

INTRODUCTION

Time and the Field

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Abstract: Prompted by the postmodern turn in anthropology, ethnographic fieldwork has been subjected to considerable analytical scrutiny. Yet despite numerous conceptual facelifts, definitions and demarcations of 'the field' have remained fundamentally anchored in tropes of spatiality with the association between field and fieldworker characterized as being maintained by distances in space. By exploring and unfolding the temporal properties of the field, anthropology can favorably complement and extend the (spatially anchored) notion of multi-sited fieldwork with one of multi-temporal ethnography. This approach implies not only a particular attention to the methodology of studying local (social and ontological) imaginaries of time; it furthermore unpacks the (multi-)temporality of the relationship between fieldworker and the field. This special issue may thus be taken as a fresh invitation to a temporally oriented ethnography.

Keywords: ethnography, fieldwork, method, multi-sited ethnography, multi-temporality, temporality, time

The increasing global flows of persons, things, and ideas continue to pose peculiar methodological problems for social scientists doing ethnographic fieldwork. According to several recent studies on the status of ethnographic methodology, the conditions of fieldwork and, implicitly, the constitution of the field itself have been radically transformed by emerging global assemblages that consistently resist being pinned down by spatial scales, such as global-local, urban-rural, center-periphery (Ong and Collier 2005). This transformation is influenced by the emergence of new technologies and intensified processes of exchange and communication that frequently work as a compression of time and space (Harvey 1989) or, conversely, entail their disembedding (Giddens 1990). The gradual expansion of the anthropological discipline has furthermore led to the inclusion of a larger variety of fields (e.g., bureaucratic workplaces, transnational



organizations, media-driven networks, diasporas, etc.), which may be constituted by spatio-temporal demarcations differing from those of the small-scale communities (stereo-)typically studied by anthropologists of yore. Faced with the challenge of aligning methodological and analytical perspectives to these shifting milieus, anthropologists have experimented with novel ways of addressing the ethnographic field and its context, for example, as global 'scapes' (Appadurai 1990); through the use of 'multi-sited' fieldwork (Marcus 1995); and by critically examining the particular location of the fieldworker and his or her relationship to the field (Gupta and Ferguson 1997b). Still, whereas the effects of global processes have been documented by privileging spatial changes and consequently discussing fieldwork as a spatialized practice (e.g., by mapping associations between sites that are locatable, both physically and ideationally), there is a need to understand as well the temporal aspects of these processes. Based on the hypothesis that 'the field' might be understood not solely as a spatial concept but equally as a temporal one, the goal of this special issue is to explore how particular 'sites' contain and actualize different social times and temporalities while also reflecting on the methodological and analytical perspectives by which they can be approached.

Seeing discrete areas of social life as amalgamations of temporal directions, time-scales, and time-cycles indicates that there might be both analytical and methodological purchase to exploring fields as temporal phenomena. The instantaneous contacts and re-entries to the field made possible through modern media make it apparent that the separation of 'field' and 'home' is being challenged, not just as a spatial configuration, but, equally important, as a temporal one. The new technologies of communication and travel have enforced a form of 'coevalness' (cf. Fabian 1983) onto the relationship between anthropology and the Other, which, on the one hand, gives access to a wider range of knowledge formations and fields, but, on the other, also potentially generates a sense of discomfort because the field is ever-present. For example, the anthropologist can receive text messages from informants now covered by mobile phone networks, while the Internet enables the anthropologist to befriend informants on Facebook, follow them on Twitter, or exchange material with them on YouTube—even as a direct part of the fieldwork process, where researcher and informant engage in reciprocal transactions of granting access to each other's social worlds (see Boellstorff 2008; Wulff 2002).

Considering that fieldwork is fundamentally about identifying spaces *and* times, which will enable the ethnographer to explore in detail the initially posed research questions, it is striking that so little has been written about the field as a temporally defined phenomenon. Our aim is therefore twofold. Firstly, building on a critical examination of recent (postmodern) critiques of fieldwork practice, we wish to explore the temporal properties of the field (understood as both an analytical and ethnographic concept). Secondly, if, as we argue, there is a lack of research on the temporal aspects of what constitutes the field, we need to clarify in greater detail how discrete temporalities can be studied and represented via ethnographic accounts (James and Mills 2005: 1). What scales of comparison may be employed to identify the production of time in various socio-cultural environments? And how do we account for the qualities ascribed

to different dimensions of time—its rhythms, durations, episodes, and temporal ruptures? Serendipity, for instance, heralded as a key ingredient in the encounter with the Other, entails the surprise resulting from the breakdown of anticipation and the change of what one had thought to be ‘one site’. In the moment of such surprise discovery, otherwise clear-cut distinctions between temporal and spatial dimensions of the field are momentarily dissolved as new insights make hitherto detached elements come together, often in paradoxical or even counter-intuitive assemblages of, say, ideas, occurrences, and things. Our argument is consequently that central aspects of doing fieldwork are better accounted for by taking the field to be a processual configuration through which time and space continuously interweave to chart out new analytical terrains.

