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Uncommon Futures

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Abstract

In the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, Munn (1992) argued that anthropology had neglected the future as a temporal focus. This concern continues to be echoed by anthropologists, even as a review of post–Cold War anthropology reveals that the future has become a recurrent, dominant temporality in the field. Reviewing texts from the past quarter-century that provide a diagnostic at the intersection of the anthropology of futurity and the future of anthropology, we argue that the urgency for an anthropology of the future—and concern over its neglect—presumes some continuity prior to the challenges of an uncertain “now” under constant transformation and, simultaneously, a desire for a common and open future world. Deriving this insight from the work of Black and Indigenous scholars, we suggest that an anthropology attuned to futures is most fruitful when it foregrounds decolonizing perspectives on commonality, continuity, and openness and problematizes them as the implicit grounds of anthropological futurity.

INTRODUCTION

Anthropology has neglected the future. Or, so goes the frequently quoted claim by Nancy Munn (1992) in her influential article in the *Annual Review of Anthropology*. Yet, a review of anthropological literature published since the end of the Cold War tells a different story: that futurity has become a dominant, even primary, temporality in the discipline as an analytic frame, ethnographic object, methodological concern, and—significantly—affective mode. Texts of this post-1989 turn directly theorizing futurity as analytic object are uncannily similar to the present one: field-reviewing essays—often introductions to collections or journal issues (Bear 2014, Moroşanu & Ringel 2016, Salazar et al. 2017)—and monographs (Bryant & Knight 2019) that historicize and thematize anthropological approaches to futurity (Persoon & van Est 2000, Zeitlyn 2015) at the intersection of a temporal axis of past-present-future relations and a spatial axis of individual and collective experience and agency (Pels 2015, Rosenberg & Harding 2005) in domains as diverse as divination (Whyte 2002) and design (Halse 2013, Smith et al. 2016). Indeed, the profusion of an anthropology of and for the future has made it extremely challenging to select a limited number of texts for review.

Given this attention, then, it is surprising to read continued and urgent invocations of Munn's claims of neglect and calls by anthropologists for theoretical and methodological attention to futurity (see Collins 2008). Pink & Salazar (2017) argue that this neglect results from early anthropological interest in a broader social science project of futures research failing to cohere with anthropology's central theoretical concerns (e.g., Maruyama & Harkins 1979, Mead 2005, Riner 1998; but see Adam & Groves 2007). The interests of those earlier futures researchers were predicated on commitments to planning, development, and a teleological "progress," concepts central to post-World War II futurism. However, these frames were rejected by both the political left and the political right as inadequate in the face of post-1989 transformations (though see Bryant & Knight 2019 on teleology).

Arguably, then, recent anthropologists have been drawn to investigating futures by the alignment of disciplinary theoretical concerns with a critique of the revised futural mode of post-1989 neoliberal and globalizing capitalism (Ortner 2016): the increasing withdrawal of states from planning and the individualization of social responsibility; the promise (and failure) of market-driven technological, social, and demographic changes; post-9/11 geopolitical and security regimes and attendant stratifications and violence; resurgent white nationalisms; and the emergence of climate change and the evidence that Earth is entering a new geological age—the Anthropocene—as a primary focus of politics. Successively listed, these developments imply accelerative, punctuated discontinuities and the dissolution of collective social and political formations. Thus, even as post-Cold War anthropologies struggle with mid-twentieth-century social sciences' complicities with predictive and developmental frames, we read the sense of urgency about anthropological neglectfulness of futures as a concern that repurposes the core presumption of 1970s anthropologies of the future in a desire for the continuity of common worlds, or what we call *continuism*.

The thematic of commonality was already evident in Fabian's [2002 (1983)] influential demand for temporal coevalness between anthropologists and their ethnographic subjects, and thus a recognition of their common humanness in time. This call resonated with an epistemological shift within anthropology from accounts of culturally bounded and distinct (Western) "linear" and (Other) "cyclical" times (Wallman 1992) to a focus on temporal multiplicities (Gupta 1992) and agentive engagements with futurity in relation to dominant forms of time (Greenhouse 1996).

A concern with continuity underpins a second reason given for anthropological neglect of futures, found in Munn's and others' observations that anthropologists have focused on history, the endurance of cultural forms (Appadurai 2013), and the presumption of the normativity of social

order (Strathern 2005). These insights have led anthropologists of futurity—drawing especially on Koselleck’s (2004) and Luhmann’s (1998) insights—to attend to anthropology’s own presumptions about time (Pels 2015) and to the cultural specificity of progress, openness, and accelerative foreshortening that travels with modernist claims on the future (Rosenberg & Harding 2005). Others draw attention to the temporal commonalities and historical continuity implicit in unmarked temporal analytics such as “process” (Hodges 2014) and “emergence” (Collins 2008) or in the presumption that time merely “contains” spatialized social forms and practices (Bear 2014) as reasserting Western, progressive linear timelines as well as maintaining earlier associations of particular “kinds” of time with particular places.

