning their discussions, to underline the complexity of the task ahead of them, and warn readers up front that things are about to take a demanding turn.¹ Yet despite its complexity, time is not quite as slippery a fish as St. Augustine suggests, and some recent writers have done well to demonstrate that, while shedding important light on how the human experience of time might be grasped (e.g. Adam 1990, 1998, Gell 1992, James & Mills 2005a, Munn 1992). The reason for such introductory disclaimers about time, for anthropologists at least, perhaps lies elsewhere. Nancy Munn has made some critical comments that paint an unflattering portrait of the history of the anthropology of time.² She notes (1992:93) an "insufficient theoretical attention to the nature of time as a unitary, focal problem" among anthropologists:

When time is a focus, it may be subject to oversimplified, single-stranded descriptions or typifications, rather than to a theoretical examination of basic sociocultural processes through which temporality is constructed ... [T]he problem of time has often been handmaiden to other anthropological frames and issues ...

¹ *Quid est ergo tempus? Si nemo ex me quaerat, scio; si quaerenti explicare velim, nescio* ... ("What then is time? If no one asks me, I know; if I wish to explain it to him who asks, I know not...") in St Augustine, *Confessions*: Book 11, Chapter XIV. Compare Derrida 1994:6: "Time ... gives nothing to see. It is at the very least the element of invisibility itself. It withdraws whatever could be given to be seen. It itself withdraws from visibility. One can only be blind to time, to the essential disappearance of time even as, nevertheless, in a certain manner, nothing appears that does not require and take time."

² Reviews by Gell (1992:3–148) and Greenhouse (1996:19–83) draw comparable conclusions.

with which it is inextricably bound up ... [and] frequently fragments into all the other dimensions and topics anthropologists deal with in the social world.

Time has certainly not been lacking from anthropological theorizing, and influential figures have contributed important works, including Durkheim (1915), Malinowski (1927), Evans-Pritchard (1939, 1940), Leach (1961), Lévi-Strauss (1963), and Geertz (1973). However, through a concise overview of such works, Munn illustrates the relatively cursory attention paid to the subject until the 1970s, particularly with respect to its role in theoretical models. It is only in the 1970s and 1980s, Munn argues, that writers began to pay more attention to time as a focus, and even then, the field of time studies has remained relatively undeveloped compared to other areas of anthropological study. Despite some valuable work, therefore, it is true to say that the anthropological understanding of time is comparatively immature.

Nevertheless, during recent decades time has come to the fore as a constitutive element of theoretical analysis, chiefly, I argue here, in the guise of the ill-defined notion of flow, or flux. While earlier anthropological movements such as functionalism and structuralism largely overlooked time as a feature of theoretical models, a necessary oversight for any static, a-temporal analytical perspective, from the 1970s onwards several influential theorists introduced a more explicit temporality back into social analysis with their visions of social life as constituted “in time”.³ Bourdieu (1977:6–9), for example, posited that human interaction as a form of practice is predicated on time’s passing, and thus

³ It would be difficult to do more than summarize in an article of this length the use such theorists make of notions of flow or flux, which is what I do here. Nevertheless, this is concordant with the point I am making, namely that they themselves do not provide explicit definitions of time.

intrinsically defined by its *tempo*, which must form a core component of any analysis, particularly of the gift. Similarly, he influentially criticized structuralist models for their “detemporalized” character.⁴ At no point, however, does Bourdieu attempt to clarify in detail how he arrives at his own notion of “time”. Giddens (1979:53–65, 198–233) proposed a related approach, whereby the *flow* of time underwrites the key process of historical reproduction, or “structuration”. He is more explicit than Bourdieu, partially grounding his understanding of “lived-through experience” in the work of phenomenological philosophers (Giddens 1979:54–5); however, he still relies on a problematically unclarified root vocabulary of flow and process, e.g.: “‘Action’ or agency, as I use it, thus does not refer to a series of discrete acts combined together, but to a *continuous flow of conduct*” (Giddens 1979:55, emphasis retained). This was accompanied by a development in political economic perspectives pioneered by writers such as Wolf (1982), who saw “history” in the canonical Marxian sense as providing the foundation for wide-ranging social analyses of inter-linked modes of production, or “historical processes”, as opposed to the relatively a-temporal, static analyses associated with structural Marxists in the 1970s.⁵ While Wolf’s approach to time is more explicitly “linear” and Anglo-Saxon in outlook, and closely tied to the totalizing Marxian model of “historical time” (c.f. Agamben 1993:91–105), it nevertheless takes the notion of the flow of time and accompanying processual

⁴ “The detemporalizing effect (visible in the synoptic apprehension that diagrams make possible) that science produces when it forgets the transformation it imposes on practices inscribed in the current of time, i.e. detotalized, simply by totalizing them, is never more pernicious than when exerted on practices defined by the fact that their temporal structure, direction, and rhythm are constitutive of their meaning” (Bourdieu 1977:9, emphasis retained).

⁵ As Wolf (1982:4) writes in his very first sentence: “The central assertion of this book is that the world of humankind constitutes a manifold, a totality of interconnected processes, and inquiries that disassemble this totality into bits and then fail to reassemble it falsify reality.”

vocabulary that underpins this model as an unproblematic given. Despite the significant differences in the approaches of these theorists, therefore, their foundational understanding of time as an underlying process, flow, or flux is comparable, if difficult to pin down with any precision. They neglect to clarify the temporal ontologies of their models. With respect to an explicit anthropology of time, in such models time is predominantly a *constitutive*, not focal aspect of the theoretical apparatus (c.f. Thomas 1996:5-6).⁶

Since the late 1980s, this intrinsic *temporal ontology* has become a defining feature of social analysis.⁷ Many political economists have adopted a reflexive approach to “historical process”, ditching the lack of coevalness (c.f. Fabian 1983:156-65) characteristic of earlier Marxist frameworks, and signalling an approximation to the processual, symbolic, or practice-theory approaches that have developed in direct descent, or by the distaff from Bourdieu and Giddens.⁸ And in their turn, many practice theorists, who initially tended to retain a focus on discrete and questionably bounded cultures, have integrated the wider frameworks of political economists into their models. During the 1990s and 2000s this trend

⁶ A well-known exception is Bourdieu (1977:97–109; 1963), and his analysis of the agrarian calendar. However, while offering characteristic insights, he still subordinates the discussion of a more general approach to time to his desire to utilize the calendar to illustrate the workings of habitus, and in this respect his emphasis on flux as constitutive obviates the possibility of examining more intricately the foundations for the human experience of time. See Gell 1992:263–305 for a detailed appraisal and critique of Bourdieu’s approach to time. Thomas (1996:5-6) provides a more detailed discussion than I can here, but while he identifies the temporal character of influential theories, he does not press home an argument for the theorization of time itself (i.e. the provision of a temporal ontology) indicating rather that his own emphasis is on the field of “historical time” – an elision that I would wish to query.

⁷ The term “temporal ontology” applies to the implicit or explicit theory of the nature of time and temporal experience underpinning a paradigm – which is necessarily metaphysical in character, and an inescapable component of any social theory (c.f. Bakhtin 1981, Turetzky 1998).

⁸ E.g. O’Brien & Roseberry 1991. Taussig 1987 offers an influential and aggressive critique of the “Euro-centric” features of the temporal outlook of Wolf (1982), Mintz (1985), and like-minded political economists, which played its part in prompting these more reflexive approaches. His approach is complemented by Ortner 1984.

intensified and broadened its influence, as acknowledgement of the impact of a globalized economy and accompanying rapid social change on even the most isolated locales seemed to underline the pertinence of these approaches. Indeed, as globalization has become indubitably implicated in anthropological analysis, and the notion of bounded cultures increasingly problematic, the sense that social life is fluid, exists in temporal flow or historical flux, has become an even more appropriate root metaphor for the temporality of analysis, facilitating both the empirical analysis that rapid social change is intrinsic to modern social life, and the political economic thesis that social change was also intrinsic to “pre-modern” societies. In this respect, entangled notions of flux and historical change lie at the heart of the temporal modalities of contemporary anthropological theory.⁹ Despite differences, therefore, regarding the most effective way to analyse human sociality, and differing conceptions of how to implement a temporally-inflected social analysis, along with an increased coeval sensitivity as to how anthropological subjects experience time, change, and history, all these approaches are clearly underpinned by a tacit unspecified temporal ontology that is evoked through a common root vocabulary of process, flow, or flux – themselves implying in an unspecified way the notion that time involves change.¹⁰

These approaches are characteristic of a broader trend in cultural and philosophical theory in the last thirty years, sometimes associated with the

⁹ As Giddens (1979:210) states: “[I]n the replacement of the synchrony/diachrony opposition with a conception of structuration, the possibility of change is recognized as inherent in every circumstance of social reproduction.” It is a statement that sounds eminently unproblematic until one considers more closely its temporal ontology; and the temporal implications of widespread concepts of social change are similarly unclarified.