The Idealized Time of the Field

According to the well-rehearsed Malinowskian canon, fieldwork is a period in a sequence of doing research where the ethnographer is spatially separated from home. Ideally, it is done after formulating a research problem and prior to ‘writing up’ data in a coherent textual representation (Gupta and Ferguson 1997a: 12). And, as has consistently been emphasized, it takes a lot of time. Since the birth of the discipline, the length of the fieldwork period has constituted a central albeit much contested factor for determining the quality of collected ethnographic data. More than four decades ago, Paul Radin ([1933] 1966: 178–179; see also Gupta and Ferguson 1997a: 45) criticized Margaret Mead for claiming deep cultural understanding based on less than one year spent in the field. Even five years, Radin thought, could give only superficial knowledge. Today, this notion of knowledge based on extensive fieldwork is almost impossible to achieve unless one is an indigenous or ‘native’ anthropologist having lived a lifetime as a cultural ‘insider’. To be sure, long-term and longitudinal qualitative studies that include extensive periods spent in the field were (and still are) regarded as strongly promoting the fieldworker’s chances of serendipitous findings or surprises, which will supposedly destabilize the researcher’s prior understandings and generate new insights.

Recently, the debate on the appropriate length of fieldwork has also focused on the relationship between ethnographic knowledge production and the increasing number of ‘outside’ constraints that significantly affect the collection of data. Firstly, research time might be severely constricted due to funding constraints and fewer funding agencies, demands on degree programs and the gradual limitation on students’ final fieldwork before writing up their dissertations, increasing pressure to identify ‘relevant’ (read ‘practically useful’) data, and growing bureaucratic obligations to account for one’s research time (Marcus and Okely 2007). Secondly, anthropologists often find themselves challenged by the time it takes to gather sufficient data to formulate ethnographically valid arguments. In a nutshell, the length of fieldwork appears to be a paradox arising from the tension between demands for the ‘timely’ relevance of an ethnographically informed anthropological analysis and the necessary ‘slowness’ and ‘belatedness’ of its creation (e.g., Rabinow et al. 2008; see also Marcus, this issue).

Still, rather than automatically discounting someone for not having endured a prolonged period of ongoing fieldwork and thus not living up to the tacit standard of the discipline, should we not assess the person's data in relation to the problem that he or she set out to answer (Faubion 2009: 163)? Radin's demand for protracted immersion and a lifetime of study is admirable, but it stipulates a number of requirements that may be impossible to align with the practicalities of fieldwork. Firstly, Radin knew very well that the ideal of a holistic study in itself is problematic. Even if given an infinite amount of time, it is less than likely that all significant data will be collected, let alone perceived as such. Secondly, and this is the cue that we want to pursue, the demand for lifelong immersion only superficially takes into account the discrete temporalities that constitute and are constituted by fieldwork. To take a few examples, analytical insights tend to erupt through a continuous oscillation between (temporal as much as physical) approximation to and distance from one's informants and research sites, so periodic absence from the field is logically as necessary as one's presence (see Whyte, this issue). Conversely, in contrast to Radin's days, when the field was generally a faraway place that was difficult to reach, it is today possible to be continuously in contact with one's informants and thus never to leave entirely (see Wulff 2002). The pressure to deliver 'on time' is not a new thing to researchers. As demonstrated by several of the articles in this issue (e.g., those by Otto, Sjørølev, and Whyte), negotiating time schedules and lengths of stay as part of one's fieldwork planning is equally crucial to finding out where to go. In addition, not just the possibilities of fieldwork, but also the relationships that define it, change as time passes (see Foster et al. 1979; Howell and Talle 2011; Kemper and Royce 2002).

If ethnographic fieldwork constitutes a recursive temporal oscillation between different sites that are spatial but also inherently conceptual (*pace* Strathern 1990; see also Holbraad 2008), a corollary must be that the field contains similar conceptual properties. What constitutes the field emerges in and through the immediate moments of surprise discovery, when otherwise detached elements come together in discrete assemblages of concepts, persons, things, and sites that seem to chart a relatively coherent configuration through their confluences. Although recent elaborations of the field do take seriously the need to pursue the scales of differentiation of one's interlocutors (cf. Marcus 2006: 115; see also Candea 2007), such endeavors might end up merely as bounding spatial sites rather than considering temporal properties. Paradoxically, the reliance upon spatial tropes in the distantiation of multi-sited ethnographies from the earlier holistic ideals potentially seems to have licensed these as 'thin' rather than 'thick' descriptions, because more sites have had to be fitted into the same conceptual frame (see Hage 2005; Marcus 2006).

