The creation of coevalness and the danger of homochronism

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Johannes Fabian's *Time and the Other* criticized anthropology for creating representations that placed the Other outside the flow of time. Fabian offered the ethnographic portrayal of coevalness as a solution to this problem. This article explores four challenges to the representation of coevalness: the split temporalities of the ethnographer; the multiple temporalities of different histories; the culturally influenced phenomenological present; and the complicated relationship between culturally variable concepts of being and becoming and cultural concepts of time. Based on these challenges, this article argues that some attempts at ethnographic coevalness have fostered a temporal framework of homochronism which subsumes the Other into academic discourses of history. To achieve coevalness and to avoid homochronism and allochronism, it is necessary to represent the temporal frameworks that research subjects use to forge coevalness with ethnographers, and to place these frameworks in relationship to commonly used academic representations of time and history.

> To think of history as one is to posit the equivalence between three ideas: one time, one humanity, and one history.
>
> Ricoeur 1985: 258

At the time of its publication, Johannes Fabian's *Time and the Other* (1983) anticipated criticisms of ethnographic representation that erupted in the mid-1980s. Since then, it has served as a charter for the linking of ethnographies to time and to history. Most ethnographies now make efforts to incorporate history into ethnography, and to portray the coevalness of the ethnographer and the people represented in the ethnography. Fabian addresses more than coevalness, however. He linked coevalness to time, saying, 'Coevalness is anthropology's problem with time' (1983: 37). This article examines the concepts of time that have shaped ethnographic discourse and that are used to create ethnographic images of coevalness, and argues that to achieve representations of coevalness, it is necessary to become conscious of dimensions of anthropology's problems with time associated with achieving this goal.

The important consequence of *Time and the Other* is that 'the temporal depiction of the Other is no longer an unproblematic aspect of ethnographic texts but rather a constitutive criterion of a critical and reflexive anthropology that has come to define

the mainstream of the discipline' (Bunzl 2002: xxxvi), but *Time and the Other* is not the final word on the critical reflection on anthropology's problems with time; rather it is a challenge for continued attention to the discipline's implicit and explicit temporal frames.

According to Fabian, the creation of spatio-temporal distance between anthropology and its subjects used to be 'a necessary assumption ... involved in the constitution of the Other' (1985: 13). He says that a component of crafting this representation of difference was the use of the 'ethnographic present'. This approach fostered a 'petrified relation' between the writers/readers of anthropology and the peoples described (1983: 143). It resulted in placing 'the Other' outside the flow of history, with the ideological consequence of protecting the privileged position of the West (1983: 144). Fabian shows that the sentence 'The X are matrilineal' is a categorical statement that asserts the matrilineality of the X at all times. In contrast, the statement 'The X were matrilineal' does not make a categorical claim for all times, but does raise the issue of historical validity (1983: 80-1). According to Fabian, categorical statements craft an ethnographic present that freezes societies in time. Stating that 'The X are matrilineal' implies that the X have always been and always will be matrilineal even though all societies change (1983: 81). Thus, the ethnographic present removes the Other from the flow of time and denies the human propensity to change.

The ethnographic present and its categorical statements also separate anthropological writing from the communicative acts that generate ethnographic knowledge – what Fabian describes as the 'temporality of speaking' (1983: 164). Practices of abstraction, categorical logic, and elision of fieldwork's communicative acts create 'distance' between the subjects of ethnographies and those who read and produce ethnographies. Fabian calls this temporal logic 'allochronism' – the creation of different temporalities in order to deny coevalness.

The criticisms made by *Time and the Other* are important, but as Sanjek writes, Fabian 'can offer no remedial prescriptions for ethnographic writing, and points to no examples of an anthropology that embraces coevalness' (1991: 615). Like other works critical of ethnographic representation published during the 1980s (e.g. Clifford & Marcus 1986; Marcus & Fischer 1986), Fabian seems to rest content with representational experimentation (1985: 19). Now that almost twenty-five years have passed since the publication of Fabian's book, it is time to reflect on the experimentation that has taken place.

Achieving coevalness through communication

Fabian's concept of coevalness is grounded in his discussion of the intersubjective time of communication (1983: 30-1). Communication is not limited to interviews, but interviews do serve as examples of the establishment of intersubjective time between researcher and research subjects. Intersubjective time has two meanings, however: shared experience in time, and shared temporal frameworks used to make communication intersubjectively significant. This point is demonstrated by two interviews in which I engaged during my first fieldwork – the topic of these interviews was the same, but my sense of being able to represent coevalness ethnographically with each person interviewed differed greatly.

The interview with Raj[1] took place after over a year of field research. I had chosen him because he was engaging and articulate, and willing to express his opinions and experiences. The interview was part of my field research about Trinidadian conceptions of time (Birth 1999).

KB: ... the expression I want to start with is 'Any time is Trinidad time'.
Raj: 'Any time is Trinidad time', ahm, that has only become a recent phenomena [*sic*]. Long ago, when they say you are going to take work at seven o'clock, you must be there at ten minutes to seven, and if you are not there you will lose a whole day's work ...