Despite these critical insights, however, the post-1989 urgency for an anthropology of the future—and concern over its neglect—presumes at least some continuity to history, time, politics, sociality, and environmental conditions prior to the challenges of an uncertain “now” under transformation. This insight derives from our readings of Black and Indigenous anthropologists and other scholars who start from the recognition that crisis, rupture, apocalypse, discontinuity, violence, and dispossession have been significant global phenomena for countless people for centuries (e.g., Allen & Jobson 2016, Simpson 2014). Moreover, these scholars emphasize that “commonality” and “humanness” were and are central—and violent—tools of white, European epistemological and territorial colonialism that can shift strategically in service to colonial, racist, and heteropatriarchal power. Commonality and humanness are analyzed in this literature as constitutive of past and ongoing suffering and, thus, dangerous starting places for figuring futures. Rather than invoking temporal multiplicity, with its implication of temporal coevalness and common humanity, these scholars speak to futurity in registers of decolonization, refusal, epiphenomenality, and fugitivity and insist that commonality is itself a temporalizing figure that demands analysis, negotiation, and revision.

In short, we argue that the very analytic of “futurity” (and concerns over its neglect in anthropology) is tied to a particular time and place, that is, at the moment when “the future” became an unavoidable sociopolitical (and latterly, ecological) problem in the Global North that threatened a continuing world for metropolitan actors and institutions, including those of university departments and disciplines, professional career paths, and academic labor. These contexts may explain both the sense of a new anthropology of the future in the context of radical social, environmental, and technological change (Fischer 2009) as well as enduring questions about the future of anthropology as a discipline (Harkin 2010), indexing long-standing concerns with anthropology’s relevance to its subjects (Ferguson 1999). Thus, we argue that the concerns about anthropology’s neglect of futures arise from this particular history and are not generalizable to a common futurity outside the conditions of their production. As such, we further argue that attempts to theorize futurity absent this recognition ignore the constitutive continuism and search for commonality that form a core temporal theme that spans twentieth- and early twenty-first-century anthropology. The transformative challenge of the Anthropocene—with its centering of nonhuman and planetary scales and agencies—offers further challenges to thinking through common and continuing human futures, a topic we also take up below.

The implicit alignment, post-1989, of urgency and uncertainty around common human futures and of anthropology’s prior neglect recalls another of Munn’s (1992) points: that any account of time “[creates] something that takes the form of time” (p. 94), an observation we refer to in shorthand as Munn’s paradox. In a Foucauldian vein, we argue that the persistence of temporalizing claims to past anthropological neglect of futurity amid the accelerating profusion of new anthropological futurities amounts to a “neglect hypothesis.” This hypothesis is productive not only of a temporalizing anxiety about disciplinary failures and the futures of common human worlds—and, increasingly, the multiple nonhuman worlds of Earth—but also a concern with the continuation of

anthropology as a discipline that can retain ongoing relevance to those worlds. Correspondingly, drawing on and amplifying the work of Black and Indigenous scholars, we argue that this temporalization of a common human future takes shape without attention to how that commonality may be formed, on whose ground, and what it is that may continue—including anthropology itself. Indeed, these literatures open to the radical possibility that anthropology—philosophy, “knowledge” itself—without this starting place has no future.

We review texts that provide a diagnostic at the intersection of these concerns: the anthropology of futurity and the future of anthropology. We ask three questions of anthropology’s engagement with futurity—of common worlds, of planet, of discipline—in the past quarter century: (a) For whom, where, when, and at what scale is “the future” what kind of puzzle, problem, or solution? (b) What semiotic and affective packages travel with “futurity” such that anthropological concerns with the future are largely limited to the terms set by neoliberal capitalism’s recent histories? And (c), concomitantly, what might anthropology (and its ethnographic subjects) gain and/or lose from a decolonization of futures?

Below, we thematize this diverse literature through three scales of temporal agency in tension with one another: individual and collective temporal reckoning practices framed as multiplicities; the decentering of human intentions and plans in the temporal scales introduced by Anthropocene frames; and decolonizing demands introduced by refusal, fugitivity, and epiphenomenality. We seek to problematize commonality, continuation, and openness as the implicit ground of anthropological futurity.

MULTIPLICITIES AND TEMPORAL AGENCY

Post-1989 (re)turns to the future in anthropology have focused on the intersections between temporal agency and institutional and social structures (Gell 1992)—and in particular, the excesses of neoliberal capitalism—through the frame of temporal multiplicities and calls for collective future imagining (Appadurai 2013); temporal pluralization (Zeitlyn 2015); and an opening up of futures (Collins 2008). Corresponding emphasis on becoming and contingency suggests an indeterminate, uncertain future open to intervention. In these calls—recalling Munn’s paradox—anthropologists move, on one axis, between the apparent fixity of contemporary neoliberal arrangements and a desire for otherwise futures and, on another axis, between analyses of informants’ futures and anthropologists’ own hopes. Miyazaki (2004, p. 25), drawing on Ernst Bloch, explicitly engages in such “zigzag juxtaposition,” moving between his informants’ hopes and hope as a means of anthropological knowledge production. In our readings, we have traced such juxtapositions, following Berlant’s (2012) suggestion that “seeing how the work of relational emotion shapes our very sinews might clarify a lot about what’s going on, what’s stuck, and what’s possible.” We examine anthropologists’ own hopes for a response to neoliberalism by attending to temporal agency through the figure of multiplicity and the affectively charged frames that travel with it: planning, anxiety, crisis, subjunctivity, potentiality, waiting, hope, aspiration, becoming, and utopia.