¹⁰ Given that *flow*, *flux* and *process* are used so freely by social analysts, strictly speaking, in dictionary terms, all imply change. According to *Chambers*, *flowing* is immediately defined as “to move or change form like a fluid”; *flux* as “the act of flowing”; *process* as “a sequence of operations or changes undergone”; and *change* of course as “to pass from

phenomenon of postmodernism. As Harris (1996:7) clarifies: “the ‘postmodern moment’ defined as a distinctive sense of temporality in anthropology does not identify fluidity as a symptom of modernity, but rather claims it to be a universal property of human societies and culture”. Harris’s article illuminates this most notable, yet under-theorized feature of contemporary anthropological theory. It is a notion that in different ways has been present in philosophical systems for many thousands of years – as the ancient Greek philosophers and early Buddhist scriptures testify (c.f. Kahn 1981, Kirk, Raven & Schofield 1983, Thomas & Hjort 1996).¹¹ It also features significantly in the work of philosophers who have been influential in shaping the temporal ontology of modern social analysis (e.g. Heidegger 1993 [1927], Whitehead 1979 [1927-8]). It has figured prominently in other fields of Western intellectual production, such as the work of canonical “high modernist” novelists such as Woolf (2000 [1925]) and Faulkner (1965 [1937]) – although influential “postmodernist” fiction writers such as Borges (1965 [1941]) or Pynchon (1973), interestingly enough, have tended towards more “event-centred” theories of temporal perception (c.f. Heise 1997:47-68).¹² And it has a broad, but undoubtedly contingent presence in the cultural practices of

one state to another”. While these are not technical definitions, my argument is precisely that neither are these words used, on the whole, in a technical sense by social analysts.

¹¹ In this respect, pre-Socratic philosophers such as Heraclitus have become a common touchstone for postmodernists (he was also a favourite of Heidegger), with assertions such as the following: “For it is not possible to step twice into the same river, according to Heraclitus, nor to touch mortal substance twice in any condition; by the swiftness and speed of its change, it scatters and collects itself again – or rather, it is not again and later but simultaneously that it comes together and departs, approaches and retires.” (From Plutarch [c.46-127 AD], *On the E at Delphi* 392B, quoted in Barnes 1987:117.)

¹² Heise suggests that postmodernist writers often present exaggerations or satirical depictions of what writers such as Harvey (1990:284–307) have characterized as “postmodern” “post-Fordist”) time-space compression. In relation to the temporal ontologies of other fields of Western intellectual production, therefore, postmodern *anthropological* thought arguably bears comparison with modernist trends, a suggestion that acquires some weight if one considers, for example, the preoccupation with flux in modernist literature (cf. Stevenson 1998: 87–158); and even, in the work of political

contemporary Western, and other societies, which cannot be unrelated to the radical and accelerated pace of global social change experienced in the last 200 years. Yet, remarkably, definitions of this assumption are rare in the social scientific literature, as are challenges to its hegemony in contemporary social analysis. Time as flux is inherent in current theoretical models as the motor facilitating the on-going reproduction, and modification of social life, and is a constituent component of many varied forms of social analysis broadly treating of “historical”, “processual”, “political economic”, or “practice-based” approaches – despite the fact that, as James and Mills point out (2005b:13), “the realm of time is not agreed even by the specialist physical scientists and philosophers to be one thing, one field.” Indeed, even though there is highly nuanced ethnographic attention paid in recent anthropological studies of time to the divergent and at times contradictory ways in which time is experienced (e.g. Orlove 2002, Hirsch & Stewart 2005, James & Mills 2005a.), the underlying vocabulary of flux remains necessarily present. In this sense, flux is arguably a *totalizing* category of modern anthropological theory (if a relatively flexible and productive one), operating, in Osborne’s (1995:28) definition, “insofar as all such totalizations abstract from the concrete multiplicity of differential times co-existing in the global “now” a single differential (however internally complex) through which to mark the time of the present”. Clearly overlooked, like time more generally, flux too has received “insufficient attention”.¹³

An extended anthropological study of the links between notions of flux, change, related historical contexts, and contemporary cultural theory would

economists, reflects aspects of nineteenth century historical realism (cf. Lukács 1972) – which is perhaps not surprising given the Marxian genealogy of such models.

undoubtedly be fascinating, and might possibly provide a basis for reconsidering our reliance on flux in theoretical models – but that is beyond the scope of this article.¹⁴ And I would stress that I do of course accept that flux as a foundational trope has offered invaluable ways of analysing human sociality – notably through the approximation it affords between the disciplines of anthropology and history. It is clear, however, that the “concept” suffers from a lack of clarity, and a potential analytical tendency towards homogenizing temporal difference. Rather than summarily define flux at this point, however, my intention is to flesh out a complex working definition, and tease out some of its implications – including addressing the charge that flux operates as a totalizing concept. For orientation, I begin with a critical discussion of two key approaches to the anthropology of time, by Gell (1992) and Munn (1992), paying special attention to the question of flux. I move on to critically examine philosophical works by Bergson and Deleuze that constitute an increasingly influential source for a contemporary model of flux. Then, in the last section of the paper, I synthesize and develop these findings. This will enable precise theorization of this key component of social analysis. In turn, it will illuminate how problematizing flux has ramifications that extend beyond the study of time into the configuration of our models of social practice more generally – and in this respect, I will comment on the implications for topics such as social change, cross-cultural analysis, and historical anthropology. In conclusion, it will also permit the roughing out of an integrated paradigm for the anthropological analysis of time and historical practice with an *explicit* notion of

¹³ This would also appear to be a feature of literary criticism, particularly of the novel. See Currie 2007 on how attention to the philosophy of time has been largely overlooked in this discipline, even among writers focusing on time itself (e.g. Heise 1997).

¹⁴ Terdiman (1993) provides a historical analysis of the relationship between modernity, notions of flux, and questions of modernist and postmodernist representation that touches on such issues.

flux at its core, which ultimately implies that we place the temporal squarely and *explicitly* at the heart of anthropological analysis.

THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF TIME: TWO KEY ORIENTATIONS

Let us now turn to examine the temporal ontologies put forward by key anthropological theorists of time, and the implications for our concern with flux. The first of our studies, Gell's *The Anthropology of Time* (1992), is one of the few major studies on time by an anthropologist and, largely theoretical in nature, is an admirable work of inter-disciplinary synthesis. Gell is clear on the theoretical stance he presents in his study, and the debt he owes to the analytic philosopher D.H. Mellor, from whose book *Real Time* (1981) he draws many of his philosophical foundations. He describes his position as "the moderate version of the B-series position" (Gell 1992:156), and it comprises a synthesis of what are called by philosophers "A-series" and "B-series" time, which form the basis for the 20th century analytic tradition in the philosophy of time (of which Mellor is the most influential contemporary exponent). B-series time, Gell suggests, is objective, "real" time: "it reflects the temporal relationships between events as they really are, out there... All events, including future events, have their dates, which are unqualified temporal attributes of events" (ibid.: 165, 156-7).¹⁵ B-series time, however, is unlike time as perceived by human subjects, as it has no past, present and future dimensions, i.e. it is fundamentally *untensed*. It instead refers to what Gell, following Mellor, describes as the unchanging nature of events outside the realm of human agency: namely, that all events have "dates" in relation to

¹⁵ See Gell 1992:149-174 & 221-241 for the B-series and A-series theories of time and his presentation of the relations between them.

each other, and these dates are permanent, unchanging and situate events in definitive temporal relation to each other. Notions of past, present and future are simply fleeting, insignificant attributes of events that are gained and lost from day to day. Change, of course, takes place, and events themselves, Gell suggests, “are the changes that happens to things, bringing about new states of affairs” (ibid.:161). And Gell also acknowledges the apparently ethnocentric nature of the notion of dates, and stresses that by being “dated” he merely means to say that events have definite and unchanging temporal relationships to each other (rather than implying that events exist in some form of ethnocentric calendar) (ibid.:159). In sum, what Gell’s B-series amounts to is a metaphysical statement about the objective, autonomous nature of real time: events exist, have definite relationships to each other, and effectively provide an objective ground for, and structure to the world and its “history”. But importantly, their “true” nature is objectively inaccessible to the tools of human perception. What Gell has presented, therefore, are the foundations for his theory’s temporal ontology.