Spatial Tropes ...

Not least as a methodological after-effect of the 'writing culture' debate in the 1980s, several works have critically examined and elaborated upon the conceptual tropes buttressing the field (Candea 2007; Clifford 1997; Coleman and Collins

2006; Gupta and Ferguson 1997b; Olwig and Hastrup 1997), but it remains that the field has generally been discussed as a spatial configuration, and doing fieldwork has been addressed as a question of choosing between going ‘there’ or staying ‘at home’ (Clifford 1997). Consequently, the field is ‘somewhere’—a location, a site, a place, or a space where the ethnographer is situated physically.

In the introduction to their edited volume *Anthropological Locations*, Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (1997a: 2; emphasis added) ask: “But what of ‘the field’ itself, the *place* where the distinctive work of ‘fieldwork’ may be done, that taken-for-granted *space* in which an ‘Other’ culture or society lies waiting to be observed and written? This mysterious space—not the ‘what’ of anthropology but the ‘*where*’—has been left to common sense.” Gupta and Ferguson express doubts about traditional ethnographic methods and concepts and whether they can address the problems of a constantly shifting globalized and post-colonial world with mobile populations. Considering that the field is closer, with people increasingly able to be interconnected and globalized, Gupta and Ferguson ask about the ways that conceptualizations and ideas of fieldwork and ethnographic methods can be adapted to this interrelatedness (ibid.: 4). Some fields (the exotic and faraway) have long enjoyed a privileged recognition because of their spatial distance to the researcher’s (frequently) Euro-American location; however, fieldwork practices and methodologies with less emphasis on distance have more recently gained ground. While distance is no longer (and should no longer be) a prerequisite for doing ‘good ethnography’, Gupta and Ferguson emphasize that location is still crucial (ibid.: 5). They want to rethink fieldwork praxis accordingly by shifting focus from spatial sites and localities to ‘political locations’. What constitutes a field location will depend on the overall objective of one’s research and the subsequent political practice and engagement. From Gupta and Ferguson’s perspective, then, the field emerges through the ‘situated interventions’ made necessary by the particular project. Rather than a bounded place with a distinct ‘culture’, it therefore needs to be understood as a series of shifting (spatial) locations (ibid.: 35, 38). By thus focusing on the interconnections between inherently heterogeneous sites, Gupta and Ferguson have moved toward a deeper understanding of the composite character of social phenomena, while also calling for new methodological approaches to parallel these insights. Strikingly, though, while they acknowledge the importance of time in the structuration of fieldwork practices, they fail to move beyond the primacy of spatiality, evidenced by the predominant usage of space-oriented tropes, such as locations, and by an emphasis on ‘somewhere’ rather than ‘sometime’ (ibid.: 35).

In recent years, one of the most significant contributions to the discussion of the field and fieldwork in a globalized environment is the notion of ‘multi-sited ethnography’ as proposed by George Marcus. Similar to Gupta and Ferguson, Marcus (1995: 95) argues that ethnographic research is moving away “from its conventional single-site location, contextualized by macro-constructions of a larger social order ... to multiple sites of observation and participation that cross-cut dichotomies such as the ‘local’ and the ‘global’, the ‘lifeworld’ and the ‘system.’” This shift has been necessitated by the dissolution and fragmentation

of the world system, which is paralleled by the emergence of new forms of socio-economic power (*ibid.*: 98). According to Marcus, ethnography may identify these interweaving and mutually contingent processes by following strategically selected entities (ideas, metaphors, persons, objects, stories, biographies) across multiple settings and thereby outline a unique multi-sited system, which simultaneously operates as ‘figure’ and ‘ground’.

We nevertheless argue that the spatiality of a field remains dominant when associations are made only between analytically separate settings that are exterior to each other. Although a unique social configuration may be discerned by connecting discontinuous sites and settings, this says little about their potential temporal interlinkages, such as when a temporal site also contains traces of other temporalities.¹ Indeed, as argued by Marilyn Strathern (1999: 163), multi-sited ethnography “may reveal the contingency of what began as initial identity—the tracing both defines and queries the chain of associations.” It is consequently by emphasizing a spatial connectivity that a multi-sited approach may come to predetermine what is held together through the different sites. In contrast, Strathern reasons that “what the locations ... have in common has not necessarily happened yet” (*ibid.*). As demonstrated by Pedersen and Nielsen’s contribution to this issue, what is shared by an assemblage of sites may be a reserve of potentialities that have not yet been realized as aims or intentionalities. By focusing on a momentary ‘hunch’ about what was at stake in a given situation during a field trip, Pedersen and Nielsen examine how different moments and analytical ideas interlink without the ethnographer knowing exactly what those connections might be. What stitched past, present, and future together in that particular situation was nothing other than the almost imperceptible sensation that something significant was taking place. Hence, the advantages of multi-sited ethnography notwithstanding, unstable associations between potentialities in the present and their (possible) future realizations, such as those crystallized through a momentary hunch, remain analytically invisible unless attention is given to the temporal oscillations and modulations constituting the field. What is suggested by Strathern and elaborated upon in several of the contributions to this issue is that the sum of information that is produced by connecting different sites, things, and ideas cannot be understood merely as a quantifiable aggregation of entities. The kinds of connectivities that might not ‘have happened yet’, such as hunches or surprise discoveries, assert their effects by charting momentary conceptual and spatial grounds upon which to figure ethnographic analyses.

