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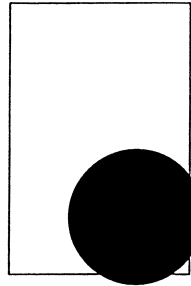
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# Rethinking time's arrow

## 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 in the guise of what I term here 'fluid time'. Anthropologists of multiple theoretical persuasions now take for granted that social life exists in 'time', 'flow', or '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 this concept is notably under-theorized, in keeping with a history of uneven study by social scientists of time. In this article I draw on anthropological approaches by Gell and Munn, and philosophical work by Bergson and Deleuze, to put forward a critical theorization. I then discuss its ramifications. Ultimately, I argue that this model points to a rapprochement between the anthropological study of time and history, sociality and temporality, and an enhanced role for temporal analysis in anthropological theory.

### Key Words

Bergson • Deleuze • emergence • fluid time • history • *la durée* • processual analysis • temporal ontology • time

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* (1977 [1972]: 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: 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: 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: 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.<sup>1</sup> 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 and 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.<sup>2</sup> 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 . . . 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 core 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 somewhat hazy notion of time as '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' (cf. Giesen, 1992).<sup>3</sup> Bourdieu (1977: 6–9), for example, posited that human interaction as a form of practice is 'inscribed in the *current* of time', 'with its rhythm, its orientation, its irreversibility' (1997: 9, my emphasis). It is thus intrinsically defined by its *tempo*, which must form a

core component of any analysis, particularly of the gift. Indeed, his concept of practice is intrinsically dependent on the spatialization of time through such seemingly riverine imagery. Similarly, he influentially criticized structuralist and objectivist models for their 'detemporalized' character.<sup>4</sup> In this respect, Bourdieu is said to have been influenced by his early readings of phenomenological philosophy, but it is hard to locate explicit clarification of his own, influential temporal ontology, which one must effectively infer from his writings, or tacitly adopt through utilizing his theoretical models. Anthony 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 on his sources than Bourdieu, and openly grounds his understanding of 'lived-through experience' in the work of phenomenological philosophers (Giddens, 1979: 54–5). However, he does so only cursorily, and thus still relies on a problematically unclarified root vocabulary of flow and process – for example: "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). These innovations were 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 interlinked modes of production, or 'historical processes', as opposed to the relatively a-temporal, static analyses associated with structural Marxists in the 1970s.<sup>5</sup> 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' (cf. Agamben, 1993: 91–105), it nevertheless takes the notion of time's fluidity and accompanying processual 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 a fluid underlying process, flow, or flux is comparable, if difficult to pin down with any precision. They neglect to clarify the *temporal ontology* of their models.<sup>6</sup> With respect to an explicit anthropology of time, in such models, time is chiefly a *constitutive*, not focal aspect of the theoretical apparatus (cf. Thomas, 1996: 5–6).<sup>7</sup>

Since the late 1980s, this intrinsic temporal ontology has become a defining feature of social analysis. Many political economists have adopted a reflexive approach to 'historical process', ditching the lack of coevalness (cf. 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, Giddens and others.<sup>8</sup> 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 intensified and broadened its influence, as acknowledgement of the impact of a globalized economy and accompanying rapid historical change on even the most isolated locales seemed to underline the pertinence of these approaches (cf. Gupta and Ferguson, 1997; Ong and Collier, 2004). Indeed, as globalization has become indubitably implicated in anthropological analysis, and the notion of bounded cultures increasingly problematic, the sense that social experience is 'fluid', and exists in relation to a global capitalist system that is constituted of capital, labour and other 'flows', has clearly become the dominant paradigm – propositions which are in turn predicated on implicit notions of temporal flow or historical flux. In this respect, fluidity

has become an even more appropriate root metaphor for the temporality of analysis, facilitating both the empirical analysis that rapid social change is endemic to modern social life and the political economic thesis that social change was also intrinsic to 'pre-modern' societies. We can thus propose that entangled notions of temporal flow and socio-historical change lie at the heart of the temporal modalities of contemporary anthropological theory.<sup>9</sup> 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 such approaches are underpinned by a tacit unspecified temporal ontology that is evoked through a common root vocabulary of process, flow or flux – itself implying, and facilitating in an unspecified way the notion that time involves 'change'.<sup>10</sup>