Moving on, human beings evidently experience and perceive events and change, and the way they do so is in keeping with A-series time, that is to say the subjective, tensed existence involving past, present and future relations that comprises everyday human time perception. B-series time provides the basis for A-series perception, which Gell models on Husserl’s phenomenological theory of internal time consciousness; but the “real” world does not exist according to A-series laws of perception. As Gell writes, “[w]e have no direct access to the temporal territory [of the B-series] because all our mental life, all our experiences, beliefs, expectations, etc. are themselves datable events, confined to their localized time-frames, like all other datable events” (ibid.:238). Instead we know

B-series time through temporal models, which reflect the structure of B-series time without accessing it directly (ibid.:240):

Our access to time is confined to the A-series flux, through which we interact with “real” time, via the mediation of temporal maps which provide us with a surrogate for real time. These reconstructions of B-series time are not the real thing ... but we are obliged to rely on them.

Gell’s grounding of the human perception of time, or A-series time, in the “real” world of B-series time provides a valuable model for grounding human subjects in the physical world, hence suggesting how the perception of time might be conceived as physically shaped, as well as culturally constructed and ultimately individually perceived, and I sympathize with the desire to situate the human perception of time “within” a wider theory of “real”, or “non-human” time. This is in contrast to other recent studies of the anthropology of time, such as that of Greenhouse (1996), who suggests that the human experience of time is exclusively the product of A-series perception. We can note therefore that Gell’s B-series provides one possible foundation for the notion of “time’s passing” found in theorists such as Bourdieu, Giddens and Wolf, even if it doesn’t constitute a model of temporal “flux” *per se* – indeed, it is in relation to such an “objective”, B-series time, I suggest, and its grounding of human sociality, that any attempt to define the notion of time as flux would have to lie. While I therefore accept the bases of Gell’s model for an approach to time, I nevertheless take issue with his particular conception of its workings. First, his reliance on Husserl’s model of time-consciousness is problematic given Husserl’s concern with a transcendent consciousness (Kearney 1994:22–23), and the subsequent developments in

phenomenological philosophy that have critiqued and developed Husserl's approach (e.g. Heidegger 1993, Merleau-Ponty 1989). And secondly, Gell's characterization of B-series time as related to dated events, despite his disclaimers, remains a dominant tenet of his presentation of Mellor's work, and is significantly questionable, resembling as it does a spatialized conception of linear time that is clearly cultural in character.¹⁶ When, for example, does an "event" begin? How does one define the positioning of events in relation to one another? Surely such positioning is the result of human, A-series laws of perception? In what sense, therefore, does the language of quantity and identity drawn upon by Gell accurately reflect the "unrepresentable" nature of "real time"? How does such a dated model of time relate to anthropological notions of historical time, for which it must surely provide a framework? And more importantly, might one draw on a less culturally-inflected approach to underpin an explicitly *anthropological* model of "real" B-series time? For it is certainly arguable that Gell's conception of the B-series incorporates a spatialized conception of linear time that is too Western in character to be of value to the cross-cultural anthropological project. Now, I evidently do not wish to try and outmanoeuvre Mellor's distinguished analytical approach – on which Gell closely relies – in this article. My approach is more pragmatic. At this stage, I shall simply note that in

¹⁶ Agamben (1993) provides a concise philosophical critique of linear time (see also Berger 1984 and Merleau-Ponty 1989). For Agamben, "[s]ince the human mind has the experience of time but not its representation, it necessarily pictures time by means of spatial images ... The modern concept of time is a secularization of rectilinear, irreversible Christian time, albeit sundered from any notion of end and emptied of any other meaning but that of a structured process in terms of before and after" (1993:91, 96). His critique is particularly aimed at the Marxist use of history: "Modern political thought has concentrated its attention on history, and has not elaborated a corresponding concept of time ... The vulgar representation of time as a precise and homogeneous continuum has thus diluted the Marxist concept of history: it has become the hidden breach through which ideology has crept into the citadel of historical materialism" (1993:91). Thompson (1967), in a well-known analysis, locates the secularization and spread of this model of

our quest for a temporal ontology that fleshes out a notion of flow or flux, it would be productive to examine an alternative theory of the relation between “human” (A-series) and “objective” (B-series) time, that might present less culturally-contingent features; and enable an explicit correlation with models of historical process.

Turning now to the work of Nancy Munn, her paper The Cultural Anthropology of Time: a Critical Essay (1992), while not as expansive as Gell’s work, nevertheless presents the most practically *applicable* anthropological theory of time currently articulated. Her approach, a variant of contemporary “practice theory”, is most significant for its utility in interpreting both the lived experience, and conceptual perception of time by human subjects, a dimension of her theory illustrated in detail in her ethnographic work (Munn 1983, 1986). In this respect she moves significantly beyond Gell’s discussion and development of Husserl, which remains mainly philosophical in nature. Grounding her position in a phenomenological theory of the human perception of time as *temporality*, Munn suggests that the conscious and tacit, embodied experience of time is the product of concrete, *temporalizing practices* whereby the inherent temporal character of social life is brought out. The summary of her position, although abstract in nature, is worth quoting in full:

[Human temporality is] a symbolic process continually being produced in everyday practices. People are “in” a sociocultural time of multiple dimensions (sequencing, timing, past-present-future relations, etc.) that they are forming in their “projects”.

In any given instance, particular temporal dimensions may be foci of attention or only tacitly known. Either way, these dimensions are lived or apprehended

time to the growth of industrial capitalism.

concretely via the various meaningful connectivities among persons, objects, and space continually being made in and through the everyday world.

(Munn 1992:116)

Human temporality, or temporalities if one considers its multiple dimensions, a symbolic process, is thus grounded in everyday social practices, and is the product of these practices, or what Munn also calls, in a phenomenological vein, “intersubjectivity”. It is simultaneously an inescapable dimension of these practices, and that includes anthropological writing about time: “We cannot analyse or talk about time without using media already encoded with temporal meanings nor, in the course of doing so, can we avoid creating something that takes the form of time” (ibid.:94). This has significant consequences for the relationship between time and space, of course. For Munn, “[i]n a lived world, spatial and temporal dimensions cannot be disentangled, and the two commingle in various ways” (ibid.:94). This leads her to characterize social life as comprising a “lived spacetime”, a position she summarizes concisely in an earlier paper on Gawan kula: “[S]ociocultural action systems [...] do not simply go on *in* or *through* time and space, but they form (structure) and constitute (create) the spacetime manifold in which they ‘go on’” (Munn 1983:280).¹⁷

With reference to the workings of how time is experienced, it will suffice to examine Munn’s comments on the past. Perception and experience of the past

¹⁷ This position has led Munn in her earlier ethnographic work to err towards a position similar to the A-series “reductionism” championed by Greenhouse, although this does not appear to be the case in her 1992 paper. The earlier work has nevertheless been pounced upon by Bloch (2000), for example, as a reason to discredit Munn’s apparatus in favour of an enlightening but similarly exclusive cognitive theory of time perception. Incidentally, Adam (1990, 1998) has been the theorist most concerned to articulate social theory with insights from physical and ecological science. Her work makes for fascinating reading, and is particularly insightful regarding time ecology, but is more

involves actualizing it in the present, or, in Munn's terminology, *temporalizing* the past, and "foregrounds the implications of the meaningful forms and concrete media of practices for apprehension of the past" (Munn 1992:113). At the same time, it can also involve future-orientations, as "the past-present-future relation [...] is intrinsic to all temporalizations irrespective of focus, inasmuch as people operate in a present that is always infused, and which they are further infusing, with pasts and futures" (ibid.:115). This viewpoint sees perception and experience of the past (present and future) as implicated in the dynamic process of temporalization that comprises the lived present. Finally, temporalizing processes are also viewed as a dimension of the exercise of power, as temporality is a hinge that connects subjects to wider social horizons, and control over pasts and futures that are temporalized also influence action in the present. Thus "[c]ontrol over time is not just a strategy of interaction; it is also a medium of hierarchic power and governance" (ibid.:109); and in addition to control over pasts and futures, this may take place through all the other various temporal dimensions of social life, from clock time and calendars to the organization of working routines and the biological rhythms of the body. It is of the essence of human time viewed as temporality, therefore, that such temporal media are not only known through reflective perception, but also embodied unconsciously in and through the intersubjective processes of daily existence.

