

Prophecy and the near future:

Thoughts on macroeconomic, evangelical, and punctuated time

ABSTRACT

A view from 1950s and 1960s Britain suggests that the public culture of temporality in the United States has shifted from a consequential focus on reasoning toward the near future to a combination of response to immediate situations and orientation to a very long-term horizon. This temporal perspective is most marked in the public rhetoric of macroeconomics, but it also corresponds in remarkable ways to evangelicals' views of time. In this article, I trace the optionality and consonance of this shift toward the relative evacuation of the near future in religion and economics by examining different theoretical positions within each domain. In conclusion, I suggest that the near future is being reinhabited by forms of punctuated time, such as the dated schedules of debt and other specific event-driven temporal frames. [*time, macroeconomics, evangelism, events, future*]

The thoughts I offer in this article start from personal observation and move toward invitation. As I came of age in postwar Europe, late-colonial Britain, the early atomic age, a 1950s–60s economic boom, and post-*Second Sex*, prefeminist uneasiness, the mood in my public sphere vacillated correspondingly between triumphalism, grief, guilt, fear, complacency (“I’m all right, Jack!”), and a sense of disjuncture between the mystiques and the modes of life. Full of contradictions and emerging lines of struggle, that era’s discourse and conviction seem, nevertheless, quite starkly different, in general, from public discourse in the United States in the present. Far from being experienced as “progression through a homogeneous, empty time” (Benjamin 1968:261) or even as Fredric Jameson’s encompassing modernity, “which entails a sense of temporality that depends on the macro-economic history of the world system” (Irvine 2004:102), the temporal sensibility of that time was specific and episodic: looking backward and forward. “Before, during, and since the war” mapped the past; struggles and plans projected the future onto near horizons such as the independence of the British colonies, the outcome of the French colonial wars in Indochina and Algeria, and the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, all pervaded by intimations of doom from “the Bomb” (the Cuban missile crisis of 1962) and *Silent Spring* (Carson 1962). For me, a sense of foreignness in the current present has come to revolve around a strange evacuation of the temporal frame of the “near future”: the reach of thought and imagination, of planning and hoping, of tracing out mutual influences, of engaging in struggles for specific goals, in short, of the process of implicating oneself in the ongoing life of the social and material world that used to be encompassed under an expansively inclusive concept of “reasoning.”¹

Working in the 1990s in Nigeria under structural adjustment and military rule, I found that neither Nigeria nor the military rule seemed so exotic but, rather, the rhetoric of economic policy did. Vistas of long-term growth were invoked in newspapers that were diligently recycled as market packaging, window coverings, mop-up material, and toilet paper, as people managed

the actualities of a desperately disturbed everyday life (see Guyer with Denzer in press). At the time, this combination of fantasy futurism and enforced presentism seemed specific to the lived implications of the economic policies of structural adjustment under military rule in Africa. Years later, the same rhetoric about horizons of long-term economic growth has become far more generalized, powerful, and confident.

Before the end of WWII, economic theorist Friedrich von Hayek had already advocated this orientation, for closely argued reasons. The human capacity to comprehend entire economic processes was far too limited to risk intervention in what would ultimately prove beneficent market forces. Overreaching the claim of reason could be disastrous. Hayek called intrusion into market forces by a near-future kind of reasoning the “craving for intelligibility,” which he saw as a contributor to a fascism that could still “lead to the destruction of our civilization” (1944:204). But even with the experience of fascism fresh in people’s experience, his theoretical project shared little affinity with the culture of early postwar times. It has far more support now, presumably for a host of reasons, including, I suggest, a greater, and more politically and socially powerful, convergence of temporal emphasis in public forms of representation and argumentation. It is to this perception that I turn in this article, suggesting that anthropology has the means, but not yet the concerted conversation, to develop an ethnography of the near future of the 21st century.

From my own vantage point in historical time, the shift in temporal framing has involved a double move, toward both very short and very long sightedness, with a symmetrical evacuation of the near past and the near future. Analysis of the “postmodern condition” has focused almost exclusively on the striking cultural emphasis on the very short temporal focus: time–space compression (Harvey 1990), simultaneity, and a “new nonchronological and nontemporal pattern of immediacies” summarized as a “reduction to the present” (Jameson 2002:707, 709). Representations of violent eruption in the arts and media, for example, are a “structural effect of the temporality of our economic system . . . [of] late capitalism” (Jameson 2002:17). Jameson goes so far as to announce “the end of temporality” as people knew it. My own culture shock had focused my mind differently: It seemed that ultimate origins and distant horizons were both reinvigorated, whereas what fell between them was attenuating into airy thinness, on both “sides” (past and future) of the “reduction to the present.”