In contrast to dominant spatial conceptualizations in anthropology—such as those suggested by multi-sited ethnography, where social life seems to be played out in and through a network of identifiable sites—we suggest that the field, as a confluence of different times and temporalities, emerges rather as a dynamic force of becoming that shifts in intensity and clarity, depending on the ethnographer’s immediate position and immersion. An exemplar of multi-sited research often referred to by Marcus (2006; see also this issue) is Kim Fortun’s (2001) study of the long aftermath of disasters in Bhopal. Interestingly, although Fortun explicitly attempts to break with the single-site location, the

ethnography requires a constant reference to the singular moment of the disaster invoked by informants as a constant 'presence' through its effects. Although not locatable as a single spatial entity, the Bhopal disaster clearly operates as a dominant temporal site that orientates both informants and ethnographer.

... and Ethnographic Temporalities

Despite the lack of anthropological attention to the temporal aspects of delimiting the field, time has been an important aspect of a wide range of anthropological studies, from the Manchester School's specific focus on process and transformation (Gluckman [1940] 1958; Mitchell 1956; Turner 1957) to the praxis studies a few decades later (Bourdieu 1977; de Certeau 1984) and the more recent historical emphasis on traditions and historicity (Hirsch and Stewart 2005; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Keesing and Tonkinson 1982; Otto and Pedersen 2005). In this regard, it is worth considering the recognition of the temporal contextualization of the Other (e.g., Fabian 1983). To take but one example, the gradual move from a structuralist approach toward increased attention to praxis and change is accompanied by a general recognition of the temporal dimensions of social life. Based on the latter perspective, any social configuration emerges from a series of overlapping, reciprocal exchanges and encounters and from associations of varying durability. These erupt and appear both over and in time, and whether they are delineated as objects of study or as 'context' (i.e., as figure or ground), such processes and connections are intimately related to people's orientations toward pasts or futures, for instance, as inscribed in ideologies of modernism or traditionalism (Otto, this issue), or when felt as hope or despair (A. Dalsgaard and Frederiksen, this issue).

A series of important contributions has documented the emergence of subjective temporal understandings from agents' positioned practices (Bourdieu 2000; Jackson 2002), ritual and cosmological times (Evans-Pritchard 1940; Geertz 1973; Robbins 2007), space and time (Corsín Jiménez 2003; Gell 1992; Ingold 2000; Munn 1986), the relation between crisis and temporal uprootedness (Game 1997; Vigh 2007), personhood as temporal compositions (Maurer and Schwab 2006), and the close linkages between materiality or technology and perceptions of time (Gell 1998; Küchler 2002). Furthermore, recent ethnographic studies have explored the particular ways that the future is envisioned and enacted upon, for example, in relation to economics (Guyer 2007; Maurer 2002), as imagined 'hinterlands' (Crapanzano 2004), or as perspectives from which to imagine the present (Miyazaki 2004; Nielsen 2008, 2011; Pedersen 2012). Finally, since the heyday of the Manchester School, the study of social situations and events has maintained a prominent status within anthropology (Burawoy 1998; Evens and Handelman 2006; see also Sahlins 1991; Strathern 1990). The particular study of events can even be seen in recent works that seek to question a one-sided emphasis on time as linearity (Das 2007; Hodges 2008). In these instances, it is by delimiting the fieldwork setting that a time of the study is established. Analytically, the detailed analysis of situations and events

invariably delimits epochs, periods, durations, and their temporal extensions toward pasts and futures (cf. Gupta and Ferguson 1997a: 2).

In sum, whereas a shift toward increasing analytical attention toward time can be discerned, its relation to the field has generally been absent in anthropological debates until recently. What is at stake, then, is a need to acknowledge the temporal properties of the field, both in relation to concrete ethnographic work and as anthropological representation.