This multiplicity of multiplicities recalls our observation that anthropological investments in temporal agency suture anthropologists’ hopes for a progressive, common future with their informants’. As Ssorin-Chaikov (2017) argues, temporal multiplicity simultaneously presumes commonality, a co-occurrence—“at the same time”—within which such multiplicities become relevant to analyses of the future. This view resonates with Farman’s (2020) observation that a fundamental dilemma for modern subjects lies in temporal discontinuity, the inability to make individual lifetimes coexist “at the same time” with historical progress. As such, we pay attention to the anthropological work that Greenhouse (1996, p. 211) argues is necessary “to sustain the notion of individual agency as a component of the agency of larger institutions.”

First, we note that attention to temporal agency draws some anthropologists away from futures as analytical objects or modes of knowledge production. Those “creatures of the future tense”—promise, expectation, speculation, hope—have long been subjects of analysis across science and technology studies (Selin quoted in Taussig et al. 2013, p. S9). Anthropologists of technology have explicitly de-emphasized, rather than neglected, futurity, pushing back against claims of newness, acceleration, or rupture ungrounded in ethnographic inquiry. Instead, they stress the human capacity to reimpose normativity “just as quickly as digital technology creates conditions for change” (Horst & Miller 2012, p. 4). Murphy (2016, p. 441) sees ethnography as potentially unsettling design’s “insouciant obsession with the future,” drawing attention toward other analytics such as imagination. Others note that planning projects invoke futures, but their primary goal is often to discipline or critique the present (Abram & Weszkalnys 2013, Wallman 1992). Anthropologists of finance capital likewise find that informants are less concerned with “the future” in financial speculation and more concerned with cultivating selves as smart (Ho 2009), bold (Zaloom 2006), or thinking subjects (Miyazaki 2013), and they correspondingly set aside the future as an analytic.

However, the multiplicity of futures has become central in anthropologies concerned with the breakdown of future-oriented modernist planning projects, including anxieties that arose over the post-Cold War decline of state-led futures. Modernization projects promised “good” common futures while their failure materialized awareness of (spatio)temporal distance from them (Holston 1989, Yarrow 2017), manifested in unfinished infrastructures signifying unrealized and fractured futures (Howe et al. 2016). Some anthropologists see these ruinations as imbued with potential and imaginative temporal productivity (Nielsen 2011), whereas others see despair, violence, and dislocation (Gordillo 2014). Alternately, some anthropologists have responded with affectively charged analyses that seek a renaissance in state-led futures toward a continuing, collective future. Hannerz (2016) critiques anthropology’s ceding of future planning to neoliberal boosters, Urry (2016) urges a return to something akin to planning, and Appadurai (2013) seeks ways of remaking modernization theory toward more hopeful futures. Guyer (2007) expresses concern about forms of collectivity eviscerated by the abandonment of near future planning in favor of projections into long-term futures, sacred and secular.

The evaporation of planned socialist futures evokes different affects and temporal reckoning techniques through the figure of multiplicity. Verdery’s (1996) question—“what comes next?”—does not assume capitalism’s future success, and she argues that understanding “actually existing socialism” is essential to considering other futures. Berdahl (1999) links former East Germans’ reengagements with German Democratic Republic-era consumer products to the very denial of their futurity by their Western counterparts, and Boyer (2006) develops this argument, showing how a West-led German future depends on continued associations of Easternness with nostalgia and the past. In response, Ringel (2018) calls for a refined presentism that resists explaining the present and future as necessary outcomes of singular pasts.

A related temporal figure, crisis, clears affective ground for a multiplication of future imaginaries, appearing as anxiety-provoking excess: a moment beyond explanation that ruptures structure and routine (Roitman 2014); an overburdening sense that decisions have increased significance for both pasts and futures (Bryant & Knight 2019); an annihilating force that creates new collective reference points (Das 2007); or an overwhelming feeling that the future did not take shape as it was meant to (Knight & Stewart 2016). For Masco (2017), crisis in the United States has become a constant, purposefully perpetuated way of being, actively mobilized by state and corporate interests as a form of governance, and narrowing collective political horizons. He calls for anthropologists to articulate collectively imagined long-term futures against “endless modes of precarity” (Masco 2017, p. S75). Crisis resonates with apocalypticism and the suturing of millennial secular and religious “bad endings” (Stewart & Harding 1999; see Guyer 2007). However, the fracturing

implications of “crisis” and “apocalypse” also make them figures of multiplicity-in-commonality, flattening radically different contexts, time frames, and experiences, a point to which we return below.