After this, Raj told stories amounting to ten transcribed pages to bolster his point. A close reading of how Raj frames his response demonstrates the sophistication with which he handles temporality. His first response includes 'that has only become a recent phenomena' and he immediately follows it with 'long ago'. Fourteen lines in the transcript later, he says, 'I think the younger people are the ones who really exploit this "any time is Trinidad time". The old people have grown up in a line of discipline'. By this point in the interview, he has given me temporal frameworks defined in terms of the past, the present, and generations. He uses this temporal matrix to elaborate on differences in discipline between young people and old people. To emphasize his point, he introduces a story about how the old people were raised with the temporal frame: 'Now, the discipline long time ...'. Each of his stories is temporally framed along two dimensions: the present versus the past, and the people who are presently old versus the people who are presently young. For instance, in the following example, he tells a story about a recent meeting, but uses it to build the contrast between young people and old people:

We organize a woman's group. When it was, we organizing the meeting for five o'clock, by six o'clock being home, you must be home by half-past six because husband always suspicious of their wives, even go to the meeting and so on. When it quarter past five, many of them walked to the meeting. When it quarter-past five some started to show. One or two came in on time – the meeting was to be at five. Some came after five; some came half-past five. When it was half-past five and we had enough people, I said, 'Ladies, I'm sorry some of you must have come from very far, but this is a woman's affair, and let me tell you as a man how your husband will think. We start a meeting half-past five and end at seven he will say, he will not want to understand that the meeting started late, so we will not keep any meeting today, but next week Friday, same day, at five o'clock', and everybody there quarter-to-five ready for meeting. Those are the woman and the older people. The younger people, I don't think that would have made an impact. You still find some, twenty-five percent, coming in after meeting started.

At another point in the interview, he was lamenting the growing power of labour unions and their effect of eroding punctuality and framing it in terms of 'now' versus 'long time', a Trinidadian idiom used to refer to the distant past: 'Now, the discipline long time, where the chief overseer on the road could send you back home and you have to lose a day work. If he do such a thing now he will be answerable to the union'. His multi-dimensional temporality of generations and 'now' versus 'long time' allowed him to compare the behaviour of the old people when they were young to the behaviour of contemporary young people. His topics range from school, to cricket tests, to work, to local meetings. Every setting is orientated by his matrix of present/long time and old people/young people.

The coevalness I felt was not my creation – it was not the result of my being able to place his experience into a temporal framework that I crafted. Instead, the coevalness I felt resulted from Raj's ability to convey his temporal frameworks to me. In Fabian's work, the fieldworker's sense of coevalness was not addressed. He emphasized the issue of time as an epistemological contradiction between allochronic discourses and empirical research that unfolds through sharing time in communication with research subjects. The interview with Raj was meaningful not simply because we shared time,

but because of how he related our shared time to his life and his sense of his past. Raj's interview suggests that the issue of coevalness is not only epistemological, but also phenomenological.

The extent to which the coevalness I felt was Raj's doing, and not mine, is demonstrated by an interview in which I felt allochronic – outside of the time of the person to whom I was talking. Robert was difficult to interview. Each question I posed was greeted with a short, vague response. I had wanted to interview him because of his age and work history, and because in other social contexts he was talkative. We had known one another for a year and a half, and had participated in conversations about many topics. I was following the same protocol I had with Raj.

> KB: I have heard this expression: 'Any time
> R: Is Trinidad time'.
> KB: What does it mean?
> R: They does have a way they does say like how you know when you tell somebody come and check you say 'any time'. They does say, 'Any time is Trinidad time'. That is how most of the people really does use it for. Like, 'Any time is Trinidad time'.
> K: What do people mean when they say 'jus' now?'
> R: Well sometime, somebody might give you something and they mightn't right away be able to come to attend to somebody, so they tell you, 'I comin' jus' now' ...
> K: What do people mean when they say 'long time'?
> R: Like long time, like fifteen years aback and twenty years aback and thing. Everybody say 'long time' ...

Robert provided no temporal frame, and since I was not fully cognizant of this being what I was missing, I was not equipped to get him to develop his thoughts in a way that I could grasp. Even when he discussed the idiom 'long time', which refers to the past, Robert did not provide a temporal frame that I adequately understood – he used the phrase 'years aback'. Elsewhere (Birth 2006), where I discuss how Trinidadians temporally structure their discussions of the past, I argue that of the four commonly employed means of temporal structure – dates, stage of life, significant historical events, and 'years aback' – 'years aback' is unusual. The other three temporal structures are often associated, thereby creating dense networks of temporal orientations for any story. In a close reading of the interview transcripts, 'years aback' rarely occurred with the other temporal structures. Instead, it tended to be used to elucidate general principles, usually moral points, that were true in the past and remain true in the present. Narratives framed in terms of 'years aback' have qualities similar to how Fabian describes allochronism – a time outside of the normal flow of time. Robert's use of this phrase to frame his discussions without including any didactic narrative left me temporally disorientated. This was compounded by his use of 'you know', 'something', and 'everybody', indicating that he used a restricted code – much of what he could have said, he did not (Bernstein 1971) – and by the fact that I did not have the knowledge necessary to engage him fully in the interview. Robert and I were in the same place at the same time, but we were not coeval in the same way Raj and I were coeval. Fabian suggests that 'for human communication to occur, coevalness has to be *created*' (1983: 30-1, emphasis in original), but my experiences with Robert and Raj, and my ethnographic work on how Trinidadians represent their lives in time (Birth 2006), has led me to believe that communication is not a sufficient condition for coevalness to emerge. The differences between my interviews with Raj and Robert complicated for me what the creation of coevalness might mean, and suggested to me that a shared duration of communication

was not the same as a sense of a shared phenomenological sense of time. These interviews also caused me to think that a subtle dimension of rapport is the mutual intelligibility of the temporal organization of narratives. In effect, that to create coevalness and to incorporate it into ethnographic representation required more than a demonstration that I was in the same place at the same time as those with whom I worked.

These interviews suggest that coevalness is not a creation of the ethnographer, but a creation out of the intersubjective relationship of the ethnographic encounter. Coevalness has epistemological, rhetorical, and phenomenological dimensions. Yet, even if coevalness unfolds in a field situation, its translation into an ethnographic account still faces four major challenges: the split temporalities of the ethnographer; the multiple temporalities of different histories; the culturally influenced, if not constructed, phenomenological present; and the complicated relationship between culturally variable concepts of being and becoming and cultural concepts of time. Consciousness of these challenges raises awareness of the risk of homochronism – a displacement of those people who are ethnographically represented out of their temporality and their assimilation into academic discourses of history. Homochronism can be subjected to criticisms that parallel those Fabian made of allochronism – both homochronism and allochronism are tropes that distance the Other through placement into post-Enlightenment temporal constructions.