These approaches are characteristic of a broader trend in cultural and philosophical theory in the last 30 years, sometimes associated with the phenomenon of post-modernism. 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 alights on this most notable, yet under-theorized feature of contemporary anthropological theory, which was arguably fundamental to the incipience of contemporary paradigms. 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 (cf. Kahn, 1981; Kirk et al., 1983; Thomas and Hjort, 1996).<sup>11</sup> 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 (1993 [1937]) – although influential 'postmodernist' fiction writers such as Borges (1970 [1941]) or Pynchon (1973), interestingly enough, have tended towards more 'event-centred' theories of temporal perception (Heise, 1997: 47–68).<sup>12</sup> And it has a broad, but undoubtedly contingent, presence in the cultural practices of 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. *Fluid time*, as we can term it, is inherent in current theoretical models as the (chiefly metaphorical) motor facilitating the ongoing 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 and Stewart, 2005b; James and Mills, 2005a), this underlying vocabulary remains necessarily present. In this sense, it 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’. In current usage, it is also but one, contingent evocation of how we might conjure the complex workings of ‘spacetime’, with the potential for further conceptual elaboration. Clearly overlooked, like time more generally, the assumption of time’s ‘fluidity’ has received ‘insufficient attention’.<sup>13</sup>

An extended anthropological study of the links between metaphors of fluidity, change, related historical contexts and contemporary cultural theory would undoubtedly be fascinating, and might possibly provide a basis for reconsidering our reliance on fluid time in theoretical models – but that is beyond the scope of this article.<sup>14</sup> And I would stress that I do, of course, accept that this complex of foundational tropes 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 offer a summary definition at this point, however, my intention – for reasons that will become apparent – is to flesh out a complex working definition of the most metaphorically neutral of these terms, ‘flux’, and tease out some of its implications – including addressing the charge that it necessarily 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 article, I synthesize and develop these findings. This will enable precise theorization, and development of this key component of social analysis. In turn, it will illuminate how problematizing fluidity 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 in passing on the implications for topics such as social change, cross-cultural analysis and historical anthropology. In conclusion, it will also permit the intimation of a paradigm for the anthropological analysis of time and historical practice with an *explicit* notion of flux at its core, which places 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 interest in flux. The first of our studies, Gell’s *The Anthropology of Time* (1992), is one of the few major works on time by an anthropologist and, largely theoretical in nature, is an admirable work of interdisciplinary 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 termed by philosophers ‘A-series’ and ‘B-series’ time. These 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' (Gell, 1992: 165, 156–7).<sup>15</sup> B-series time, however, is unlike time as perceived by human subjects, as it has no past, present and future dimensions, that is, 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 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' (1992: 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 (1992: 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. Gell's B-series model, therefore, is the explicit foundation for his theory's temporal ontology.

Now, 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' (Gell, 1992: 238). Instead, we know B-series time through temporal models, which reflect the structure of B-series time without accessing it directly (1992: 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 directive 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 fluid time 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 framework 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: 22–3), 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 brazenly cultural in character.<sup>16</sup> When, for example, does an 'event' begin? How does one define the positioning of events in relation to one another? Surely the analogy of the calendar which he puts forward for this purpose derives much too explicitly from human, A-series laws of perception. In what sense, therefore, does the language of chronological 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, or indeed the elusive notion of fluid time, which we are pursuing in terms of flux? 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 of 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 our quest for a temporal ontology that fleshes out a notion of 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.<sup>17</sup>

Turning now to the work of Nancy Munn, her article '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 valuable 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 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' (1992: 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' (1992: 94). This leads her to characterize social life as comprising a 'lived spacetime', a position she summarizes concisely in an earlier article 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).<sup>18</sup>

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 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' (1992: 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 practices 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' (1992: 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 practices of daily existence. Munn's theory of temporality thus provides a counterpart to the practice paradigm mentioned earlier.