Anthropologists have also employed subjunctivity and potentiality to explain how informants cope with uncertain futures by engaging temporal indeterminacy and often reorienting causal relationships. Medical anthropologists analyze affectively charged, conditional temporal modes generated by illness narratives, prognosis, and divination (Good & DelVecchio Good 1994, Jain 2007, Whyte 2002); predictive genetic technologies that attempt to discipline potential futures (Gibbon et al. 2014; see Taussig et al. 2013); and definitions of personhood (Strathern 1992). Fortun (2008) examines future-oriented affects—hype, speculation, potentiality—traveling with genomic technologies in Iceland and how contingent futures are involuted into the present through promissory utterances. The common context of a continuous and seemingly unending neoliberalism is ever-present in these writings, as its intensification in health care contexts produces anxiety for individuals mitigating health risks through technological intervention (Wolf-Meyer & Callahan-Kapoor 2017).

Continuation and commonality are figured differently, however, in post-Cold War contexts where anthropologists argue that socioeconomic conditions of waitthood frame temporal experience (Johnson 2018), particularly for youth for whom mid-twentieth-century normative paths to future adulthood have been derailed (Durham & Solway 2017). Hage (2009) argues that waiting “emphasizes a dimension of life where the problematic of our agency is foregrounded” (p. 2). This is evident in Mains’s (2013) analysis of narrowed economic opportunities for young urban Ethiopian men, who cannot mobilize resources to create the relationships that could assure their futures. O’Neill’s (2017) ethnography of homeless people in postsocialist Romania shows how they experience abject downward mobility in a newly consumerist society as unrelenting waiting and boredom.

Conversely, some anthropologists see productivity in waiting, despite the material and emotional difficulties it may produce, whether as space for political, economic, and social mobilization (Jeffrey 2010) or as unwaged affective labor toward a common future with one’s faraway spouse (Kwon 2015). Cole (2010) questions the normativizing presumptions of “crisis” and “lifestage” in examining young Malgasy women’s heterogeneous life courses in the face of economic liberalization as they draw on both Pentecostal Christianity and international marriage to fulfill local expectations of adulthood. Likewise, authors in Cole & Durham (2008, p. 21) resist normative and romanticizing associations of childhood with positive futurity, demonstrating that youth always “naturalize new relations to time, especially the future.” Harms’s (2013, p. 365) informants build social connections while cultivating indifference to planned futures while they wait, opening an “alternative time of spontaneous possibility, where nothing is ever happening but where opportunities always seem to arrive.” Yet waiting is stratified; that is, it is not a common experience. For apartheid-era white South Africans, Crapanzano (2003) emphasizes that waiting was both a privilege and a product of political paralysis, and Harms (2013) stresses that the ability to make waiting productive is gendered, arguing for the multiplicities of “eviction time.” Moreover, framing waiting as a new response to disruptive neoliberalism implies a prior, continuous, and normative future for informants to aspire to, despite their worlds having undergone repeated transformation, including through colonialism and capitalist extraction.

Theorizing positive and agential responses to waitthood and the recession of state planning, anthropologists have also drawn on hope, aspiration, and similar future-oriented affects as epistemological and political tools toward common futures. Echoing Berlant’s (2011) “cruel optimism” and her subsequent call to experiment and fantasize ways out of capitalist futures, anthropologists attend to informants’ agency in the face of uncertain, precarious, or foreclosed future imaginings

of the “good life” and truncated conditions of possibility (Allison 2013). Miyazaki’s (2004) use of hope as both ethnographic object and mode of knowledge production has been widely influential. For example, Pedersen (2012) theorizes hope as a kind of work employed by his informants in postsocialist Mongolia to accept unpredictability and resist any clear planning into the future. Mankekar & Gupta (2017) examine Indian Business Process Outsourcing workers’ hopeful future imaginings, which are based on “disjunctive temporalities” emerging from global capitalism but which in turn require the management of aspiration, anxiety, and insecurity in informants’ pursuit of upward mobility. For Appadurai (2013, p. 127), on the other hand, hope is a “force that converts the passive condition of ‘waiting for’ to the active condition of ‘waiting to,’” arguing that, like waiting, “aspiration” is a stratified, unevenly distributed cultural practice.

The anthropological desire for indeterminacy and contingency (particularly in contexts of crisis) as a source for hope and otherwise (Povinelli 2016) futures is further evidenced by interest in becoming, drawn from the philosophy of Deleuze, Whitehead, and Bergson (Hodges 2008; see Born 2015). Deleuze is broadly cited in this literature to theorize informants’ discourses of futurity as shaped by “continual becoming, potentiality, and emergence” (Mankekar & Gupta 2017, p. 79). Biehl & Locke (2017, p. 22) use “becoming” to consider the “plasticity” of human–nonhuman relations, thereby resisting inevitability in spaces of crisis, but also as a methodological guide for anthropology.

However, Crapanzano (2003, p. 25) notes that informants and anthropologists are both “caught,” their hopes not easily discernible from each other. Jansen (2016, p. 451) argues similarly that “[a]nthropological replications of hope reverberate with the hopes of their authors for particular forms of knowledge production” and alternatives to a neoliberal capitalist order, leading to empirical selectivity. He suggests that a political economy of hope would allow anthropologists to attend to relational, historically contingent everyday practices of hope rather than optimistically presuming open or indeterminate futures that might not exist for informants. These critiques thus open to the possibility that an apparently discontinuous—and liberatory—becoming may also be bound to unexamined presumptions of commonality.