Beyond the Spatial Trope

As Bruce Kapferer (2006: 125) tells us, ethnographic research is based on actual social interactions, encounters, situations, and events that “are effectively moments of social life in the very process of formation.” Stretched out between what was and that which will be, these moments (or ‘temporal sites’, in our terms) include surprise discoveries and hunches as mentioned above, which enable the ethnographer to engage with wider realities and thereby chart viable analytical terrains.² In a similar vein, many of the contributions in this collection (S. Dalsgaard, Lutz, Pedersen and Nielsen, Sjørølev) make clear that irrespective of the parameters with which we choose to delimit a given field, it has fundamental temporal properties that need to be examined *ipso facto* and not only by reference to a spatial trope. Identifying a set of temporal properties is, firstly, a matter of simply ‘being present’ for whatever period is necessary in order to establish a dynamic and mutually conditioned relationship between the questions we ask of our material and the concrete ethnographic circumstances of their problematization. Secondly, and this follows from the first point, it is equally a matter of identifying the precise juncture at which new insights are constructed from the relationship between research questions and ethnographic data. According to Strathern (1999: 6), such a juncture may fruitfully be understood as an “ethnographic moment” where the already known is transcended by establishing new associations between “the understood (what is analysed at the moment of observation)” and “the need to understand (what is observed at the moment of analysis).” What is emphasized, however, is the volatility of the relationship established between question and answer. As Strathern (1991: xxii) argues: “[I]nsofar as an answer generates new material or insights, then it necessarily draws on knowledge not available to the questioner ... This excess may well generate new questions that make the old ones uninteresting ... Each question in conjuncture with its answer, or each position from which a new position is created, in turn becomes a position that one leaves behind.”

As more and more information is gathered, research questions invariably undergo a process of analytical displacement. It is therefore the researcher’s immersion in an ethnographic field that comes to destabilize the premises that initially anchored the study. What is particularly interesting in relation to the present discussion, then, is the fact that the parameters that define the field undergo gradual transformations. Different aspects (both temporal and spatial) become relevant as more is learned about social life in a local environment.

Particular social configurations might assert themselves in radically new ways, for example, by shifting the analytic scale from economics to aesthetics and thereby also changing its analytically defined properties. In other words, if differentiation and change are integral to the field, the concept invariably loses its spatial anchorage. Here we might recall how multi-sited fields in Marcus's (1995) outline emerge by tracing a social phenomenon that traverses a number of connected sites or locations. Taking into account the internal differentiations of individual sites, it becomes untenable to maintain the notion of the field as resting on a spatial trope, that is, on the idea that lines can be drawn between locatable sites. Simply put, not only the object of study but also that which we take to constitute a site might already be in the process of transformation, and thus it is problematic (if not impossible) to trace associations between sites that supposedly display similar properties.

In order to appreciate analytically the internal differentiations of discrete sites, we consequently need to bracket the proclivity to consider the field as a spatial configuration and instead explore the analytical potentials of conjoining time and field in a conceptual assemblage. What emerges is a glimpse of the ways in which different moments co-exist, stretch out, and allow for indeterminate series of becomings (Grosz 1999: 25). Indeed, if that which is shared by different sites has not yet come into existence (Strathern 1999: 163), unrealized (but potential) futures co-exist with other times within the present (Nielsen 2011). What constitutes a temporal field, then, might be a particular rhythmic modulation within and across different sites and times, that is, a particular way in which the various sites change through their interconnections. In this issue, some of the contributions show how orientations in time (Otto), experiences such as waiting (Sjørølev, S. Dalsgaard, Lutz), or anticipatory hunches that connect emic and etic domains (Pedersen and Nielsen) open to the researcher fields that exist purely as oscillations between pasts, presences, and unknown futures.

Surely, if a temporal field comes together as an effect of how various sites differentiate, we need to reconsider the presence of the ethnographer in the field. According to Marcus (1995: 99), multi-sited ethnography acquires its analytical strength from the researcher's extended immersion in particular sites. We wish to suggest, however, that if individual sites can be considered also as temporal nodal points, it becomes problematic to privilege the spatial dwelling in a limited set of (physical) places, whose visibility derives from traversing phenomena, for example, when the ethnographer is following ideas, persons, or things. Borrowing a well-known Heideggerian concept, we might define this kind of ethnographic presence as 'temporal dwelling'. In "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," Heidegger (1971) describes 'dwelling' as a process of creating a meaningful environment through concrete, practical 'doings'. As a temporal concept, we take dwelling to constitute the ways in which past, present, and future are stitched together by the researcher to constitute a volatile durational assemblage composed by converging times. As such, the ethnographic present constituted by the interaction or encounter between fieldworker and field/informant becomes an "interstitial zone of time/space" (Handelman 2006: 106) from which the temporal field gradually emerges as a result of the fieldworker's

attachment to other times and places. In a sense, temporal dwelling suggests a more flexible association with the field whereby the ethnographer is equally positioned in those futures and pasts, which have never been and might never be actualized, while still asserting some kind of effect in the present. Furthermore, it acknowledges that getting things wrong is part of the analytical endeavor. As most anthropologists know, a hunch is not always a prelude to a surprise discovery. Sometimes it is simply an irrelevant sensation caused by the ethnographer's inability to connect the temporal dots.