The first challenge of coevalness: ethnographers' split temporalities

Whereas Fabian emphasizes how the ethnographic present distances the ethnographer from the subject of ethnography, he does not explore the complicated relationship of the ethnographic present to the temporality of the ethnographer. In discussing chronotopes, the narrative relationship of place and time, Bakhtin explores the relationship of the author to the narrative and points out that '[t]he represented world, however realistic and truthful, can never be chronotopically identical with the real world it represents, where the author and creator of the literary work is to be found' (1981: 256). The author's presence in ethnographic representations is often a split image: the author as writer at the time of writing, and the textually represented fieldworker whose temporal and spatial relationship to the ethnography is complicated. With regard to texts in which the author is represented within the narrative, Bakthin states,

> he can represent the temporal-spatial world and its events only *as if* he had seen and observed them himself, only *as if* he were an omnipresent witness to them. Even had he created an autobiography or a confession of the most astonishing truthfulness, all the same he, as its creator, remains outside the world he has represented in his work (1981: 256, emphasis in original).

This point is illustrated by Crapanzano's discussion of Geertz's opening narrative in his 'Deep play' (Crapanzano 1986; Geertz 1973a). Crapanzano focuses on Geertz's story of escaping a police raid on a cockfight as a rhetorical means of establishing Geertz's ethnographic authority, and in doing this, Crapanzano highlights the difference between the anthropologist as a character in an ethnographic representation and the anthropologist as the producer of that representation. In 'Deep play', then, Geertz is both a character in a story and the author of that story, but Geertz-the-fieldworker in the story is portrayed with uncertainty and anxiety about the future that Geertz-the-author lacks. From a textual perspective, one could ask whether Geertz established coevalness with himself – a point made by Rabinow, who wrote, 'We remain out of time

not only in the sense of a refusal of coevalness with the Other in Johannes Fabian's terms, but in a strict sense, in a refusal of coevalness with ourselves' (1988: 360). So, whereas recent anthropological rhetoric eschews an ethnographic present in favour of representations of the ethnographic presence of the author as fieldworker, the implicit split image of the two temporal existences of the ethnographer as narrator and character in a narrative remains a challenge for representations of coevalness. These conventions rarely relate the author to history, or even to the author's pre-fieldwork past, but suspend the ethnographer in time, in an effort to establish coevalness between the ethnographer and the Other.

The second challenge of coevalness: multiple temporalities of multiple histories

Time and the Other is often used to support the incorporation of history into anthropological representation. Behar credits Fabian's ideas with 'the infusion of deeper level of historicity into ethnography' (1986: 6). For Borneman, Fabian's *Time and the Other* encourages the following perspective:

> By striving toward a fuller historical consciousness, we anthropologists are doing much more than merely acknowledging the historicity of our productions ... Our understanding of historical space is more than a prelude to knowledge of the objective world; it is also a form of knowledge about events of cultural significance necessary for a self-articulation and definition in the present (1998: 146-7).

The significance of Fabian's ideas has been extended beyond cultural anthropology to include archaeology. Hodder writes:

> Involving ethnographers will hopefully assist archaeologists to shy away from assuming an equation between 'local' and fixed or indigenous. A reflexive approach to the local involves seeing how it is historically constructed. The local may not be an 'authentic' voice that can be used uncritically to make sense of the past in that locality (2003: 63).

In relationship to the intersections of ethnography, ethnohistory, and archaeology in the study of Mesoamerica's past, Chance uses Fabian to articulate a concern about an 'ethnographic past' that also distances 'the Other' from the anthropologist: 'By giving short shrift to history, we may attribute a greater antiquity to beliefs and practices than they in fact possess' (Chance 1996: 392).

The invocation of historicity and the use of historical narratives is seen as a means of avoiding allochronism. Yet, many ethnographies equate history, a representation of the past, with historicity, a representation of a connection to the past, and contextualize their representations using Western historiographic ideas. In this case, history is used as the ground for shared pasts, but in personal encounters it is not such general history that is relevant, but locally embedded history. The distinction between *H*istory and *h*istory made by Glissant (1989) emphasizes the difference between the assertion of transcendence of History as represented in Western discourse and the experience of fragmented pasts that is found in local history in the Caribbean. Glissant's distinction resonates with Foucault's contrast between 'traditional history' and 'effective history'. For Foucault, traditional history 'aims at dissolving the singular event into an ideal continuity' (1984: 88), and effective history 'deals with events in terms of their most unique characteristics, their most acute realizations' (1984: 88). These not only are different views of history, but suggest how techniques of creating history organize how

the past is thought, and that traditional history homogenizes and essentializes the unique qualities of events and also their temporalities by placing them within a general, 'ideal continuity', as opposed to leaving them within the sequences and rhythms from which they emerged.

If identities emerge, in part, out of the relationship between local discursive practices and local histories, then does linking them to 'History', in Glissant's sense, or traditional history, in Foucault's sense, establish coevalness? Moreover, the contents of History are themselves contested (Chakrabarty 1992; 1997; 2000; Trouillot 1995). Consequently, history cannot be easily assumed to be the past of intersubjective significance for communicative encounters between a fieldworker and informants.

When I interviewed Robert, I encountered this problem. The local history of which Robert was conscious is not the history represented in works on Trinidad's past. The representations of Trinidad's history that shaped my awareness of Trinidad's past emphasized the sugar plantation economy and ethnic politics. Robert lives where cocoa is the main crop and the effects of ethnic politics refract through locally based agricultural and labour interests (see Birth 2006). Knowledge of Trinidad's past as recorded in academic discourse is not identical to Robert's knowledge of his past as part of these historical currents. Thus, even when one refers to history, this is not sufficient to establish a common present in the ethnographic encounter, because the ideas of the past that the ethnographer and informant bring to the situation are different.