Finally, attention to becoming and hope travels with a renewed interest in utopias (Harvey 2000), both as imaginations of alternate social formations and as mobilizations of intentional political strategies (Jameson 2007). Anthropologists have attended to utopias that are “grounded” (Price et al. 2008) and made visible through anthropologists’ ethnographic engagement with informants’ daily practices and social spaces. Sliwinski (2016, p. 430) proposes that utopian thinking is a contingent process that orients anticipatory hopes toward specific goals, enabling value-judgments to be made about futures. Interest in utopia also emerges from tensions within queer theory that directly engage continuity and commonality. Edelman’s (2004) influential *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* shaped a rejection of futurity as predicated on the figure of the heteronormative (white) child and, correspondingly, on queer death. In contrast, Muñoz (2009)—allying with feminist and queer of color critiques—insists that queerness is a preeminent site for ongoing utopian promise and becoming but with a demand on commonality that requires examination of what it is that may be considered common, a point to which we return below.

These dilemmas of commonality and continuism—both of informants’ futures and of anthropologists’ hopes for the future—we argue, are the meta-temporal and affective sinews that connect these multiplicities, amplified by the forms of futurity introduced at scales of geological time, to which we turn next.

-OCENE EXPERIMENTS

Climate change and the assertion of a new geological age, the Anthropocene—or what we call the -ocene for reasons explained below—open to transformations in notions of transformation,

radically extending scales of agency and futures that far exceed human intentionality and intervention. Commonality and continuation are thus central problematics in this field. -Ocene discourse activates futures simultaneously in the very short and long terms, at the scale of the planet and of particular places, and in collective and individual (dis)continuities.

While concerns about human–environmental relations have been central in anthropology’s history, anthropology’s attention to anthropogenic climate change is more recent (Fiske et al. 2014). Anthropologies of climate change locate the future as emergent from histories of colonialism and capitalist extraction and short-termism (Crate & Nuttall 2016), and they argue for anthropology’s contributions to human well-being; to understanding human relationships with environments in particular places (Marino 2015); and to public debates (Barnes & Dove 2015) with the hope of a future common, liveable, if changed, world. This work also invokes an anxiety about neglect, of anthropology not being “in time” to respond to climate change (Baer & Singer 2018).

However, the sense that intervention may foreshorten future negative environmental outcomes has been overwhelmed by the temporally dislocating figure of the Anthropocene (Howe & Pandian 2016, Tsing et al. 2017). Coined on the cusp of the new millennium, it denotes humans as a geological rather than only an environmental agent, profoundly extending the imbrications of humans with planetary futures (Chakrabarty 2009).

Scholarship has proliferated around the Anthropocene’s origin point, its name, the response it should elicit, and at what scale theory and action should take place, indexing the politicized question of -ocene responsibility. Proposals for -ocene origins range from the “golden spike” of the postwar industrial “great acceleration” (Zalasiewicz et al. 2015) to the massive deforestation of Earth well prior to the modern industrial era (Kelly 2016). Although “Anthropocene” is the unmarked name for this epoch, nominating *anthropos* as the common agent of planetary futures implies common past species responsibility (Malm & Hornborg 2014) and ignores stratified pasts, presents, and futures (Bonneuil & Fressoz 2017), evident in alternative prefixes that imply different causalities and continuities: capital- (Moore 2015), plantation- (Haraway 2016), techno-, socio- (see Malm & Hornborg 2014, p. 67, note 4), and even thermo-, thanato-, and phago- (Bonneuil & Fressoz 2017). However, the -ocene suffix (from Greek *kainos*, “recent” or “new”) also presumes a scaling of temporal responsibility: It is an epochal division of the Quaternary Period, within the Cenozoic (“new life”) Era, itself embedded in a 545-million-year Phanerozoic (“visible life”) Eon. That is, there is no guarantee that Earth is on the cusp of, merely, a new Epoch. It could be a new period, a new era, or—“heaven help us,” writes Zalasiewicz (2009, p. 155)—a postvisible-life eon.

Scholars argue that -ocene time also troubles the directionality of futurity. Latour (2017, p. 156) argues that delaying action is not possible because “the Anthropocene meets another time...as if time flowed from what is coming...to the present.” But -ocene time is also ultimately predictive in that the materiality of human geological agency can be assessed only millions of years from now (Szerszynski 2017). Deep historical approaches (Shryock & Smail 2012) in turn raise questions about whether -ocene origins and futures can be linked only to modern industrial capitalism.

Zalasiewicz’s appeal to transcendence, above, feels appropriate, invoking affective appeals not only to theoretical innovation and pragmatic action toward human futures, but also to the literal question of the constitution and continuation of humanness in -ocene futures. Haraway’s (2016) Chthulucene—suspicious of accelerative, species-unifying, anthropocentric, and futural framings for these ethical and political questions—demands rather that we “stay with the trouble” by attending to a revised kinship among and across species and nonhuman entities (see Rose 2013), echoing Stengers’s (2015) demand to stay present against a “coming barbarism” and Tsing’s (2015, p. 22) call to “look around rather than ahead.”