I endorse much of what Munn has to say about temporalizing practices, although I will now present two observations of relevance to the theme of this paper. First, in the restricted space of her essay, the philosophical foundations for Munn's approach are necessarily abbreviated, although she makes clear here and

limited regarding the apparatus required for an analysis of the everyday human experience of time.

elsewhere in her work the debt she owes to the phenomenological tradition (c.f. Munn 1986:20). Her efforts to see temporality as the product of sociocultural processes, however, and her reliance on the subject-centred account of time provided by the phenomenological project, are problematic. For although she locates temporality in the context of a wider temporal universe, referring to “time’s pervasiveness as an inescapable dimension of all aspects of social experience and practice” (Munn 1992:93), she is not explicit on the ontological foundations which might locate time within material, as well as symbolic processes. In other words, Munn transposes A-series concerns into an anthropological framework with a good deal of success, but neglects to explicitly articulate any relationship to the B-series. This suggestion of a more materialist dimension is side-stepped, jeopardizing as it does her emphasis on social experience and knowledge as culturally constituted, although one could immediately point out, of course, that her conception of social life as processual is itself universalist in nature (c.f. Harris 1996).¹⁸ Similarly, this ensures that her discussion of time remains discrete, a dimension of *social* practice, i.e. severed from a model of *historical* time, process or indeed, practice (c.f. Thomas 1996:5). Secondly, there is the question of terminology, namely the notions of process and flux themselves. Like so many other writers, Munn provides no clear definition of these terms, but still uses them freely. That would not be so problematic, were she not writing explicitly about the anthropology of time. It is an issue directly connected to Munn’s side-stepping of a definition of the B-series. In sum, Munn’s impressively condensed work is incomplete, as we are left with an approach that

¹⁸ The problem, clearly, is one that has affected symbolic anthropology in more general terms, and has received much attention in other areas of anthropological theory, concerning the rapprochement and articulation between materialist and symbolic

appears to define the cultural component of human temporality with reference to a general ontology of time as “process”, but neither defines the B-series (“objective”) nature of this “process”, nor its relationship to human temporality, with any transparency.

Both Munn and Gell present similarities in the phenomenological approach they adopt to human temporal experience (although for anthropologists, Munn presents a more advanced analytical apparatus). But as we have seen, neither Munn nor Gell provide an ideal model of B-series time – which is vital to any effective understanding of what anthropologists mean by “flux”. Munn is content to use a practice model for time experience that does not seek to examine its own temporal foundations. But her implication that anthropologists are preoccupied with the cultural experience of time (c.f. Greenhouse 1996), hence obviating the need for a coherent B-series theory, does not elide the need for reflexive knowledge of the temporal ontology of our theoretical models themselves. Gell, meanwhile, presents a model of time that relies on clearly “ethnocentric” metaphors for time perception, and his phenomenological model is problematic. Similarly, as neither addresses the role that their respective temporal metaphors and ontologies play in the practice paradigm itself, neither profit from the potential benefits to be had in doing so, as we shall see.

B-series time, I propose, and by implication the nature of temporal flux, would benefit from the exploration of an alternative definition, both regarding its implicit nature, and its relationship to human temporality. For an anthropologist, any such enquiry must ultimately address the *pragmatic* requirement of how material time might most usefully be evoked for the purposes of cross-cultural

perspectives (e.g. Foster 1995, O’Brien & Roseberry 1991, Parmentier 1987, Roseberry 1989).

enquiry; and in the context of the anthropological project, what validity might this definition have as a universalist claim. It must also acknowledge the limitations of such an enquiry, given the decidedly complex, multiform, and ultimately cultural nature of our understanding and conceptualization of time. But, of course, it should also respond with precision to the pressing requirement for a definition of flux. My goal is therefore an elucidation of the concept of flux, in the context of a pragmatic, working anthropological model of historical time experience, and with these demands before us I now turn to examine the philosophical work of Bergson and Deleuze. As we shall see, the benefits for social analysis will include clear reflexive awareness of the temporal ontology of anthropological paradigms; the elision of spatialized models of time from theoretical paradigms; a more dynamic model of socio-temporal experience that facilitates fuller integration of temporal analysis with models of historical practice, and ultimately, a provisional correlation of notion of temporality, sociality, and historical practice.

TOWARDS A THEORY OF FLUX: BERGSON, DELEUZE & *LA DURÉE*

Time has of course been an important focus of study throughout the history of philosophy. Turetzky's study (1998), provides a valuable overview, and distinguishes three principal traditions in twentieth century philosophy: the analytic tradition, the phenomenological tradition, and a distaff tradition. The analytic tradition, taking as its starting point McTaggart's (1908) thesis concerning time's "unreality", focuses on the relationship between an objective, universal notion of time as static and quantitative ("B-series time"), and the human experience of time and temporal becoming ("A-series time"). It has found

explicit recent voice within anthropology in Gell's (1992) work, as I have shown, although as Gell points out, many "common sense" notions that have informed previous anthropological conceptions of time can be viewed as incorporating A-series and B-series insights, to varying extents.

The phenomenological tradition has had a profound influence on anthropological thought, and on anthropological treatment of time more generally, as it tends to focus explicitly on A-series time – i.e. the world of human experience that preoccupies anthropologists. Its most influential theorists have been Husserl (1966 [1887]), Heidegger (1993 [1927]), and Merleau-Ponty (1989 [1945]). Phenomenologists insist on placing subjectivity and intentionality at the centre of any investigation of human temporality; they have thereby been open to critique for their subject-centred, A-series approach. They have perhaps their most comprehensive social scientific exponent in Schutz (1962); and more recently, phenomenological theories of temporality have been influential in the work of theorists such as Giddens, and symbolic anthropology, in particular of course in Munn's work on time. Finally there is a significant "distaff" tradition, which Turetzy grounds in the work of Bergson (1988, 1944, 1960) and Deleuze (1990, 1991, 1994), and which, as its name suggests, constitutes a less institutionalized, though no less significant line of development.

Although the work of Bergson influenced to some extent the phenomenology of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, distaff writers have had little explicit influence on the way anthropologists think about time, despite the fact that related thinkers such as Foucault have acquired a considerable anthropological following. It is of interest, however, that from Turetzy's cogent perspective (1998:118), the distaff tradition (as it appears in Deleuze's

interpretation and adaptation of Bergson's work), can both account for, and incorporate the most significant aspects of both analytic and phenomenological approaches to time, while remedying their principal drawbacks. This suggests a relevance to our concerns, given queries raised concerning the drawbacks of Gell's reliance on analytical philosophy, and Munn's under-theorizing of the relationship between human temporality and B-series time. Indeed, Bergson and Deleuze's primary concern derives from a preoccupation with the continuous emergence of novelty within the universe and the ramifications of this proposition for the understanding of time and consciousness – i.e. the very question of flux itself. Let us consider, therefore, the nature of what we should note beforehand, is a necessarily complex, but potentially valuable theory.¹⁹

Bergson presented his influential theory of time as *la durée*, or “duration”, and its significance for the understanding of consciousness in a series of works published during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but most fully in *Matière et Mémoire* (1896), and *L'Evolution créatrice* (1907).²⁰ Deleuze, writing from the 1950s onwards, elucidated and extended Bergson's position in his own philosophical publications, first in a number of shorter works on Bergson himself,

¹⁹ Bergson and Deleuze's approaches are also comparable to other theories of time in the “distaff” tradition: most notably, Nietzsche's notion of eternal recurrence, in which time “is neither an aspect of change nor an absolute extension; it is a constitutive intensity” (Turetzky 1998:114); or the Stoics' notions of *Chronos* and *Aion* (cf. Turetzky 1998:38–42), which Deleuze develops elsewhere (Deleuze 1990). One can also invoke broad parallels with key works in “process” philosophy such as Whitehead 1979 (Clark (1999) analyses the relationship between Deleuze and Whitehead); or with writers in the American pragmatist tradition, particularly James (1996) on flux, stream of consciousness, and radical empiricism (as have been drawn for other thematic contexts by Rorty (1989, 1991)). There are also parallels to be noted with work in the phenomenological tradition, such as Levinas' (1989 [1946]) concept of the *il y a*. Bergson and Deleuze, however, are particularly enlightening for their efforts to correlate human experience (“A-series” time) with non-human material processes (“B-series” time), and for having most thoroughly worked through the implications of integrating “flux” into analysis. For related reasons, their work has been the subject of much attention by philosophers in recent years, which have also seen a revision of Bergson's reputation (cf. Ansell Pearson 1999, 2002, Mullarkey 1999).