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 article. First, in the restricted space of her essay, the philosophical foundations for Munn's approach are

necessarily abbreviated, although she makes clear here and elsewhere in her work the debt she owes to the phenomenological tradition (cf. 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 (cf. Harris, 1996).<sup>19</sup> Similarly, this ensures that her discussion of time remains discrete, a dimension of *social* practice, in other words, severed from a model of *historical* time or globalized processes (cf. Thomas, 1996: 5). As a result, we also have little sense of how non-human processes can be theorized to have agency in human affairs (cf. Latour, 2007). Likewise, we have no sense of how these apparently discrete temporalizing practices relate to social practice more generally. For the phenomenological philosophers, temporality was a core dimension of human being (Heidegger, 1993; Merleau-Ponty, 1989). For Munn, it has become a conceptual adjunct of sociality. In sum, we have no ontological framework through which to correlate the multiple social and material trajectories of historical time.

Secondly, there is the question of terminology, namely the vocabulary of fluid time itself. Like so many other writers on practice, Munn provides no clear definition of this regime of tropes, but still invokes it freely. That would not be so controversial 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 appears to define the cultural component of human temporality with reference to a general ontology of fluid time, but neither defines its B-series ('objective') character, nor its relationship to wider social practice, with any transparency. (An observation, one might add, that I have already made in related terms of processual theory more generally.)

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 effective model of B-series time – which is vital to any precise theorization of 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 (cf. 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. Gell, meanwhile, presents a model of time that relies on clearly 'ethnocentric' metaphors for time perception, and his phenomenological model is problematic. Finally, neither addresses the role that their respective temporal metaphors and ontologies play in the practice paradigm itself, so neither profit from the potential benefits to be had in doing so, as we shall see – in

particular with regard to the explicit integration of temporal analysis with praxis. In this regard, both are content to approach the anthropology of time as a discrete area of study, despite arguing for time's pervasiveness in social life. To which one might reply: if time is pervasive, then we must develop a way of analysing it pervasively.

B-series time, then, and by implication the nature of temporal flux, would benefit from the exploration of an alternative definition, both regarding its explicit nature and its relationship to human sociality. And given that no anthropological alternative is forthcoming, we turn to the philosophy of time. Let us set down some brief pointers for orientation. 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 enquiry. It should also query what validity this definition might have as a universalist claim. It must also acknowledge the limitations of such an enquiry, given the decidedly complex, multiform and ultimately socio-cultural nature of our understanding and conceptualization of time. But, of course, it should respond with precision to the pressing requirement for a definition of flux. The goal is therefore an elucidation of the concept of flux, in the context of a pragmatic, working, cross-cultural model of historical time experience, and with these demands before us I now turn to examine the philosophical work of Bergson and Deleuze. The potential benefits for social analysis will be seen to include reflexive awareness of the temporal ontology of anthropological paradigms; the elision of spatialized metaphors of time from theoretical paradigms; and a more dynamic model of socio-temporal experience that facilitates fuller integration of temporal analysis with models of socio-historical practice.

### **TOWARDS A THEORY OF FLUX: BERGSON, DELEUZE AND *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 20th-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 – that is to say, the world of human experience that pre-occupies 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 criticism 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 Bourdieu and Giddens, and in symbolic anthropology, in particular of course in Munn's work on time. Finally, there is a

significant 'distaff' tradition, which Turetzky grounds in the work of Bergson (1944, 1960, 1988) 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 Turetzky'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, multi-stranded emergence of novelty within the universe and the ramifications of this proposition for the understanding of time and consciousness – that is, the very question of flux itself. Let us consider, therefore, the nature of what, we should note beforehand, is a complex but potentially valuable theory.<sup>20</sup>

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* (first published in 1896), and *L'Évolution créatrice* (appeared 1907).<sup>21</sup> 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, 'Bergson (1859–1941)' (1956a), 'La Conception de la différence chez Bergson' (1956b) and *Bergsonisme* (1966); and then principally in two wider-ranging philosophical works, *Différence et Répétition* (1968) and *Logique du sens* (1969).<sup>22</sup> 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.<sup>23</sup>

Both Bergson and Deleuze can be said to 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.<sup>24</sup> Quantitative multiplicities are 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 interrelated (i.e. relational) 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, relational division, 'flux', or 'individuation'.<sup>25</sup> *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 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.'<sup>26</sup> 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.

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'.<sup>27</sup> I shall come to the force that propels the process of actualization in due course.<sup>28</sup>

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.<sup>29</sup> 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 '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 – the subject of anthropology – 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 co-existence', 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' (Deleuze, 1994: 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 different/ciation, indeed it consists of the operation of different/ciation 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'. We might equally read this as a metaphor for the vital momentum that physicists locate in the well-springs of matter, or in the mysterious operations of sub-atomic particles.