In contrast, anthropologists and other scholars identify how sustainability (see Sze 2018) and resilience (see Hastrup 2009, Evans & Reid 2014) have become key terms in the sociotechnical

centering of humans in -ocene futures that mirror the mobilization of crisis as a mode of governance discussed above. Such technical projects of governmentality bleed into ecomodernist positions that resist calls to reduce human impacts on nature, rather vaunting human technological ingenuity and arguing for accelerated “decoupling” of humans from nature toward a “good Anthropocene” (Asafu-Adjaye et al. 2015), foreshortening human and nonhuman extinctions. Such techno-optimistic solutionism is, in turn, critiqued for failing to attend to the scalar interspecies imbrications revealed by -ocene worlds (Latour 2017).

Yet, solutionist, human-centered worldings intersect with heterodox ontological scholarly interventions and experiments that are united in resisting “correlationism” (Meillassoux 2010)—Enlightenment epistemologies that reduce the world to human intention and interpretation—and that seek to reimbricate human and nonhuman worlds (McLean 2017). Ontological approaches insist that -ocene time opens to planetary agencies and processes that transpire regardless of human action (Clark 2010), revealing a future geological record where the human may not be easily visible. In decentering human agencies, histories, and futures, object-oriented ontologies and speculative realisms include different registers of accelerationism that, alternately, propose extinction or are aimed at bringing an Anthropocene-starting and human-centering capitalism to its logical end point (Williams & Srnicek 2013). Yet, such visions are in turn critiqued for their uncanny resonance with both pro-growth accelerationism and Christian eschatology (Danowski & Viveiros de Castro 2016) and a patriarchal refusal of affiliation (Behar 2016), revealing that the apparent separation of materiality and transcendence in modernity is, rather, a constitutive tension of the modern era (Farman 2020).

Ethnographically, imagined -ocene futures open to transmuting day-to-day experiments with transitions from material Holocene conditions (Vine 2018) but also in political positions and strategies, such as those of leftist peak oil adherents who reject collective action in favor of survivalist withdrawal (Schneider-Mayerson 2015). Moreover, despite the -ocene’s implication of a very long future, the “near future” also “becomes unpredictable, if not indeed unimaginable outside the framework of science-fiction scenarios or messianic eschatologies” (Danowski & Viveiros de Castro 2016, p. 12). At these scales, then, contemporary deep future projects and experiments can themselves scale to temporal proximity. Modernist projects ranging from warnings left for future human communities, 10,000 years in the future, about radioactive waste (Goodenough 1999); to human movements into outer space (Valentine et al. 2012); or even attempts at technologically secured human immortalism in coming decades (Farman 2020, Huberman 2018) collapse into a “now.” Olson & Messeri (2015) further argue that -ocene talk implicitly limits futures to the spatial scales of Earth without regard for its cosmic context and timeline. Scale may thus work to maintain Western epistemologies—and the continuous figures of “Earth,” “life,” and “human” that concern them—at the center of temporal and spatial analyses (Tsing 2015).

Yet such experiments no longer necessarily orient to any obvious common world, political spectrum, or species being. Rather, Cohen et al. (2016) argue that “Anthropocene” actually inaugurates the idea of unified species by proposing its extinction, or, as Povinelli (2016) writes, “*anthropos* remains an element in the set of life only insofar as Life can maintain its distinction from Death/Extinction *and* Nonlife” (pp. 22–23, emphasis in original). Nonetheless, -ocene scales may also provoke a reconnection of the ethics and politics of hope to futurity for, as Clark (2015, p. 131) argues, these scales “cannot simply be taken as revealing a ‘truth’ that completely negates the drama at the normal scales of human-to-human interactions.” Moreover, the very scale of -ocene futures opens to calls for a transdisciplinary scaling up (Palsson et al. 2013): Not only may anthropology not be in time; it is also not enough.

Yet the presumption that the end of the world is now at hand is temporally pegged to the revelation of an -ocene as an existential threat to privileged, metropolitan, and largely white populations

in the Global North. As we argue next, continuity and commonality are figured very differently for communities and peoples for whom the future's dislocations are not new and, indeed, whose futures have been denied precisely in the production of modern futurity.

REFUSING COMMON FUTURES

Finally (a temporalization to which we return below) we examine futurities at intersecting (if sometimes in tension) nodes of Black and Indigenous anthropological and interdisciplinary scholarship, which offer challenges to anthropological futurities tied to appeals to a common humankind, multiplicity, and continuation (including of anthropology's own future). We ask, what do continuity and extinction look like when the apocalypse has already happened and when stable prior orders are not presumed? Upon whose ground and in and on whose terms do calls for common futures occur?

Indigenous scholarship and activism problematize white anxieties around (or proposals of) extinction in -ocene literatures by emphasizing what Wolfe (2006) calls "the logic of elimination," whereby settler states are always already predicated on Native disappearance and noncontinuity via violence or assimilation into settler society. Smith (2010, p. 48) thus argues (in critical response to Edelman) that all "Native peoples have already been determined by settler colonialism to have no future." Rifkin (2017) shows how settler sexology framed Native "perversion" as productive of Indigenous primitivity, incapacity for futurity, and ultimate disappearance and, as such, "the Native Apocalypse, if contemplated seriously, has already taken place" (Dillon 2012, p. 8). Thus "extinction" here is not a concern coming for an undifferentiated "us" from a sudden Anthropocene future, nor a surprise, nor a potentiality, but a fundamental and enduring fact for Indigenous peoples.