Bergson (1859-1941) (1956), La Conception de la différence chez Bergson (1956), and *Le Bergsonisme* (1966); and then principally in two wider-ranging philosophical works, *Différence et Répétition* (1968), and *Logique du sens* (1969).²¹ It is not my intention here to explore and illuminate the shifts and developments in the position of each writer within their different publications, or to examine in detail the critiques of Bergson's earlier theories and Deleuze's accommodation and development of them. The synthesis offered of their respective work draws largely on Deleuze's extension of, and amendments to Bergson's position; and while for the sake of clarity I retain elements of Bergson's technical vocabulary, the position outlined is principally influenced by my reading of Deleuze and his interpreters, and tailored for an anthropological agenda.²²

Both Bergson and Deleuze ground their theories of time in the notion of *la durée*, although the ways in which they present and explicate it differ. Central for both, however, is the distinction, adapted by Bergson from the theories of the physicist and mathematician G.B.R. Riemann, between quantitative, or discrete, and qualitative, or continuous multiplicities.²³ Quantitative multiplicities are

²⁰ Respectively translated as *Matter and Memory* (1988), & *Creative Evolution* (1944).

²¹ Deleuze's three books are available in translation as *Bergsonism* (1991), *The Logic of Sense* (1990), and *Difference and Repetition* (1994).

²² The presentation therefore takes a pragmatic, selective approach, and makes modest claims to represent the full complexity of this multiform theory. Deleuze alone, for example, presents several versions, in each case with novel and complex jargon, and anyone familiar with his work will also be aware of its occasionally convoluted nature. I should also note that for the sake of intelligibility I retain the term *la durée*, which Deleuze dispenses with in his later work. Disclaimers aside, however, my exposition elucidates the main components of this approach to time with precision. For critiques of Bergson, see Sartre 1956:192-4, Merleau-Ponty 1989:413-4, Bachelard 1950 and Giroux 1971. For a related critique of Deleuze, see Wyschogrod 1990:189-229, and for a reply, Boundas 1992. For a brief overview of critiques of Bergson and Deleuze, and counter-critique, see Boundas 1996:98-103.

²³ See Bergson 1960, 1988; Deleuze 1991, chapter 2; Turetzky 1998, chapters 13 & 14; & Boundas 1996:82-85. "Multiplicity" is the established translation of the French

numerical in nature, and take the form of the one and the many: their differences are homogeneous differences of *degree*, and such multiplicities can therefore be divided without occasioning a difference in kind. Qualitative multiplicities, by contrast, on division create heterogeneous differences. Simplified for the purposes of this discussion, they comprise an inter-related, infinite whole, where any multiple is fused with all other multiples, and any one cannot either be isolated, or change without all others changing – as Deleuze specifies, they are multiplicities “of succession, of fusion, of organization, of heterogeneity, of qualitative discrimination, or of *difference in kind* ... that cannot be reduced to numbers” (1991:38). Drawing on this distinction, *la durée* is abstractly, and analogously defined as consisting of concrete, qualitative multiplicities, which divide continuously. These multiplicities in reality comprise the life and matter of the universe, which one can therefore describe as existing in a state of incessant division, “flux”, or “individuation”.²⁴ *La durée* is therefore a non-chronological conception in its essential nature, and its tendency to differentiate may be viewed as the origin of the phenomenon we subsequently call “time”.

The way in which the reproductive logic of qualitative multiplicities can be thought of or represented is thus problematic, and differs from the logic of representation associated with the division of quantitative multiplicities. For both Bergson and Deleuze, *la durée*, as the differentiation of qualitative multiplicities, occurs through the “actualization of the virtual”, rather than the “realization of the possible”. Following the logic of *la durée*, the possible can only exist in

“multiplicité” in this literature, although English language mathematicians would use the term “manifold”.

²⁴ “In the terms of another discourse, actualization is individuation, the creation of singularity (whether physical, psychical, or social), insofar as the processes of individuation predate the individual yet the individual is a somehow open-ended consequence of these processes” (Grosz 1999:27).

retrospect: while the new may be “possible” before it exists in the sense that there is nothing to prevent its occurring, this does not mean that its actual occurrence is *concretely* foreseeable, for as a “possibility” it only exists once it has occurred (cf. Turetzky 1998:197–8). As Grosz (1999:26) elaborates: “To reduce the possible to a preexistent phantomlike version of the real is to curtail the possibility of thinking about emergence, an open future not bound directly or strictly to the present.”²⁵ For *la durée*, with respect to the act of division, one must instead see the *virtual* as productive of the actual, without, of course, the virtual ever being actualized (cf. Deleuze 1994:258–65). The virtual is therefore defined by Deleuze in Proust’s (1999:264) words as “real without being actual, ideal without being abstract”. It is the *tendency* that produces the actual, a *de jure*, rather than *de facto* principal of differentiation that is never actualized. This explanation is necessary because, as Boundas (1996:91) explicates:

Left to its own resources, the process/ production of entities will permit only the discernment of nuances or of differences of degree, in which case the notion of difference will be left subordinated to the concept of identity. Different/ciation [the actualization of the virtual] expresses simultaneously the compossibility of the “elements” inside the virtual and the divergence of the series in which the virtual is actualized.

²⁵ Grosz (1999:28) writes: “Duration proceeds not by continuous growth, smooth unfolding, or accretion, but through division, bifurcation, dissociation – by difference – through sudden and unexpected change or eruption. Duration is a mode of infecting self-differentiation: difference is internal to its function, its modes of elaboration and production, and is also its ramifying effect on those objects located “within” its milieu. This means that not only must concepts of time (in physics, biology, philosophy, cultural studies, and social theory) be opened up to their modes of differentiation, but also that our very concept of objects, matter, being ... needs to be open to the differentiations that constitute and continually transform it.”

Both Bergson and Deleuze present their own versions of this theory, Deleuze going farthest in developing it via his method of “transcendental empiricism”, whereby *la durée* divides and differentiates according to the process of what he terms “different/ciation”.²⁶ I shall come to the force that propels the process of actualization in due course.²⁷

With respect to the relationship between time and consciousness, Deleuze offers the most concise, detailed, and relevant explanation through his notion of the “three syntheses of time”, and I turn exclusively to his exposition at this point.²⁸ The first characteristic to be noted about *la durée* is what Deleuze terms the “first synthesis” of time. *La durée*, as the continuous different/ciation of multiplicities, produces a “living present”, by linking what might commonly be thought of as successive instants into a fusion of what is conventionally termed past and future. Dividing time into instants would of course imply a quantitative perspective on time, similar to notions of B-series time prevalent in the analytic tradition. This first synthesis of time is therefore both connective and contractile, in its joining and fusing of different multiplicities; it is also passive, consisting of the different levels of organic and inorganic matter as they exist in the universe. In this sense, it marks a significant difference from phenomenological theories of

²⁶ Deleuze is invoking the difference in French between *différencier*, to make or become different, and *différentier*, which means the same but in a mathematical context. As Boundas (1996:91) glosses: “Different/ciation refers to the complex relations between problems and solutions, questions and answers, virtual Idea-structures and their actualizations. Deleuze calls ‘differentiation’ the totality of the diacritic relations which occur ‘inside’ an Idea-structure, and ‘differentiation,’ the process of actualization of such a structure.”