It is important to note that, despite an apparent similarity between time as *la durée* and the notion of fluid time identified earlier – which characteristically spatializes time using metaphors such as the 'current 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; second, regarding the paradoxical nature of the past in the second synthesis; and third, 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: 94–9), it is potentially compatible with dominant contemporary social, and scientific theories, and paradigms in modern physics and biology regarding energy, matter, or genomics.<sup>30</sup> It is composed of all the seemingly 'continuous', but in effect different/ciating, pulsations of organic and inorganic matter

that constitute the universe and life in it – the multiple strands of bifurcating materiality which, for anthropologists, are of interest in their ethnographic guise.<sup>31</sup> 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 different/ciation ultimately triumphant.<sup>32</sup> 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 interrelationships while encompassing different/ciation.

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* – 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.<sup>33</sup> One can thus begin to grasp how the relational concept of *la durée* is a philosophical cousin to anthropological concepts such as Tonkin’s (1992: 72–5) theory of ‘co-existent times’, Thomas’s (1996: 121) notion of history as a ‘systemic process’, or Ingold’s proposition that anthropological subjects are integrated in ‘the unfolding of a total relational field’ (1990: 225); the multi-layered perspectives on history that have developed from the work of the *Annales* school and related debates (e.g. Braudel, 1989, 1990; Gurvitch, 1964); or Adam’s (1998) theory of timescape. Similarly, one can infer how *la durée* might underpin models of sociality and socio-historical practice informed by the principally metaphorical notions of fluid time as advocated by Bourdieu, Giddens, or Munn, with ‘time’ experience now a central, dynamic dimension. Finally, we can note parallels with approaches in anthropology which argue that social scientific understanding is an emergent, relational process of conceptual and narrative creation (Strathern, 1988; Viveiros de Castro, 2002; Wagner, 1981; cf. Henare et al., 2007: 13); or posthumanist perspectives in the sociology of science, that seek to establish paradigms grounded in an explicit theory of temporal emergence (Latour, 2007; Pickering, 1995; Rheinberger, 1997). With this multi-layered, relational ontology of historical time before us, we shall now return to work reviewed on the anthropology of time earlier, and extend it critically in the light of the model just outlined.<sup>34</sup>

## RE-THINKING THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF ‘SPACETIME’

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 Mellor rely to a much greater extent on western ‘common-sense’ conceptions of time than Bergson and Deleuze. Indeed, the latter two provide a challenging but workable non-chronological framework that ultimately affords a distinctive vantage-point on cross-cultural temporal perspectives – though it is still, of course, grounded in western (French) cultural terminology. If our different models are broadly



compatible, it is precisely Gell's emphasis on the temporal, datable nature of B-series 'real time' that constitutes our most notable point of disagreement. When worked through, however, such general differences evidently become significant. Gell seeks to identify dated 'real time' as the basis for the study of human *time experience*; I seek to establish *la durée* as a basis for the study of *lived experience* and *sociality*, as we shall see.<sup>35</sup>

*La durée*, as I have shown, 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 (cf. 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 concrete, non-human context. By contrast with Munn, therefore, and in keeping with Deleuze's approach, lived experience lies in a complex relationship with *la durée*, which encloses and enables it while remaining, in the last instance, inaccessible to objective human representation. This reveals the partially determined, but inherently relational, 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 and 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*.<sup>36</sup>

Turning now to rough out the implications for anthropological models, one must first note that the process of different/ciation 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 in a broader, multi-layered, relational context, it simultaneously underlines that the temporal is its correlate – indeed, in this respect, terms such as sociality and temporality can effectively be proposed to be interchangeable (cf. Hirsch and Stewart, 2005a: 262–3; Munn, 1992: 116). This prompts several observations. As a general statement, we can propose that any considered anthropological analysis should integrate discussion of historical processes with consideration of the lived experience of time – each potentially reconceived on an ontological level as emergent features of *la durée*. With regard to sociality, however, 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 therefore stress that all such 'discrete' temporal experience should be reconceived as a dynamic feature of *la durée* fully integrated with other pertinent historical process. In this sense, we are extending to its logical conclusion what has always been latent in 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 and Stewart, 2005a: 262). That said, it should 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. So the precise task then becomes to elide the marginal disciplinary status of the anthropology of time, 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 different/ciation.