The distinct temporalities of different histories and historicities compound this problem. All representations of the past involve temporality. Raj was successful in creating coevalness because of the sophisticated matrix of temporal frameworks he used to contextualize his stories about the present and the past. Subsuming ethnographic representation into any particular history avoids the problem of allochronism, but creates homochronism – a single all-encompassing set of temporal tropes. *H*istory (in Glissant's sense) relies on a post-Enlightenment epistemology of time – the Christian chronology, an emphasis on change, and a distinctive periodization often subtly defined and punctuated by European and North American conflicts. These temporal tropes organize and orientate events in time, and they are part of what Fabian describes as 'attempts to secularize Judeo-Christian Time by generalizing and universalizing it' (1983: 2). Even if one attempts to write effective history, in Foucault's sense of the concept, employment of these temporal frames places such effective history into the sort of ideal continuity Foucault associates with traditional history.

By the time of the publication of *Time and the Other*, many ethnographies already included history, so Fabian's book reinforced this trend. For example, in *The Devil and commodity fetishism*, Taussig (1980) creates this sort of coevalness in order to link folk religion to Marxist ideas of class consciousness. In discussing the plantations, he offers a narrative punctuated by dates and periodizations to document the relationship between Europeans, Africans, and Indians:

The Inquisition was founded in Cartageña in the early seventeenth century ... (1980: 42).

Writing in 1662, the chief inquisitor attributed much of the sorcery and idolatry in the mining districts to the heedless materialism of the mine owners ... (1980: 43).

In 1771 the Bishop of Popayán, capital of the Cauca region of southwest Colombia, complained bitterly that his attempts to catechize the slave and prevent their being worked on Sundays and feast days encountered the firm opposition of the slave owners (1980: 45).

In the opinion of Ramón Mercado, native of Cali and Liberal party governor of the Cauca region between 1850 and 1852 ... (1980: 45).

This demonstrates the frequency with which historical chronology and periodization are used to frame representation. Taussig's multi-layered temporalization is not limited to years – the narrative is further structured by 'periods' in which local trends are linked to supra-local history: for example, 'the Inquisition'.

In contrast, Rappaport's discussion of the construction of history and time among the Páez of Colombia suggests the extent to which Taussig might be imposing his temporal and chronological sensibilities on his ethnographic subjects (1990). Rappaport demonstrates that the histories of the Páez do not follow the same narrative and chronological form of Western, academic history that emphasizes linear periodization and causal chains. Instead, Páez historicity includes a variety of genres with different narrative conventions, some of which emphasize motifs that make sense due to patterns of repetition rather than chronological proximity. How does one think through the challenge of multiple histories in connection to coevalness? Does homochronism artificially obscure important differences?

The third challenge of coevalness: the phenomenological present
The idea of the present invokes ideas of the past and future. The ethnographic encounter is one of the intersections of different phenomenological, subjective pasts in an intersubjective present. Discussions of the phenomenological present affirm that it is closely tied to memory and imaginations of the future. Different pasts and futures lead to different experiences and constructions of the present (James 1996; Mead 1932). Even when invoking an idea of collective memory, Robert and I had only slightly overlapping memories, and consequently our shared present was an intersection of different temporal subjectivities, not coevalness. As Fabian acknowledges, '*Somehow we must be able to share each other*'s *past in order to be knowingly in each other*'s *present*' (1983: 92, emphasis in original).

Cole's work on memories of colonialism in Madagascar provides an example of the complex interaction of context-dependent remembering to an ethnographic portrayal of the interview encounter. In *Forget colonialism*, she reports going to the field with the intention of studying 'how historical events were experienced in terms of everyday consciousness' (2001: 2). In particular, she was interested in the 1947 rebellion against French colonial authority. She recounts that when she arrived at her fieldsite, the presence of the violent colonial past seemed absent, and, instead, the relevant past was dominated by 'the moral economy of cattle sacrifice' and concern about the ancestors (2001: 3). She admits, 'I might have concluded that the importance attributed to the colonial period by Western anthropologists and postcolonial theorists had more to do with their own preoccupations than those of the formerly colonized' (2001: 5). Later into her fieldwork, Malagasy elections prompted open and vivid discussions of the colonial past and the violence of 1947 (2001; 2006). In effect, the relationship of the past to the present was shaped by the concerns of the present, and her initial position of thinking in terms of the violent colonial past did not fit with the present she encountered of the cycle of cattle sacrifice.

Koselleck (1985) argues that the ways in which the future is imagined and linked to the present vary historically. By implication, futures vary culturally, as well. Bourdieu's discussion of Kabyle concepts of the future corroborates Koselleck's point: '[N]othing is more foreign to the pre-capitalist economy than representation of the future (*le futur*) as a field of possibles to be explored and mastered by calculation' (Bourdieu 1979: 8). Bourdieu distinguishes between *le futur* of capitalism, and the forthcoming future

('*un à venire*') grounded in the present, and argues that the latter is typical of precapitalist societies (1979: 9; 1963: 61-2). Bourdieu's claim to be studying 'traditional' Kabyle has been challenged by Goodman (2003), who points out that he worked with refugees during the Algerian Revolution, but even if Bourdieu's portrayal does not reflect traditional Kabyle concepts of the future, it still suggests cultural variability in concepts of the future. There is additional support for such claims in the vast literature on achievement motivation and future orientation in psychology (see Ashkanasy, Gupta, Mayfield & Trevor-Roberts 2004 for a review). This literature uses psychological tests cross-culturally to discern differences in how people think about the future. Often, these studies have practical intentions of explaining different levels of economic success in capitalist economies. The methodological problem with the studies is the extent to which they implicitly adopt ideologies of time and planning associated with European and North American capitalist values, and it is unclear whether the tests measure how people conceptualize the future or the extent of their differences from European and North American representations of it. Despite this significant flaw, this literature does corroborate Koselleck's claim of historically and culturally contingent relationships with the future.