²⁷ Ansell Pearson (2002) provides a lengthy elucidation of the key concept of the *virtual* which, he writes, “presents an ontological challenge to our ordinary conceptions of perception and memory, of time and subjectivity, and of life in its evolutionary aspect ... [T]he virtual is by nature something intrinsically vague and indeterminate [but] wholly real and the real is, in fact, unencounterable and unthinkable without it” (ibid.:2–3). See also Shields 2002.

²⁸ See Deleuze 1994, chapter 2. The following exposition also draws on Deleuze 1991, Turetzky 1998, chapter 14, and Boundas 1996.

“temporality”, in that its origin lies beyond subjectivity and consciousness, effectively rendering them possible. However, it also accommodates them, as consciousness, or what Deleuze terms the “active synthesis”, exists “within” the “living present”, and is the location where the lived experience of time is ultimately registered.

Now, for consciousness, the “active synthesis”, to become aware of past and future, it must clearly access a dimension that is more than the mere continuous differentiation accorded by the first, passive synthesis of time. In accounting for this actuality, what Boundas (1996:85) terms “the formation of closed, ‘extended’ or ‘cool’ systems inside the open-ended, intensive *chaosmic* virtual”, Deleuze calls upon the “second synthesis” of time. The “second synthesis” is best revealed through confronting various fundamental paradoxes arising from the insights of *la durée*, and linked to the resulting implausibility of certain common sense notions of, and metaphors for grasping the workings of time.

To begin with, following on from my description of *la durée* as qualitative multiplicity, one must conclude that the “present”, as a discrete spatialization of time, no longer “is”, and no longer becomes what is “past” when a new “present” emerges from the future to replace it. The nature of *la durée* is against such a conclusion, as it is against the notion of time as a succession of instants, and one must in effect conclude that the “present” *is not*, the “living present” being merely the continuous differentiation of *la durée*.

Nevertheless, for consciousness, time continues to pass. How does this happen, particularly as the past cannot pass once it is already past, and the present cannot be replaced by another present that takes its place? The conclusion that both Deleuze, and Bergson, draw is that the present must pass *at the same time* as

it is present. This apparently profound contradiction in terms of Western common sense notions of time, and linguistic metaphors, is Deleuze's first paradox, which he terms the "paradox of contemporaneity": "the contemporaneity of the past with the present it *was*" (1994:81). As Deleuze (1991:59) writes:

The past would never be constituted if it did not coexist with the present whose past it is. The past and the present do not denote two successive moments, but two elements which coexist: One is the present, which does not cease to pass, and the other is the past, which does not cease to be but through which all presents pass.

This then gives rise to a second paradox, what Deleuze terms the "paradox of coexistence", and which he expresses in similarly complex language intended, one imagines, to undermine common sense temporal terminology. "If each past is contemporaneous with the present that it was, then all of the past coexists with the new present in relation to which it is now past" (Deleuze 1994:81–2). Or, in layman's terms, the only place the past can exist is in the present – it has nowhere else to be – even though the present is *not* "present", of course. This generalized past, therefore, does not exist in actuality, but is the *virtual* form of the past, accessible through varied practices of remembering. With respect to consciousness, it is this virtual form of the past and its actualization through acts of remembering that is the precondition for our perception of the present as "passing", and indeed our perception of the past itself, acting as a ground, the past "in general", against which consciousness can perceive *la durée*'s, and ultimately "time's" work. It is the existence of this pure, virtual form of the past, the *a priori* past, which Deleuze terms the "second synthesis" of time.

We are now close to completing this elucidation. But first there is a further, third paradox to consider. Following on from the paradox of contemporaneity, where the past is contemporary with the present it was, Deleuze points out that, as a result, we can no longer conceive of the past as “past”, since it never actually came “after”. On the contrary, in considering the second synthesis of time, the existence of the *a priori* past, Deleuze writes: “each past is contemporaneous with the present it was, the whole past coexists with the present in relation to which it is past, but the pure [virtual] element of the past in general *pre-exists* the passing present” (ibid.:82, my emphasis). Deleuze’s third paradox is therefore entitled the “paradox of pre-existence” – and one should note that it evidently works to further challenge the most fundamental metaphors many languages use for temporal perception.

A summary of these complex propositions will now pave the way for some preliminary conclusions. The first synthesis of time forms the “living present”, and is that passive, connective synthesis which lays the foundation for existence – effectively the physical ground for the universe as we know it. Within this first synthesis we find the “active” synthesis (consciousness), which can then differentiate between past and future due to the second synthesis of time, once again a passive synthesis comprising the existence of the *a priori* past. But there is still, of course, the “third synthesis” of time to be accounted for. This is the driving force of differentiation, indeed it consists of the operation of differentiation itself, in which “[t]ime splits into two heterogeneous dissymmetrical emissions, one toward the future, making the present pass, and another toward the past, coexisting wholly with the present it was” (Turetzky 1998:217). It is the eruption of a future that subordinates the actualized to its

novelty. Bergson grounds the differentiating quality of *la durée* in what he called the *élan vital*; Deleuze in a more creditable Nietzschean eternal return which, as Ansell Pearson (2002:200) points out, “does not speak of a return of the same but only of difference.” One might equally locate it in the vital momentum that physicists discern in the well-springs of matter, or the mysterious operations of sub-atomic particles.

It is important to note that, despite an apparent similarity between time as *la durée* and the common sense notion of time as flux – which frequently spatializes time using metaphors such as the “river of time” – Deleuze’s reworking of Bergson’s theory is fundamentally more specific. First, with respect to *la durée* itself, which categorically has no “direction”, and is non-chronological in nature; secondly, regarding the paradoxical nature of the past in the second synthesis; and thirdly, in terms of the integrated relationship between time and space. Regarding the latter, it must be noted that *la durée* is thoroughly spatio-temporal in character, and following philosophers such as Ansell Pearson (1999, 2002) and Boundas (1996:94–99), it is potentially compatible with prominent contemporary social, and scientific theories, and dominant paradigms in modern physics regarding energy and matter.²⁹ It is comprised of all the seemingly “continuous”, but in effect differentiating pulsations of organic and inorganic matter that constitute the universe and life in it – the multiple strands of bifurcating materiality which

²⁹ Ansell Pearson (2002:66) writes: “The single time common to all times is the time of duration, where duration is conceived as a virtual multiplicity ... My claim is that this is not simply the time of the philosopher. This is why it is important that duration *qua* a virtual multiplicity is not restricted to the solely psychological or phenomenological but also encompasses the vibrating rhythms of matter.” This “single time”, or “open whole” is also referred to by Deleuze (1986) as the *plane of immanence* (see Ansell Pearson 2002:41–2 for a succinct discussion of this “pluralist monism”).

for anthropologists, are of interest in their ethnographic guise.³⁰ Continuity in this respect is reduced to the perceived occurrence of “habit” within processes, as with respect to *la durée* no repetition is ever “the same”; habit itself is continuously open to the eruption of novelty; and differentiation ultimately triumphant.³¹ As for the notion of process itself, in ontological terms it comprises the myriad “sequences” or “lines” of actualization within *la durée* that evince contingent inter-relationships while encompassing differentiation.

And so one can propose that *la durée* is the manifold substance of “history” itself. In this respect, evoking and interpreting significant “habitual processes” or “lines” of actualization within it – of short duration or *longue durée* (cf. Braudel 1989, 1990) – of relevance to selective, small-scale domains of human activity, with the precise yet ultimately restricted tools of human representation – is what the anthropologist’s task evidently comprises.³² One can thus begin to grasp how

³⁰ As Grosz writes (1999:17): “[*La durée*] functions simultaneously as singular, unified, and whole, as well as in specific fragments and multiplicitous proliferation. There is one and only one time, but there are also numerous times: a duration for each thing or movement, which melds with a global or collective time. As a whole, time is braided, intertwined, a unity of strands layered over each other; unique, singular, and individual, it nevertheless partakes of a more generic and overarching time, which makes possible relations of earlier and later”. It is at this point, however, that I would advocate return to a re-grounded anthropological perspective and theoretical apparatus. My approach therefore stops short of adapting for anthropology Deleuze’s more well-known philosophical work with Guattari (e.g. Deleuze & Guattari 1984, 1988) – which was translated in the 1970s and 1980s, and whose fashionable status in postmodern debates has tended to obscure the more significant work contained in *Difference and Repetition*, and on Bergson more generally. Indeed, since its publication in English in 1994, *Difference and Repetition* has increasingly been recognized as Deleuze’s distinctive contribution to modern continental philosophy. For philosophical discussion of how *la durée* might be concretely imagined, see Boundas 1996: 96–7, and Deleuze 1991: 103–5. See also Boundas 1996, note 48 for further references.