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.<sup>37</sup> But on the other, one must definitively collapse any discrete notion of 'lived time', or 'temporality', into an inclusive notion of sociality conceived as an emergent element of *la durée* – that is to say sociality would be melded with a dynamic, regrounded 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 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*.<sup>38</sup>

With respect to the charge of totalization that can be levelled at the notion of fluid time, we should also note that *la durée* is open to the many divergent and convergent, multi-layered features of human experience. One of the further problems, of course, with a metaphorical terminology that treats of currents and flows and fluxes but remains ill-defined is that the poetic suggestiveness of such language 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 different/ciation – in other words, 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 earlier (cf. Osborne, 1995: 28). It comprises an integrative, emergent pluralism.<sup>39</sup> To the extent that it is possible, it 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 is grounded in an emergent, flux-like historical process or total relational field (Ingold, 1990; Thomas, 1996) – while obviating the need to try and intricately articulate such an anthropological approach with the plethora of competing theories about bio-physical spacetime from other fields. In this respect, we might note its apparent compatibility with 'complexity theory' and dominant paradigms in the philosophy of biology (cf. Delanda, 2005; Goodwin, 2001; Serres and Latour, 1995: 57–62).

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 fluidity 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.<sup>40</sup> In the same way that Jameson has 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.<sup>41</sup> My proposition, however, is that *la durée* offers a precise perspective on flux and change that allows one to clarify the relationship between historical change that anthropologists habitually curtail and define ethnographically, and the different/ciating flux of *la durée*, which is all-pervasive and provides an explicit spatio-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. It might be said to inherently invite both novelty at an ontological level, and variation in practices, through the indeterminate process of the actualization of the virtual (cf. Ansell Pearson, 2002: 2–3). But it exists in no causal or enabling relationship with rapid historical change. Indeed, different/ciation can be said to ontologically underpin so-called 'traditional' societies just as much as the turbulent globalized environments of modernity. The concrete temporal dynamics and character of social change, therefore, is a matter for contingent elucidation, rather than being indexed to the temporal ontology of *la durée*. We now have a novel, nuanced temporal perspective on what Giddens (1979: 210) might mean when he states that 'the possibility of change is . . . inherent in every circumstance of social reproduction'.

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 sociality 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 in this article, I have challenged the use of *temporality* and related terms as analytical tools to explore the experience of 'time' in everyday practices.<sup>42</sup> When writing of everyday practice, following Bergson and Deleuze, one might therefore use *actualization* and the verb to *actualize* – which fully implicate the virtual–actual axis – in place of common terms such as temporalization; or even, with further qualification, symbolization. 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 one workable philosophical foundation for future research in this area, and incorporates a vision of the relationship between analysis and flux that could be further developed. In particular, one can argue that the centrality of temporal experience to sociality demands a precise set of tools that enable consistent and sustained analysis of the temporal modalities and outlooks of everyday practice. This might involve a more nuanced attention to everyday indigenous experiences of change, continuity, epoch and rupture, alongside more conspicuous 'local traditions', and processes of objectification and codification of history practised by those in power (including anthro-

pologists); novel theorization of 'conflicts in time' within the politics of lived experience; and elucidation of an emergent concept of 'living traditions' where the process of differentiation can be seen to be 'transcended' and afforded graded cultural continuity (cf. Harris, 1996: 13; Lambek, 2002: 273; MacIntyre, 1981: 206–7). Indeed, ethnographic work problematizing the handling of time experience and emergence in anthropological models is already in progress (e.g. Hirsch and Stewart, 2005b; Lambek, 2002; Mosko and Damon, 2005), and this article has focused on clarifying the philosophical and ontological basis for such a project. In this respect, we can conclude by endorsing *la durée* as a candidate for the temporal ontology of this more temporally-aware social science.