Ethnographic coevalness, then, rests on an assumption of not only an intersubjectively shared present, but, by implication, an intersubjectively shared past and future, as well. This does not mean sharing identical pasts and futures, but sharing sufficient common knowledge about the past and future to make communication in the present intelligible (Birth 2006). Sharing in a communicative event does not automatically generate the sort of intersubjectivity necessary to establish coevalness. Robert and I did not have this shared past or future, and as long as he spoke in a highly restricted code, we could not have an intersubjectively shared past sufficient for me to make sense of what he said. In contrast, Raj made a great effort to make his past intersubjectively shared between us.

Culturally divergent memories and anticipations of the future raise another question of phenomenology in relationship to conceptualizing coevalness: to what extent is the phenomenological present shared between readers, writers, and ethnographic subjects, and consequently is the 'present' of a communicative encounter a sufficient means for establishing coevalness?

Schutz's contrast between contemporaries and consociates describes another dimension of the concept of the phenomenological present. Consociates share a directly experienced social reality, whereas contemporaries could share this reality if they chose to do so, but do not (Schutz 1967: 142). According to Schutz, contemporaries understand one another through 'anonymous processes' that involve the understanding of 'social reality in general' (1967: 183). The use of history in ethnographic research generally employs accounts that are not specific to the individuals studied, the ethnographer, or the ethnographic encounter, but relate to a larger social context that is more general and envelops ethnographic moments – a translation of the past of the individuals into a past of their 'social reality in general'. An anonymous and general past can be applied to all ethnographic subjects, but that hardly seems to be the coevalness that Fabian seeks, and is not the coevalness that Raj created. Yet, a consistent challenge in ethnography is that published histories rarely are straightforward records of the past of the location of fieldwork (Trouillot 1995). Often, their use involves the application of national or regional studies to a specific locale – an application of a 'social reality in general' to contextualize 'directly experienced social reality'. When using a general past

of a nation or region in place of the unique past of a location of research, does ethnography transform consociates into contemporaries in order to create coevalness? The common rhetorical techniques used to create coevalness suggest that this is the case. By placing both the Other and the ethnographer in the history derived from scholarly studies of the past, coevalness seems possible, but such history is distanced from both the lived experience of the ethnographer and the ethnographic subjects. If coevalness is meant to overcome the creation of distance between anthropologists and those whom they study, then the use of homochronic history is just as inadequate, albeit in different ways, as the use of an allochronic ethnographic present.

The fourth challenge of coevalness: time and ontology

In her extensive review of the anthropological literature on time, Munn wrote: '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' (1992: 93). Munn's statement seems odd. After all, anthropologists have written extensively on time, and this literature is complemented by work in other disciplines. Yet, a close examination of the literature on time in the social sciences and humanities supports Munn's claim, and reveals that this literature tends to develop only one of the following three themes at a time: a demonstration of the cultural variability of concepts of time; a concern with ontology and time; or a concern with how time organizes thought.

Much classic work in anthropology, such as Hallowell (1955), Geertz (1973b), and Evans-Pritchard (1940), has emphasized cultural variability in concepts of time. In the cases of Geertz's 'Person, time and conduct in Bali' and Evan-Pritchard's *The Nuer*, the cultural variability of time played a central role in representing the alterity of those studied.

Such an emphasis on cultural differences conflicts with those who seek to emphasize transcendental elements in the human experience of time. Concern with transcendental features of time in opposition to cultural variability falls within the tradition of European philosophy. For example, Heidegger (1962; 1989; 1992) develops the concept of '*das Man*'. This concept often has been translated into English as the 'they', but it also means 'one', 'everyone', and 'we' (Heidegger 1992: 327). In effect, it suggests a density of the relationship of intersubjectivity and subjectivity that no single English word adequately captures. *Das Man* can imply a non-anaphoric, imagined 'they', or the collective. Heidegger argues that the effect of *das Man* on being-in-the-world is to create an alienation that '*closes off* from Dasein its authenticity and possibility' (1962: 222, emphasis in original). By pitting culture against authenticity, Heidegger poses a significant conceptual challenge to an anthropological perspective that links culture to authenticity.

A compromise perspective seeks to balance universal qualities and cultural variations in thought. This approach is derived from Kant's idea of time as an analytic judgment that plays a crucial role in forming synthetic judgments (2003). It has taken its most recent forms in works on how time structures narrative and representations (Bakhtin 1981; Carr 1986; Ricoeur 1984; 1985; 1988). Ricoeur develops the idea of how concepts of time structure authoring, the text, and the interpretation of the text. Bakhtin's discussion of chronotopes (1981), like Kant, also makes time a fundamental dimension of humans' abilities to tell and to understand stories. Whereas Ricoeur and Bakhtin suggest that the use of time to structure stories is a human universal, unlike

Kant they do not assume that the concepts of time used are Newtonian, sequential concepts. Instead, both Ricoeur and Bakhtin suggest variability in concepts of time at the same time as they stress the necessity of concepts of time in making narratives meaningful. In *The anthropology of time* (1992), Gell suggests, like Kant, transcendental concepts of time, but rather than viewing them as analytic judgements, as does Kant, Gell emphasizes how they are derived from universal structures of experience.