³¹ As Deleuze writes: “we have no other continuities apart from those of our thousands of habits”, yet “[h]abit draws something new from repetition – namely difference” (1994:94, 93).

³² Bergson (1998) and Deleuze (2004:164–213) both explicate how conceptual thought can only constitute a “spatialization” and mystification of *la durée*, if frequently giving rise to utilitarian and successful ways of manipulating it. I would nevertheless seek to qualify their approach with respect to Haack’s (1993) pragmatic theory of critical common-sensism, for example, which lends greater validity to social scientific representation.

the concept of *la durée* might articulate with the multi-layered perspectives of historians such as those associated with the *Annales* school; or anthropological concepts such as Tonkin's (1992:72–5) theory of “co-existent times”, and Thomas's (1996:121) notion of history as a “systemic process”. Similarly, one can intimate how *la durée* could articulate with models of sociality and socio-historical practice as advocated by Bourdieu, Giddens, or Munn – with “time” experience as a central, dynamic dimension. With this multi-layered image of historical time experience in mind, we shall now return to work reviewed on the anthropology of time above, and extend it critically in the light of the model just outlined.³³

RE-THINKING THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF TIME

Of the studies addressed, our objections to them are now clearer. Both Gell's model, and the theory of *la durée*, allow for articulation of A-series and B-series time. And Gell's assessment of “real time” from one angle appears similar to that of Bergson and Deleuze: both are inaccessible in a direct, objective sense to human perception. But, importantly, Gell considers “real time” to nonetheless “reflect the temporal [dated] relationships between events as they really are” (Gell 1992:165), a position fundamentally incompatible with the phenomenon of *la durée*, which consists of pure different/ciation, and to which Gell's abstracted notion of dated relationships is clearly inapplicable. In this respect, Gell, and

³³ We should note that this new definition renders the metaphor of the “flow of time” redundant, with its watery overtones. There is also a good case for eliding the terminology of “flux” and “process” as well, given their association with common sense notions (– time, as we have evoked it, is more of a “pulse”). But I have opted instead to redefine this terminology to enable a convergence between anthropological and philosophical notions about time.

Mellor, rely to a much greater extent on Western common sense conceptions of time than Bergson and Deleuze. Indeed, the latter provide a challenging but workable non-chronological framework that ultimately affords a distinctive vantage-point on cross-cultural perspectives. Husserlian phenomenology aside, if our different models are broadly compatible, then, it is precisely Gell's emphasis on the temporal, datable nature of B-series "real time" that constitutes our most notable point of disagreement. Gell seeks to identify dated "real time" as the basis for the study of human time experience; I seek to establish *la durée* as the materialist basis for the study of lived experience. When worked through, however, such general differences evidently become significant.³⁴

La durée, by contrast, provides a model of non-chronological spacetime as different/ciation, and allows for insertion into this model a notion of the intersubjective nature of human experience that articulates with it through the three syntheses. In anthropological terms, this is accordant with a critique of linear time (c.f. Greenhouse 1996); and it enables the adoption of an anthropological apparatus influenced by phenomenology as advocated by Munn, and its development in novel ways through a consideration of the relationship of lived experience to its material, non-human context. It also permits the articulation of a symbolic interpretation of everyday practice, with a political economic or historical anthropological framework that insists on grounding "culture" in material historical processes (cf. Thomas 1996, Wolf 1982). By contrast with Munn, therefore, and in keeping with Deleuze's materialist approach, lived experience lies in a complex relationship with *la durée*, which encloses and

³⁴ Gell (1992:317–19) regrettably gives short shrift to Bergson, whom he classifies erroneously as an A-theorist. He does not engage with Deleuze's philosophy of time, which was only translated into English in the 1990s, and not widely debated outside French philosophical circles while he was researching *The Anthropology of Time*.

enables it while remaining, in the last instance, inaccessible to objective human representation. This reveals the partially determined, but inherently cultural and individualized nature of sociality and lived experience, as *la durée* underpins human existence and the physical conditions which shape it; while the experience, appropriation and representation of “time” reside largely in the domain of everyday practice (Lambek 2002, Munn 1992), neurological, cognitive and embodied processing (Bloch 1998, Damasio 2000:219–26), and ultimately, individual “moments of being” (Chodorow 1999:216–17, Ortner 2005, Rapport & Overing 2000:260–1). And in this respect it should also be noted that to conceptualize these processes in language is a task that can complement and quantify, but not represent the complex qualitative experience of *la durée* that constitutes our lives – as Bergson and Deleuze have made clear, conceptual thought can only constitute a spatialization of *la durée*.³⁵

Turning now to rough out a provisional anthropological model, one must first note that the process of differentiation which lies at the root of what is commonly conceptualized as “time” must sit squarely at the foundation of any notion of sociality or historical practice. If this places sociality squarely in a material context, it simultaneously underlines that the temporal is its correlate – indeed, in this respect, common terms such as sociality and temporality can

³⁵ Merleau-Ponty offers an interesting opening here for a *durée*-inflected aesthetics of anthropological writing. In *Signs* (1964), he suggests there is a distinction between what he terms the “primary expression” of corporeal communication, or the language of the senses, and the “secondary expression” of conceptual assertion. The latter, he asserts, is founded on extension and translation of the former. Extending primary expression to include “lived experience” as it is manifested in *la durée*, secondary expression can therefore be understood as the conceptualization of this lived experience that occurs “within” it. Artistic expression, Merleau-Ponty proposes, has a privileged access to primary expression that conceptual language does not, through its “tacit and implicit accumulation of meaning rather than by abstracting meaning into a pure state of clarity” (Kearney 1994:80). Anthropology is therefore ideally placed among disciplines to evoke

effectively be proposed to be interchangeable (c.f. Hirsch & Stewart 2005:262–3, Munn 1992:116). This prompts several observations. First, any considered anthropological analysis must integrate discussion of historical processes with consideration of the lived experience of time – each reconceived in terms of *la durée*. Secondly, with regard to sociality, it has frequently been the case that the notion of temporality has been evoked by anthropologists as a means of focusing explicitly on the temporal dimension of social life. One must stress that all such experience should ultimately be conceived as a dynamic feature of *la durée* integrated with other pertinent historical process. So the precise task of an anthropology of time then becomes to elide its marginal disciplinary status, arguing on the basis of an explicit temporal ontology for the centrality of integrated discussion of lived time and historical process to all social analysis; and ultimately, perhaps, for the need to imagine sociality in terms of differentiation.

Evidently, therefore, adoption of *la durée* produces a re-evaluation of the anthropology of time. For on the one hand, one can still address varied notions and experiences of “time, “history”, “past”, “present”, “future”, “tempo”, “time reckoning” – those enduring topics of the sub-discipline now underwritten by the “structure” of *la durée* – as they emerge in different historical contexts.³⁶ But on

the various dimensions of lived experience in *la durée*, through combinations of artistic and conceptual expression.