Temporalizing the Field

In his article "Reflections on Hope as a Category of Social and Psychological Analysis," Vincent Crapanzano (2003) discusses the pitfalls of assuming that different temporalities can be described through an inherently transparent vocabulary. "Can we assume that the structures of time ... are universal?" he asks (*ibid.*: 11). Crapanzano continues to argue that rather than conceiving of time as a "smooth flowing continuum" (*ibid.*), that is, as the objective and unchanging ground, we need to grasp how different temporalities are produced and expressed both ethnographically and analytically in multiple and often contradictory ways.

Crapanzano's description of the inherent complexities of studying diverse temporalities may be taken as an apt starting point for the final synthesis of our discussion. If we follow his distinction between a social-cum-ontological production of time and an analytical-cum-methodological vocabulary through which the former emerges as a distinct object of study, the contributions to this issue are occupied precisely with exploring the interrelations between the two.³ In particular, they emphasize a need to treat discrete temporalities recursively, that is, to allow temporal imaginaries to condition the analytical framework rather than vice versa. Instead of representing time as an implicit ground upon which other components figure, primary attention is given to the operations of time in the constitution of social life.⁴ As such, several of the contributors (S. Dalsgaard, Sjørølev, Pedersen and Nielsen) show that different fields contain social perspectives as moments in time that can merge temporalities and thus equally erupt from time.

As stated above, based on the contributions, our hypothesis has been that the field may effectively be taken to constitute an emergent agglomeration of temporal sites, and it is in this (recursive) albeit perhaps counter-intuitive understanding that the notion is considered to be particularly pertinent. What might the implications be, then, for an anthropological approach to time and the field that (recursively) takes seriously the insights from the ethnographic accounts in this issue? First, time needs to be understood in relation to particular activities (cf. Gell 1992: 212). As William James (1909: 232) told us more than a century ago, time "comes in drops," and it is this emergent quality that more than anything characterizes its dynamics. Thus, functioning not merely as a 'smooth flowing continuum', time may be "braided" (Grosz 1999: 17) or "folded" (Latour 2005: 201) in numerous different ways. In a nutshell, we

may argue that time is the principle of movement and change whose modus operandi is succession. Second, by opening space to time (*pace* Corsín Jiménez 2003), it becomes impossible to privilege either one as a priori stable ground upon which to explore social processes, since space and time are each other's ontological condition (cf. Massey 1992). The paradoxical joining of time and field in a conceptual assemblage thus guides our attention toward the diverse ways that sites and times may come together without attaining the fixity and/or directionality that is often ascribed to each individually. A temporal field emerges, we argue, precisely by identifying certain sites, which derive their spatial (i.e., locatable) properties by actualizing particular temporalities across different settings—and not only through sequencing built on simultaneous spatial convergences (*ibid.*).

In order to unpack this argument, we refer to the analyses and ethnographic examples of this issue. Taken together, they embrace multi-temporality by demonstrating a wide range of conceptual linkages of time and field. Their inputs range from 'fieldwork techniques', as in the advantages of the longitudinal (and often episodic) study where field and fieldworker are transformed through forward-moving linear progressions that continuously shift in pace (Whyte), to the experience of rhythms and durations of (ritual) waiting time (Sjørsløv). The common-sense sequence of knowing and the need to know is challenged by the anticipation associated with 'unfocused presence' (Sjørsløv) and the temporal reversibility established through certain 'trans-temporal hinges' (Pedersen and Nielsen). But there are also temporal challenges related to ethnographic writing about continuously expanding narratives of living people's lived lives, which perpetually leaves the anthropologists in a position of being 'belated' (Marcus) or even 'out of conclusion' (A. Dalsgaard and Frederiksen).

Through the contributions, the reader also gets a sense of how attention to time and temporality is central to specific topics if one wants to understand what people do and why, or that temporalities can be crucial ingredients in the definition of the field in question (Walford, S. Dalsgaard, Otto, Lutz). Even if not spelled out, presence is a key organizing trope in several of the articles because it is through presence and the present that time 'surfaces', to use the term adopted by Peter Lutz in his contribution. Whether the (repeated) unfocused presence of the anthropologist (Sjørsløv) or the intermittent and cyclical presence of government big men in Papua New Guinea (S. Dalsgaard), presence is a precondition for knowing—but knowing often seems to depend on something apart from what is in the present moment, such as memory or anticipation. Indeed, as Ton Otto argues in his piece, sharing the present (time) with informants is the basis for ethnographic fieldwork. But one also shares past and future, and thus understanding, expectations, and aims in life cannot be assumed. Herein lies perhaps the challenge of the temporal reversibility implied by trans-temporal hinges (Pedersen and Nielsen), boredom (Sjørsløv), and the calibrations necessary for climatologists' predictions (Walford). Together, the contributions may take a step not toward answers but toward better questions about the multitude of interrelations of time and field that buttress the anthropology of the contemporary.