A key response to these facts is figured by Indigenous scholars through refusal, characterized by a will to "survance," "an active repudiation of dominance, tragedy, and victimry" (Vizenor quoted in Dillon 2012, p. 6). This refusal draws attention to explicit Indigenous futurisms, including how they are rearticulated in Indigenous science-fiction prose (Dillon 2012) and film (Lempert 2014, Medak-Saltzman 2017) toward decolonized futures. Decolonization thus invokes futurity as inherent to political, social, cosmological, and ethnographic refusal. Simpson (2014) demonstrates anthropology's role in restricting the terms of Native futurity in the present-day United States and Canada via settler demands for fidelity to a presumed unchanging and disappearing past. Refusal for Simpson is both an enduring commitment to Mohawk territorial sovereignty against settler law and violence and also a refusal to document Nativeness and its future according to a settled anthropological canon. In another settler context, Zuabi's short story, "The Underground Ghetto City of Gaza," draws on subterranean fugitivity as a site of Palestinian refusal, not only of settler violence but also of the terms of future negotiations: of common humanness, time, even "life" (Ritskes 2017).

Rifkin's (2017) analysis of "settler time" extends these arguments, highlighting the presumption of common, linear, and causal time in which history is a settled matter and must form the basis for commonality in assessing past and future Indigenous claims on the settler state. Such desire for commonality is evident in Kuper's (2003) critique of "Indigeneity," where he argues (teleologically) that Indigenous activists' use of Western law and epistemologies to press claims are inauthentic even as he expresses impatience with Indigenous actors' refusals of Western scientific evidence as the common ground for negotiation. But Sium et al. (2012, p. iii) argue that "the decolonizing project seeks to reimagine and rearticulate power, change, and knowledge through a multiplicity of epistemologies, ontologies and axiologies."

In this use, “multiplicity” demands prior attention to the foundational terms of reimagination and rearticulation rather than the a priori presumption of multiple times lived at “the same time.” But it is also not an outright rejection of the possibility of commonality. Hayman et al. (2018) insist that Tlingit/Tagish understandings of glaciers as agentive and intentional are “precise ecological knowledge” that contribute to deeper understandings of these “future rivers of the Anthropocene,” knowledge that destabilizes settler boundaries, physical and epistemological. Goodyear-Ka‘ōpuna (2019) describes the worldwide voyages of two ocean-going canoes launched from Hawai‘i in 2014 as a reassertion of Native Hawai‘ian ancestral oceanic knowledge, but with an international crew, which livestreams updates, mobilizing critiques of the US Navy’s preparedness exercises with a view to radically different futures. That is, a decolonizing perspective does not outright refuse common identity, time, critique, or multiplicity, nor futurity or science. Rather, decolonizing perspectives refuse the temporal and political limiting of Indigenous knowledge by metropolitan actors to “traditional ecological knowledge,” demanding that Indigenous knowledge be a starting point for enacting transformative futures that do not presume the continuation of historical and contemporary political, epistemological, and social arrangements (McGregor 2004, p. 405; Whyte et al. 2018).

Critical Indigenous and Black theorizations and claims on futurity stand in tension with one another (Day 2015), but their resonances around decolonization and refusal speak to un- or undertheorized subjects in many accounts of the future in anthropology. Harrison’s (1991) landmark collection gave attention to elided Black contributions to anthropology and launched what Allen & Jobson (2016) call “the decolonizing generation.” While the authors note that post-1989 arrangements inaugurated “an ambiguous temporality no longer bound by the prescriptions of a Marxist-Hegelian historical determinism” (p. 134), Harrison’s collection points to a longer-term problematic: anthropology’s refusal to acknowledge Black and women anthropologists as generators of theory. Central is the resistance of Black anthropologists to facile discussions of race as “social difference” and insistence on the constitutive “effects of race and anti-Black racism in a capitalist world system” (p. 135).

These perspectives intersect with Afropessimist arguments that identify Black death and the absence of Black futurity as constitutive of Western modernity. As such, Black futurity has been unthinkable in metropolitan white scholarship as a starting place for considering global futures. Weheliye (2014) draws on Black feminist insights—especially those of Sylvia Wynter and Hortense Spillers—to analyze the constitutive whiteness of a universalizing human (and his future) that is at play in Anthropocene anxieties. McKittrick (2013, p. 14) likewise sees lived connections across slavery and contemporary political economies as “plantation futures” but urges “recast[ing] this knowledge to envision an alternative future.” This appeal suggests Afrofuturist frames (Nelson 2002), which draw on Black creativity—including science fiction (Bould 2007)—toward alternative futures that refuse associations of Blackness with pastness but—as with Indigenous futurisms—incorporate both modern tropes and technologies as much as histories of slavery, violence, and oppression.