³⁶ To a degree, I am in agreement here with writers such as Barth (1987) or Scott (2007) who argue that “we must always struggle to *get our ontological assumptions right*: to ascribe to our object of study only those properties and capabilities that we have reasonable ground to believe it to possess” (Barth quoted in Scott 2007:3, emphasis retained) – so as to avoid “the artificial production of rubrics . . . or recourse to isolated socio-cultural phenomena as the topical foci for local and cross-cultural study” (Scott 2007:3). The anthropology of time should of course be grounded primarily in contextualized lived experience, and thus reference how *la durée* is manifested ethnographically. Nevertheless, its temporal ontology is *not* open to cultural remodelling, however local people might seek to conceive of it (which is of course of primary interest) – or social scientists, for that matter. In this sense, with respect to the anthropology of time, an addendum to Barth’s formula might run: “we must always struggle to make our own ontological assumptions *explicit*” (cf. Barth 1987:8, Scott 2007:3).

the other, one must definitively collapse any discrete notion of “lived time”, or “temporality”, into an inclusive notion of sociality conceived as an element of *la durée* – i.e. sociality would be melded with a dynamic, re-grounded notion of lived time. If I therefore raise the prospect of collapsing the anthropology of “time” back into “all the other dimensions and topics anthropologists deal with in the social world” (Munn 1992:93) – which was in fact a flaw in Munn’s eyes – I am now doing so conscious of the fact that all dimensions of sociality require analysis of their contingent, dynamic orientation towards *la durée*.³⁷

Deleuze’s adaptation of Bergson also provides an approach that dispenses, albeit with a good deal of complexity, with previous ambiguity about the concept of flux – although when dealing with such a notion, it is hard to imagine how such complexity could be circumvented. To the extent that it is possible, Deleuze also presents a foundation for cross-cultural study that is wholly non-chronological, avoiding any obvious resemblance to Western common sense notions of time – and even the hint of a spatialized model of time as linear. *La durée* therefore provides one precise and specific definition of what anthropologists might understand by the notion that lived experience exists in relation to a non-human, flux-like material process – while obviating the need to try and intricately articulate such an anthropological approach with the plethora of competing theories about physical spacetime from other fields.

We should also note that *la durée* is open to the many divergent and convergent, multi-layered features of human experience. For one of the further problems with a metaphorical terminology that treats of rivers and flows and fluxes but remains ill-defined is that the poetic suggestiveness of such language

³⁷ Hirsch and Stewart (2005:271) reach a related conclusion in their discussion of “historicity”, in some ways a terminological equivalent to “temporality”: “Historicity in

lends a totalizing form to interpretations of everyday practice. Through deconstructing and redefining some of these metaphors, we are now well-placed to grasp how with reference to *la durée*, they can be complexly conceived so as to implicate differentiation – i.e. there is no *direction* in which flux or process is *moving*, and there is no *one* river of time that *flows*. In this sense, *la durée* retains a universal applicability while remaining free of the totalizing impulse identified in chapter one (cf. Osborne 1995:28). It comprises an integrative pluralism. In sum, *la durée* is a highly articulate concept open to the manifold strands of historical reality, both human and non-human, co-existing and inter-related.³⁸

However, what is not yet explicit from this enquiry is whether ultimately one is culturally “trapped” within even such a complex notion of flux – indeed if there is an outside perspective that will afford a different vision of lived experience; or if the non-human features of *la durée*, in the guise of “physical time”, are perhaps a cultural construct it is possible to side-step, as certain anthropologists have tried unsuccessfully, to my mind, to suggest (e.g. Greenhouse 1996). In this respect, some writers have proposed that current theoretical preoccupations with change and flux are a symptom of our contemporary “runaway” civilization – modernity, postmodernity – and in the case of anthropologists, the preoccupation of an intellectual elite who for the main part are themselves based in an intensely fluid environment, the modern Western university.³⁹ In the same way that Jameson has

this anthropological or ethnographic sense is a concomitant of sociality.”

³⁸ For extended discussion of how Deleuze’s approach admits a fundamental pluralism within the apparently unifying concept of *la durée*, see Ansell Pearson 2002, chapter four. It is worth emphasising that *la durée* also renders the metaphor of the “flow of time”, with its fluvial overtones, redundant. Indeed, there is a case for eliding the terminology of “flux” and “process” as well, given their association with common sense notions – *la durée*, as evoked here, is more of a fission and/ or fusion. But I have retained this terminology to enable a convergence between anthropological and philosophical notions.

³⁹ Berger (1984) develops such a thesis, for example, suggesting that “[h]istory ... no longer speaks of the changeless but, rather, of the laws of change which spare nothing”

written of the impossibility of imagining new, “post-individualistic” life-worlds, it may therefore be argued that it is only possible to think *beyond* flux in a future in which our current historical conditions – of rapid historical change and rupture – have been surpassed.⁴⁰ My proposition, however, is that *la durée* offers a precise perspective on flux and change, that allows one to clearly distinguish between historical change, that must be defined ethnographically, and the differentiating flux of *la durée*, which is all-pervasive and provides both a foil to historical change, and an explicit temporal ontology with which to ground practice methodologies. Flux, in this sense, is not the unconscious mirror of our fluid times, not coupled loosely to historical change, but a distinct, wider-ranging concept, of greater purchase, with the potential for precise cross-cultural applicability – which is also suggested by its manifestation in different, largely unrelated periods of the past.

In sum, I have elected to collapse the concept of temporality into the notion of sociality, as conceived in relation to the theory of *la durée* expounded above. This realignment takes note of the re-configuration of the notion of lived experience that must take place once it is conceived in terms of *la durée*. In effect, however, we are only following to its logical conclusion what has always been latent in

(ibid.:12). It is a theme pursued in the extensive literature on modernity and postmodernity, as I show in chapter four, particularly among writers of a Marxian persuasion, and in this respect is also present in Marx and Engels’ (1952 [1848]) *Manifesto of the Communist Party*.

⁴⁰ “For Marxism, indeed, only the emergence of a post-individualistic social world, only the reinvention of the collective and the associative, can concretely achieve the ‘decentering’ of the individual subject ... only a new and original form of collective social life can overcome the isolation and monadic autonomy of the older bourgeois subjects in such a way that individual consciousness can be lived – and not merely theorized – as an ‘effect of structure’” (Jameson 2002:111–12). Chodorow (1999) provides an effective rejoinder to such assertions of cultural determinism; and indeed Berger himself (note 39, above) is arguably confounding talk about time and social change with a sense of the inevitability and annihilating power of secular death (as Heideggerians and existentialists also do in their different ways (cf. Osborne 1995: 69–112)) which is not to say that his observations don’t have ethnographic applicability.

notions such as sociality, which along with other concepts ending in -ality was conceived as a result of the shift towards viewing human experience as constituted intersubjectively “in time” during the 1980s (cf. Hirsch & Stewart 2005:262). However, it should also be noted that while the majority of contemporary anthropologists employ the terminology of constitutive flux, and related concepts such as sociality and *habitus*, along with paradigms rooted in processual and historical analysis – fewer engage in explicit analyses of how the temporal is concretely experienced and dynamically implicated in everyday practice. Once flux is developed as a concept, it is clear that temporality is no longer a discrete perspective on lived experience that one can engage and disengage at will, and not merely a constitutive feature of analysis – but a dynamic element of all lived experience, and any analysis of it.

At this point, therefore, one might signal a final, significant, if logical innovation in analytical procedures, to acknowledge this fuller integration between previously distinct analytical considerations of lived experience and temporality. The extent to which the activity of *temporalization*, and the verb to *temporalize*, can be effectively elided into any process of symbolization in everyday practice has become a point of contention. In this respect, and given the queries outlined above, one can opt to challenge the use of *temporality* and related terms as analytical tools to explore the experience of “time” in everyday practices.⁴¹ When writing of pasts and futures, in keeping with my use of Bergson

⁴¹ For Fabian (1983:73), for example, temporalization “connotes an activity, a complex praxis of encoding Time. Linguistically, temporalization refers to the various means a language has to express time relations. Semiotically, it designates the constitution of sign relations with temporal referents. Ideologically, temporalization has the effect of putting an object of discourse into a cosmological frame such that the temporal relation becomes central and topical (e.g. over and against spatial relations). Finally, temporalizing, like other instances of speech, may be a deictic function. In that case a temporal ‘reference’ may not be identifiable except in the intention and circumstances of a speech-act”. It is

and Deleuze, one might therefore use *actualization* and the verb to *actualize*, which implicate the virtual-actual axis. While this image of human sociality as a partly-determined fully socio-temporal practice reflexively open to historical analysis is abbreviated, and would benefit from development at length in relation to ethnographic materials, it provides a workable foundation for future research, and incorporates a vision of the relationship between analysis and flux that could be further developed. And at this point, one might effectively endorse *la durée* as a candidate for the temporal ontology of a modern self-reflexive social science.

the proposition that a “temporal relation” is discretely identifiable that, once brought into question, problematizes this, and ultimately any approach that wishes to demarcate “time” or “temporalization” as a discrete field of enquiry; and arguably ensures the marginality of the study of time experience.

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