To present how the contributions develop the relationship between time and field, we have organized them according to three different angles. The first articles explore how our anthropological subjects reflect on, act upon, and, perhaps ultimately, are constituted by different temporal orientations or ‘situated temporalities’. If people’s temporal orientations might be seen as particular ontological perspectives, we might fruitfully ask to what extent particular ontologies are constituted not only *in* time but, indeed, *of* time.

Antonia Walford explores the apparent binary of ‘social’ and ‘natural’ time based on how micrometeorologists and climate modelers ‘make new knowledge’ in their work in the Amazon. In calibrating their equipment, the micrometeorologists make use of past data to anticipate the range within which new data should fall. Past data are a scale and a model signifying how future data *should* be. They are a future-oriented ‘model for’ as much as a ‘model of’ past reality. However, time also enables the generation of prediction through the careful elimination of an infinite number of potential futures. For climate modelers and micrometeorologists in different ways, time is *a priori* and thus ontological as ‘t’—the base scale for all variations as variation happening over time and connecting past, present, and future in a meaningful relationship. Where ‘t’ situates the concrete observations of micrometeorologists *in* time, it also works as the fundamental principle and scale situating their studies as research constituted *of* time.

Steffen Dalsgaard’s article, which illustrates the temporal practices associated with the state in Papua New Guinea, is a call for the study of the state as a temporal entity as much as a territorialized one. The exchange events, which in Papua New Guinea bring the state into being, contain the temporal as well as spatial limits of the extension of the state. The state, personified by ‘government men’, exists in time as only intermittingly present in people’s lives through such events. In addition, interaction between public servants and citizens is often negotiated through social relationships and obligations that challenge the control of space and time often ascribed to state actors. In this way, the sociality of leadership and the state itself are as much made of time or temporal practices as they are situated in time.

The following articles address the issue of ‘different times’. They suggest a distinction between ‘time as difference’ and ‘differences over time’ (e.g., speed, change, and speed of change). Considering that people act on localized and possibly even clashing temporal orientations, time might be taken to constitute a decisive differential parameter distinguishing particular cultural fields. How do we analytically delimit and explore these temporal domains and, just as important, what are the implications for our understanding of what constitutes an ethnographic field?

Through their studies of young people, Anne Line Dalsgaard and Martin Demant Frederiksen argue for an anthropology more oriented toward possibilities and open endings. No one knows how the future will turn out, but many classic analyses of young people’s situations (e.g., Willis 1977) have often emphasized the structural patterns of continuity—and thus hopelessness—rather than seeing the future as open to change and hope. Hope in particular is important in Dalsgaard and Frederiksen’s account, especially when

working with young people, because it seems crucial that anthropologists take informants' dreams and aspirations seriously. This entails acknowledging the way that hope is associated with agency and striving toward other potential futures—a striving that perhaps makes a difference over time by dreaming of a different time. In addition, the authors' attempt to analyze potential futures for their interlocutors tries to maintain an openness, but this poses the dilemma of how to close the article, since the future remains open and the lives of their interlocutors are still evolving. In this way, Dalsgaard and Frederiksen also address what has become a perpetual dilemma, that is, the slowness and belatedness of ethnography (Marcus, this issue).

Otto's article demonstrates different times by discussing the way that different temporalities or 'timescapes' exist simultaneously in a Papua New Guinean society and how these may be studied over time. The term 'timescape' refers to people discursively and practically stressing an orientation toward future or past in the way that they position themselves in the face of ongoing changes in the world around them. Like some of the other contributors (Sjørsløv, Whyte), Otto argues for a long-term approach bringing the anthropologist into engagement with social relationships that will evoke sensitivity to contrasts in people's perspectives and draw out their different temporal domains. In his field, this is exemplified by conflicts between 'traditionalists' and 'modernists' arguing over the relative importance of past and future in shaping lives in the present. For an ethnographer, shared experiences may draw forth shared understandings—or the realization that the ethnographer and her or his collocutors do not share the presumed understanding.

The contribution by Lutz investigates how time matters in the field of Swedish old-age home care. To explore this question, he analyzes multiple 'space-timings' that affect the scheduled minutes of managed care, the care worker's own practices, and the elderly who receive home care. Inspired by Bruno Latour's comments on the ontological underpinnings of 'objective' time and 'subjective' experience of time, Lutz proposes the concept 'surfacing' as a way to think through the materializations of the space-timings. Rather than asserting an a priori 'objective' or clock time, he demonstrates how the time schedule is formed into a unique temporality by multiple actors. Lutz concludes that surfacing is relevant for conceptualizing temporal relationships, not only between the field and desk of home care (care work versus care management), but also between the fieldwork and analysis that anthropologists must mediate.