## Notes

- 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.
- 3 It would be difficult to do more than summarize in an article of this length the use such theorists make of this notion, 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.
- 4 See Bourdieu (1977: 9):

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. (Emphasis in original)

- 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.'
- 6 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 – a sociological counterpart to what Bakhtin (1981), for example, in referring to texts, termed a *chronotope*.
- 7 A well-known exception is Bourdieu's (1977: 97–109, 1963) 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 time 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 of Bourdieu's approach to time. Thomas (1996: 5–6) also analyses the temporal dynamics of such theories, but 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.

- 8 For example O'Brien and 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).
- 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 globalization and social change are also widely 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 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. AD 46–127], *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 economists, reflects aspects of 19th-century historical realism (cf. Lukács, 1972) – which is perhaps not surprising given the Marxian genealogy of such models.
- 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 relations between modernity, fluid time, and modernist and postmodernist representation that touches on such issues.
- 15 See Gell (1992: 149–74 and 221–41) for the B-series and A-series theories of time and his presentation of the relations between them.
- 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. (Agamben, 1993: 91)

Thompson (1967), in a well-known analysis, locates the secularization and spread of this model of time to the growth of industrial capitalism.

- 17 If you introduce Gell's image of B-series time as 'dated' into the types of statement quoted from Bourdieu, Giddens or Wolf, earlier in this article, you begin to grasp its incongruous character in the anthropological context. In this respect, the apparently 'natural' character of metaphors of flow, fluidity and so on, devoid of overt cultural references to time, suggests they are less glaringly problematic to deploy and so have attracted less attention, in the cross-cultural context, despite bearing their own set of problems.
- 18 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 essay. 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 limited regarding the apparatus required for an analysis of the everyday human experience of time.
- 19 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 perspectives (e.g. Foster, 1995; O'Brien and Roseberry, 1991; Parmentier, 1987; Roseberry, 1989).
- 20 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 [1969]). 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).

- 21 Respectively translated as *Matter and Memory* (1988) and *Creative Evolution* (1944).
- 22 Deleuze's three books are available in translation as *Bergsonism* (1991 [1966]), *The Logic of Sense* (1990 [1969]) and *Difference and Repetition* (1994 [1968]).
- 23 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), and Bachelard (1950). 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).
- 24 See Bergson (1960, 1988), Deleuze (1991: ch. 2), Turetzky (1998: chs 13 and 14), and Boundas (1996: 82–5). 'Multiplicity' is the established translation of the French 'multiplicité' in this literature, although English language mathematicians would use the term 'manifold'.
- 25 '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).
- 26 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.

- 27 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.'
- 28 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' (2002: 2–3). See also Shields (2002).
- 29 See Deleuze (1994: ch. 2). The following exposition also draws on Deleuze (1991), Turetzky (1998: ch. 14), and Boundas (1996).
- 30 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: 59) as the *plane of immanence* (see Ansell Pearson, 2002: 41–2 for a succinct discussion of this 'pluralist monism').

- 31 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 a return to a regrounded 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 and 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.
- 32 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).
- 33 Bergson (1988) and Deleuze (1994) both explicate how conceptual discourse can only constitute a ‘spatialization’ and mystification of *la durée*, if frequently giving rise to utilitarian and successful ways of manipulating it.
- 34 It is worth emphasizing that this new definition renders the core tropes of fluid time – with their 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 (time, as we have evoked it, is more of a ‘pulse’). But let us opt instead to redefine this terminology, to enable a convergence between anthropological and philosophical notions.
- 35 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*.
- 36 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 the various dimensions of lived experience in *la durée*, through combinations of artistic and conceptual expression.
- 37 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, the latter’s 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, from the perspective of 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).

- 38 Hirsch and Stewart (2005a: 271) reach a related conclusion in their discussion of 'historicity', in some ways a terminological equivalent to 'temporality': 'Historicity in this anthropological or ethnographic sense is a concomitant of sociality.'
- 39 For extended discussion of how Deleuze's approach admits a fundamental pluralism within the apparently unifying concept of *la durée*, see Ansell Pearson (2002, ch. 4).
- 40 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' (1984: 12). It is a theme pursued in the extensive literature on modernity and postmodernity, 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*.
- 41 Jameson (2002: 111–12) writes:

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'.

Chodorow (1999) provides an effective rejoinder to such assertions of cultural determinism; and indeed Berger himself (note 39, this article) 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 do not have ethnographic applicability.

- 42 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 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 reinforces the marginality of the study of 'time experience'.

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