Balancing cognitive temporal universals with cultural temporal variation seems to be the most amenable approach for anthropology. By avoiding the problem of ontology – particularly Heidegger's formulation of humans' concepts of being having a temporal dimension – one is able to avoid a conflict between a transcendental ontology of time and cultural variation in concepts of time. Yet, many societies have developed ontologies of time, and to refer to these ontologies as 'cultural concepts' becomes a way of avoiding the task of relating them to European philosophical treatments of time.

Some ethnographic work has engaged the relationship of ontological ideas of time and cultural variation in concepts of time. In her work on Oman, Limbert confronts the connection between Omani ideas of time and being-in-the-world. Omanis have an anxiety about the future that disrupts their sense of the present. Their sense of the present is viewed as miraculous, and thereby a disruption, rather than a repetition of the past (Limbert n.d.*a*; n.d.*b*). Their sense of who they are is grounded not only in this miraculous, anomalous present, but also in their connections to the past and the future. Yet, Omanis do not comfortably fit within European imaginations of ontology. The disruption in time is not the termination of their being in the future, but the manner in which the present is temporally anomalous – the present is viewed as a termination of their being in the past, and when the present ends, they may revert to what they were. This is not a cyclic concept of time, but one of enduring Omani characteristics in relationship to which present conditions are viewed as unusual.

Another example of the difficulty of relating cultural variability to a transcendental concept of being-in-the-world comes from Australian Aboriginal concepts of 'The Dreaming' or 'Dream-time'. McIntosh refers to the link between this concept and the idea of being able 'to see the eternal' (2000: 38). Hume represents this concept as 'the sacred knowledge, wisdom and moral truth permeating the entire *beingness* of Aboriginal life' (2004: 237, emphasis in original). Stanner describes The Dreaming as existing outside of time: '[I]t was, and is, everywhen' (1979: 24). In Aborigine ontology, being involves relations between this concept of the eternal and the waking experience of cycles and change.

The challenge of Omani concepts of time and Dream-time is that these concepts shape the relationship of being-in-the-world and identity to the past and present. As Davis points out, concepts of time 'are a raw material for the production of thought about the past' and, since concepts of time differ, so do the pasts that these concepts shape (1991: 4). Consequently, the consciousness of time is central to being for all humans, and this suggests that consciousness of culturally shaped times creates different senses of being-in-the-world. The problem, then, for anyone engaged in ethnographic work that confronts cultural concepts of time related to ontological ideas of being-in-the-world – the challenge of Omani and Aborigine ontologies – is that the scholarship of cultural variability in temporal ideas can only awkwardly be coupled with the scholarship on ontology. European philosophy's emphasis on the transcendental component of the relationship of time to being-in-the-world collides with an emphasis on cultural variability. Such a tendency to eschew the cultural to discover a

transcendental ontology creates complications for applying the third tradition con-
cerning ways of knowing to understanding the relationship of time and ontology
cross-culturally. Time, then, is a topic that raises all the issues associated with cultural
relativism, but does so in a fashion that is also related to the problem of being.

Anthropology's love of history and fear of time

The challenge to ethnographically understanding time and being suggests that anthro-
pology must confront two related latent tendencies in its treatment of time. First, much
contemporary anthropology desires to document and see change, an attitude that
Fabian suggests is shared by all 'Western social science' (1983: 145), and the anthropo-
logical study of time emphasizes temporal variability and, consequently, alterity. The
difficulty of reconciling these two positions of a pancultural emphasis on change and a
culturally specific emphasis on alterity has emerged in several important works on the
anthropology of time. Bloch (1977) reconciles them by distinguishing ritual time, which
is culturally variable, from sequential practical time, which is pancultural. Gell (1992)
adopts a similar perspective by suggesting that a sense of time based on preceding and
forthcoming (A-series time) is fundamental to experience, but becomes culturally
elaborated in many different ways.

Munn is explicitly critical of Bloch's privileging of practical time over ritual time
because it emphasizes an ' "empirically" derived cognition that has somehow bypassed
any sociocultural construction of reality' (1992: 100). Kermode, in his discussion of the
importance of a concept of the ending in narratives, is even more condemning of
allowing time to be conceived only in terms of succession: 'To see everything as out of
mere succession is to behave like a man drugged or insane' (1967: 57). His argument is
that while time may involve succession, narratives about what occurs in time involve
senses of beginnings, middles, and ends. Moreover, the middle, when the action takes
place, is laden with the issue of the fulfilment of time as the plot moves towards the
ending.

If coevalness requires not merely a shared duration of time, but intersubjectively
shared concepts of time and associated ideas of beginnings, middles, and endings, then,
according to Munn and Kermode, it is not possible to rely on a bare-bones concept of
succession as the ground for meaningful intersubjectivity or being-in-the-world.

An illusory way out is to represent cultural variability ethnographically while using
a temporal structure of historical change that fits academic conventions to frame the
ethnography. Such illusory coevalness not only assumes a shared past, but also claims
a shared sense of being-in-the-world grounded in academic history – a very culturally,
contextually, and temporally specific mode of thinking about the past. It forces both the
ethnographer and the Other into academic representations of the past, being, and
identity. Much of the use of history in anthropology does this. Rather than confronting
the issue of time, the relationship of the past and the present is assumed, and European
dating systems provide the orientational frameworks for structuring the past. Through
a web of dates, global events, and local histories, the past is used as the context for
understanding the present, with attention paid to how cultural representations of the
past are structured by present concerns. To say that Plato died in 347 BC invokes the
dating system devised by Dionysius Exiguus in the sixth century AD and the pre-AD
dating conventions developed by Bede. We place all events and people prior to Diony-
sius and Bede into our conceptions of time and chronology, not theirs – Plato's death

is represented by a date defined in relationship to an event (the birth of Jesus) that Plato could not have foreseen. Ethnographically, it is easy to impose such temporal frameworks without reflection.