The final articles discuss the timing and temporalities of fieldwork—what we have chosen to call 'methodologies of time and timing'. How are temporally protracted ethnographic studies expanded and/or contracted? What are the challenges of working in or with recurrent (cyclical) episodic times? And, finally, how do we tackle the analytical and methodological challenge of absences from and returns to ongoing and shifting 'ethnographic times'?

Inger Sjørsløv writes about her gradual introduction to the syncretistic religion Candomblé in Brazil. In her account, her unfocused presence (i.e., boredom) had been the grounds from which meaningful figures (events, happenings) stood out during fieldwork. This constituted a rhythmic modality

that momentarily connected ethnographer and informant in a unique temporal field. To identify these figures, though, requires recurrent visits and ‘deep hanging out’ through a prolonged interaction of shared time, involving varying tempos, between fieldworker and informants. In this way, Sjørsløv compares ethnographic fieldwork to ritual, which creates generalized knowledge about the Other when the temporal (fieldwork) is the basis for the atemporal (analysis). Her success in learning about and with her informants stems in part from her time and timing, but also from being present at different times where ‘nothing’ happens.

Likewise, Michael Whyte argues that returning to the field and being ‘updated’ is an underestimated aspect of the long-term process of doing anthropology, which he demonstrates with reference to the 40-odd years he has been working in and out of Uganda. To re-enter the field is an act of continuously trying to re-establish coevalness between anthropologist and informants and become ‘synchronized’ with respect to social relations of one’s field (cf. Fabian 1983). In this way, overcoming the social lapse between field visits can be turned into an advantage in the understanding of long-term shifting positions, discourses, and narratives. The social relationships of such ‘episodic fieldwork’ thus build on the significance of the absence and return of the fieldworker as an event in itself, which elicits information.

In the article by Pedersen and Nielsen, the focus of attention is on the multiple and overlapping temporalities of ethnographic fieldwork. Based on two discrete cases from Mongolia and Mozambique that explore the socio-economic effects of Chinese infrastructure projects, the authors introduce the notion of a trans-temporal hinge, which operates by bringing together phenomena and events otherwise distributed across time. Hence, a trans-temporal hinge might be any social configuration that the ethnographer encounters in the field that allows for a broader temporal assemblage to be composed.

The contributions are rounded off by Marcus’s reflections on time and the field. In line with his recent work on an anthropology of the contemporary (Rabinow et al. 2008), Marcus considers the issue of the belatedness of anthropology. The slowness of ethnographic work, dominated by a “norm of patience,” is now challenged by the anxious demands of relevance—demands that are fundamentally temporal. Called upon to respond to concerns emerging in the present, ethnographic analysis cannot maintain a detached status as a “historical document in the making” or as a scientific endeavor to uncover eternal truths while claiming “all the time in the world” to do so. The urge for relevance arises because research subjects (informants, specialists, etc.) are increasingly found among the readership of anthropological accounts. The way to overcome demands for relevance seems to be to locate ethnography historically. By changing the temporal point of reference toward past events, the contemporary itself becomes a medium-term frame that negotiates the slowness of ethnography with the “permanent belatedness in relation to its object.” Marcus relates the temporal matter of producing ethnography to the changing (political) relationships wherein representational practices are embedded. He thus concludes that “‘being there’ is perhaps no longer as important as ‘taking one’s time.’”

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Notes

1. As an example, we might take Veena Das’s (2007) description of the spatio-temporal traces of the partition of India. She writes that “although the Partition was of the past if seen through homogeneous units of measurable time, its continued presence in people’s lives was apparent in story, gesture, and conversation ... The sense of the present then was marked by a fearful anticipation. The survivors in the locality were living not only with memories embodied in the walls of houses, on the charred doors, in the little heaps of ashes in the street, but also with threats embodied in words and gestures” (ibid.: 97–98).

2. A parallel concern with multiple temporalities of a site can be discerned from Sorin-Chaikov's (2006) analysis of gifts to Stalin as involving heterochrony.
3. For comparison, consider James and Mills's (2005: 14) argument that "[t]ime 'exists' for academic discussion, speculation, and comparison, only in the interplay of idioms we provide or invent for it through our languages, ceremonies, 'cultural' codes and technical inventions."
4. As argued by Munn (1992: 93): "[T]he problem of time has often been handmaiden to other anthropological frames and issues ... with which it is inextricably bound up. In short, the topic of time frequently fragments into all the other dimensions and topics anthropologists deal with in the social world."

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