Refusal and fugitivity are also central in this literature. McGranahan (2016) argues that refusal is not a synonym for “resistance”—presupposing the state as its object—but rather is autogenerative, affiliative, and a form of critique. Likewise, Berry et al. (2017, p. 538) argue that fugitivity is “a rethinking of the contours of the political in co-creating spaces of liberation and transformation.” Sojoyner (2017) applies fugitivity ethnographically by asking, for example, “[W]hat damage is done by reinforcing a narrative that Black students should not drop out of school?” (p. 516). This question asserts Black agency and affiliation toward refusing prescribed liberal futures by connecting the punitive space of schools to both the historical plantation and contemporary prisons,

refusing that connection's endurance through withdrawal from liberal promises of commonality and inclusion.

Refusals emerge across specifically African futures in different terms. Rouse (2016, p. 21) draws a distinction between Afrofuturism and African Futurism, an orientation that embraces economic development “marked by a suspicion of recent history [and] coupled with an embrace of science and technology.” Piot (2010) similarly argues that, in West Africa, “futures are replacing the past as culture reservoir” (p. 16), and Weiss (2004) sees “pervasive speculation” as key to contemporary African temporalities (see also Cole 2010). In these contexts, it is clear that it is history rather than “the future” that is foreshortened. Piot and Weiss both express concern that contemporary African futurisms draw on neoliberal modalities, but Mbembe (2016) argues that African nations and citizens have engaged in ongoing refusal of abjection across colonialism, development, and neoliberal experimentation to create active, antiracist futures. Rouse (2016, p. 25) likewise argues that African futurisms forged in the rejection of the past should also be seen as active “redemptive project[s]” that resist rectification through Western historicizing perspectives (see Nyamnjoh 2012).

Wright (2015) connects these diverse Black futurisms, arguing that the dominance of “middle passage epistemology” reduces global Blackness to (masculinist, heteronormative) US Black experience by reasserting dominant linear, causal timelines. Wright (2015, p. 4) centers the epiphenomenal “now,” through which the past, present, and future are always interpreted” and experienced and which incorporates multiply temporalized and emplaced experiences of Blackness globally. In this formulation, historical continuity is not the privileged temporality, and commonality is not contingent on any singular authenticating timeline.

Anthropology's turn toward ontology and calls for a “permanent decolonization of thought” (Viveiros de Castro 2014) or becoming (Biehl & Locke 2017) are, in part, responses to these temporalizing refusals as much as to Western ontological transcendence. However, Todd (2016) draws attention to the citational practices of metropolitan anthropology that still reduce Indigenous knowledge to “data.” She critiques an ontological anthropology for centering white/settler scholarly traditions as the origin of these insights, offering “discovery” of affiliative kinship among species, orientations to catastrophe, or nonhuman agencies as a way of securing anthropology's futurity. Tuck & Yang's (2012) insistence that “decolonization is not a metaphor” defers the question of settler futurity—and its generative knowledge—again refusing an unmarked common theory, time, or ground through which to address contemporary matters of concern. We concur with these scholars' arguments that metropolitan, white, and settler anthropologists must follow Indigenous and Black scholars, activists, artists, and informants in theorizing about what newness, surprise, hope, and futurity might be; which sources of knowledge should be the starting points for that work; on whose ground and in whose terms commonality may be acknowledged; and what ground will need to be returned, and what reparations made, in advance of assumptions about where common futures may be found and what it may be that continues into the future.

NOT SO MUCH A CONCLUSION

Even as we make this call, we return to what we referred to in the introduction as the “uncanniness” of this article's resonance with other reviews of anthropological futures by way of Munn's paradox: that to invoke time is to create something that takes the form of time. That is, the structure of our article—beginning with the clear historical moment of 1989, reviewing mostly white metropolitan scholarship, and ending, *finally*, with a call to center Black and Indigenous theorizations and scholarship through registers of refusal and fugitivity—also participates in a temporalizing, affectively charged claim to neglect, and an implicit continuism in linear time by suggesting a way forward.

As such, applying our diagnostic to ourselves, we suggest that the sense of uneven uncertainties key to theorizations of Global North futures cannot but infect their own critical accounting.

At the same time, we argue neither for withdrawal from nor an abandonment of “the future” in or of anthropology; these are merely other futurities in atemporal disguise. Nor do we propose refusal as a common starting place; after all, populists, racists, and nationalists also refuse. Moreover, advocating that Global North, metropolitan actors complicit in settler–colonialism practice refusal would be inappropriate and undermine its decolonizing epistemological and political power. Rather, we suggest that an anthropology attuned to futures is most fruitful when recognizing the dilemmas of commonality and continuism bound to metropolitan accounts of futurity and considering decolonizing perspectives on hope, waiting, apocalypse, and endangerment as essential to its theory. This is not a demand to abandon critical anthro- projects (e.g., -pology, -pocene) but a call to attend to the starting places and authoritative frameworks for developing those insights. If the future is an urgent concern, the question of common grounds for the future must be preceded by others: Whose ground is this? What is their account of this ground? How did you come to this ground? And how might these questions shape the commonality of that which is hoped to continue? The answers must be incorporated centrally in anthropological theory making if anthropology desires a future. In Todd’s (2018) words, “We are tasked with making anthropology what it needs to be. Or, maybe, abandoning it all together. And starting something else anew.”

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