Also, for all the extolling of cultural variability, when it comes to the fundamental issues of time and ontology, cultural anthropology prefers to make change, not conservativism, transcendent and absolute. This seems consistent with the postmodern condition that emphasizes transience, fragmentation, and instability (Jameson 1991; Lyotard 1984). Temporal conceptions that emphasize enduring characteristics, everlastingness, eternity, or infinite repetition are disconcerting precisely because they disrupt a sense of change as central to being-in-the-world.

In this regard, it is important to note that Fabian's criticism of allochronism was that it was in the service of Western social scientific theories of change. Placing of the Other outside of time was because '[t]heoreticians and apologists of a new international order perceived the need to safeguard the position of the West. The necessity arose to provide an objective, transcultural temporal medium for theories of *change* that were to dominate Western Social Science in the decades that followed' (1983: 144-5, emphasis in original). Whereas allochronism was often in the service of teleological concepts of change, homochronism need not be teleological. To exchange teleological allochronism for homochronism, but still to privilege theories of change that 'safeguard the position of the West' does not address Fabian's concern. The problem is that for many people in many societies, change and stasis stand in relationship to one another.

Recognition of the ways in which change and stasis seem mutually disruptive is a widespread aporia. This problem is central to Augustine's struggle with the concept of time in his *Confessions* (1997). For him, God was eternal and unchanging and the challenges of temporality were due to the changing condition of humans. For Augustine, the understanding of change only unfolds in contrast to eternity – or, as Ricoeur (1984) describes it, Augustine's aporia is the relationship of *intentio* to *distentio animi*. Augustine uses this to contrast God, whom he links to *intentio*, with human life – a process of maturation and transience characterized by *distentio animi*. In addition, Augustine was intent on demonstrating the superiority of his theory of time that combines linear time with a concept of eternity over representations of time as cyclic (1890: Book 12, chaps 13, 14, and 17) and a concept of infinite linear time without beginning or end (1890: Book 4, chap. 4), a temporal theory that can be attributed to Aristotle (1936), although since Augustine had no Latin translations of Aristotle, he was probably referring to Epicurean philosophy or Manichean discussions of this idea of time. Hegel's philosophy contains similar issues, with his emphasis on change in relationship to the Unchangeable and Absolute Idea (1977). More recently, Deleuze has wrestled with similar problems in his study of the relationship of difference and repetition (1994). This is not simply a problem within the intellectual tradition that stretches from Plato to European philosophy, but is within traditions in other parts of the world, as well. Peel's description of Ijesha concepts of history (1984) juxtaposes a logic of time-transcendent stasis in *itan* – a form of social charter – with a logic of succession and change in *qwa* – the representation of the succession of rules. Balinese concepts of time also address the aporia of relating change and repetition under the single concept of time (Geertz 1973a; Howe 1981), in a way that seemingly privileges repetition over change. Miller, in his work on Trinidad, also notes a tension between what he calls transience and transcendence (1994). My own engagement with Miller's terminology initially focused on his link between these concepts and ethnic stereotypes

in Trinidad (Birth 1999: 16-17), but the global distribution of attempts to relate a sense of change with a sense of eternity/stasis/repetition suggests that what Miller documented in Trinidad, which I also noted, might have been a complicated grafting of this aporia into constructions of ethnic differences. In any case, the transcultural, if not pancultural, distribution of such aporias, along with the great cultural variability in the solution of such aporias, makes it difficult to imagine an anthropological theory of time or representations of time with universal applicability. Likewise, there is a need to contextualize coevalness in very local, culturally sensitive terms, rather than through the imposition of the temporal concepts that are often hidden, yet important, assumptions in anthropological and historical scholarship.

Conclusion and alternatives

The homochronism commonly invoked to create a sense of coevalness is consequently an imposition of one historically and culturally contingent, and presently powerful, temporality on both the ethnographer and the subjects of ethnography. The desire for coevalness creates four challenges: the split between the ethnographer's experience of time and the tropes for representing the ethnographer; the existence of multiple histories; the diversity of ways in which the relationship of the past and future shape the phenomenological present; and the diversity of ethno-ontologies. Current homochronism hides these problems by creating a sense of a shared, general history. It is a history that makes everyone into contemporaries, in Schutz's sense, and a history that privileges change.

Fabian responds to his worry about 'a program for the ultimate temporal absorption of the Other', what I have called homochronism, with a desire to see 'what can be said, positively, about coevalness' (1983: 154). In retrospect, his critique did not prevent homochronic writing, but there has been some work that provides alternative conceptions of time for understanding non-European power relations, and these have created interesting ways to represent coevalness. The already mentioned work of Rappaport to capture Páez's sense of their past is one example (1990). Sahlins's study of the death of Captain Cook is another (1985). Crucial to Sahlins's argument is the claim that Hawaiian cosmology and politics were linked in such a way as to promote Cook to a position of honour during one part of the year, but to view him as a threat to order during a different part of the year. Obeyesekere (1992) has criticized Sahlins's argument on the grounds that Hawaiians were reacting to an overbearing British explorer, and that an appeal to cosmology provides a weak, if not a ridiculous, explanation for Cook's death. If the Hawaiians stood alone in the apparent link between concepts of time and political structures, Obeyesekere's argument would be powerful, but the Hawaiians are not alone. In a study of Mayan political organization, Rice (2004) argues that the connection between cosmology, calendrical reckoning, and power were crucial features of the Maya. The early medieval debates about chronology and calendars also closely linked secular power, cosmology, and the control and awareness of time (Borst 1993). It seems that post-Enlightenment rationalism severs time from eternity and precludes cultural ontologies that do not do the same. Works that confront this problem explicitly represent temporalities that contrast with post-Enlightenment rationalistic times. These alternative temporalities often address either cultural ideas of eternity or long cycles of repetitions.

To create coevalness, it is crucial to adopt the local conceptions that organize the past and relate them to 'general social reality'. This is not homochronism, but since it is

grounded in local temporalities, it is not European-derived allochronism, either. It can often pose significant challenges since such temporal representations do not form typical chronologies and adhere to mnemonic devices other than time-lines. For instance, Basso's discussion of Apache morality tales in *Wisdom sits in places* (1996) weaves together multiple temporalities. Central to the book is the attachment of Apache stories about the past to places – 'place-making is a way of constructing history itself' (1996: 6). The Apache stories of place names that Basso relates include multiple temporalities of stasis and change. For instance, the story of the place 'Water Lies With Mud In An Open Container' (1996: 8) contains a narrative of change that discusses how a long time ago people travelled to the spot and settled there, but it also culminates in a statement of stasis: 'Water and mud together, just as they were when our ancestors came here' (1996: 12). In addition to representing tales in which multiple Apache temporal frames interact, Basso offers a discussion of how the Apache organize their past with the major distinctions of 'in the beginning', 'long ago' (before the whitemen came), and 'modern times' (since the whitemen came) (1996: 49-51). He describes how each temporal frame is linked to a different purpose with myths about the beginning of time serving 'enlightenment and instruction'; historical tales of long ago used to criticize and edify behaviour; and stories of modern times used to provide entertainment. The different historical modes convey a relationship of change and stasis that makes the past meaningful to the present, and Basso's temporal representations lead readers through his experience of discovering the Apache past in the present in his temporal frames.

There are also works that manage an interactive sense of coevalness by linking academic history and ethnographically revealed conceptions of the past. Mintz's *Worker in the cane* (1974) does this. Each chapter title provides two temporal frames: a stage in Taso's life and a range of dates, for example 'Manhood: the early years (1927-39)' (1974: 99). Each chapter contains Taso's narratives followed by a brief section in which Mintz relates Taso's stories to dates and the political economy of Puerto Rico for the period. So, in the chapter just mentioned, Taso and his wife, Elisabeth, tell multiple stories with the most common temporal frames being 'at that time' or 'after that time' related to occasional dates. At the end of the chapter, Mintz provides chronology in which each significant event is assigned a date, for example 'Taso's blacklisting and his subsequent political disillusionment (1932-33)' (1974: 169). After presenting this chronology, Mintz offers general statements to provide additional historical context to Taso's life, such as: 'By the 1930s most of the land on the south coast was in the hands of a few corporations, most of them North American. The political situation was very dark, and workers were forced to vote in line with their employers' interests to keep their homes and jobs' (1974: 169). Taso's life story and Mintz's history of Puerto Rico alternate in a way that enriches both narratives.

Richard Price's works on the Saramaka (1983; 1990) also represent local temporalities in contrapuntal relationship to conventional academic historical narratives. For instance, in *Alabi's world* (1990), he includes narratives of the same set of events from the perspectives of the Saramaka, the German Moravian missionaries, the Dutch colonial officials, and his own voice as an 'ethnographic historian' (1990: xi-xvi). Each voice is identified with a different typeface in the book. In so doing, the implicit temporal principles that organize each narrative are juxtaposed, and Saramaka tales of the past become intelligible to readers familiar with European historical tropes because of the relationship of Saramaka temporal frames to familiar European frames. The clock- and

date-consciousness of the colonial officials subtly contrasts with the date- and time-of-day-consciousness of the missionaries and the strong plots conveyed in Saramaka histories, and Price co-ordinates these different sources on the past. The dissonance between the European voices of the Moravian missionaries, the colonial officials, and the narratives of Saramaka are evident, and their lack of coevalness as a result of having different pasts is a source of ethnographic insight.

In these examples, the ethnography includes the writers' struggles to come to terms with the local temporality in relationship to temporalities familiar to readers of ethnographies, rather than obscuring local temporalities in the imposition of a European-derived chronology.

Coevalness based on a homochronism in which the ethnographer places the Other into a scholarly-style history, then, is a distancing construction, much like its predecessor, allochronism. Like its predecessor, homochronism reflects the dominant teleology of the intellectual climate out of which it emerged: a fear of concepts of time that emphasize endurance, if not eternity, coupled with a desire to document change. It is not likely that the ethnographer shares the past with informants, and this burdens the ethnographic task to portray the temporal logics of the local narratives of the past. At least in Trinidad, much of what people say in order to make their lives sensible to others involves how they orientate themselves in culturally shared ideas of the past. The coevalness that Raj established was his doing, through his use of a matrix of temporal frameworks; it was not the product of my imposing a temporal organization on his narratives. In telling me his opinions, he made a great effort to orientate me in his ideas of time so that I might understand his life and experiences. This put me in his history.

NOTES

[1] Informants' names are pseudonyms.

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La création de la contemporanéité et les dangers de l'homochronie

Résumé

Dans son livre *Le Temps et les Autres,* Johannes Fabian critiquait la création par l'anthropologie de représentations plaçant l'Autre en dehors du flux du temps. Selon lui, la description ethnographique de la contemporanéité pourrait être la solution à ce problème. Le présent article explore les quatre difficultés que pose la représentation de la contemporanéité : temporalités dissociées de l'ethnographe, temporalités multiples des différentes histoires, présent phénoménologique culturellement informé, relation complexe entre les concepts culturellement variables de l'être et du devenir et les concepts culturel du temps. Sur la base de ces difficultés, l'auteur avance que certaines tentatives de contemporanéité ethnographique ont suscité un cadre temporel d'homochronie qui subsume l'Autre dans les discours académiques sur l'histoire. Pour parvenir à la contemporanéité et éviter homochronie et allochronie, il est nécessaire de représenter les cadres temporels utilisés par les enquêtes pour forger la contemporanéité avec les ethnographes et de resituer ces cadres en relation avec les représentations académiques du temps et de l'histoire qui prévalent habituellement.

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