The evaporation of the near future in theory and public representations seemed at least as disturbing as the death of the past. As Jameson also writes, no element of temporal framing can be shifted without affecting the other elements. But for one who takes up this analytical challenge to the ethnography of life-as-lived, and to the ideological and pedagogic texts and media forms that instruct people about living in these times, the many theoretical typifications of “mod-

ernism” and of an accompanying “neoliberal–postmodern” rupture that pervade the literature do not help (in my view). What one sees now is not so much a break as a major shift composed of a multitude of small ruptures. The past that included my own mid–20th century was not modern in any singular sense (Latour 1993); some minor themes have surged forward, and major concerns leave continuations and reverberations that are configured into themes and images in novel but not necessarily revolutionary ways. For example, the macroeconomic theory of the long run has been in the intellectual and cultural repertoire for over a century, worked out in myriad details and technical innovations over decades and only in the last 20 years finding certain elective affinities in temporal framing that create the cultural traction with technologies, institutions, and publics that was missing after 1945. To look back at these processes over time is to see them as composites, which then allows analysis to focus on the still-lingering and newly emergent entailments and dissonances that escape their terms of reference and that constitute life in the attenuated temporal spaces in which everyday intelligibilities are forged. The near future may be evacuated as a feature of social or collective doctrines, but it is still—and newly—inhabited. The ethnographic and comparative analytical question is, how?

I thought of using the term *foreseeable future* in this discussion: as a gesture toward a favorite poet (William Matthews [1987]), an engagement with explicit terms in management science (see Allen 2006), and a step toward addressing that most unsatisfactory of sociological concepts, “unintended consequences.” I only sideline this phrase, in favor of *near future*, because I want here to privilege emergent socialities rather than ideational forms. To ask what becomes “near” when “near” fades from collective consciousness is to ask about social distance and access as well as conceptual horizons. It is to invoke material and political urgencies as well as time–space schema. And out of an enormous potential range of ethnographic and theoretical work relevant to time, I hope this question can identify and highlight a field of practice that may arise in specific ways in the present world across a whole variety of domains, from law to livelihood.

To address “the decline of the near future” in theory and public rhetoric more rigorously than through pursuing a personal hunch, and to strike out beyond the confines of the Nigerian evidence, has turned out to be far more demanding and engaging than I imagined at the outset. Some sources are very densely argued and others are quite thin. Much relevant thinking about time in anthropology is less illuminating about the future than about the past (see Munn 1992).² And anthropology’s attention to economics is quite limited by comparison with its attention to politics, law, and the state. The “Foucault effect” (Foucault 1991) has resulted in a pervasive attention to politics in all its capillaries of social and personal bodies, but anthropologists are still

either avoiding, stereotyping, or walking gingerly around economic theory and rhetoric (although see Maurer 2002 and the critique in Mirowski 2000). For example, in a work that I found inspiring with respect to the seriousness of the analysis of referential texts, Vincent Crapanzano (2000) writes of the recent rise in the influence of doctrinal “literalism,” but in religion and the law only. Important analyses of the temporality of lived economies are embedded in an expanding library of ethnographies focused on hope (Miyazaki 2004), despair (Ferguson 1999), disciplined devotion (to market movements; see Zaloom 2005), panic (about debt; Williams 2004), fiscal disobedience (Roitman 2005), and moral unease (Robbins 2004). But relatively less attempt has been made than in the anthropological literatures on power, law, and the state to address economic experience and reasoning in relation to the rhetorics and programs that directly shape that experience and to the theory (or doctrine) that justifies it (although for cases, see Kaplan 2003; Maurer 2002; Mitchell 2002). Modeling by think tanks is crucial here, but our literature is again focused more on the state than the economy (see Baxstrom et al. 2006).

Doubtless there are many more creative allusions to futures in emergent cultures than I can encompass. Hence, the invitation to colleagues to discuss the issue in this forum. To frame the problem tightly at this stage, I look at how temporal evacuation happens within two highly sophisticated and influential bodies of thought, in which the doctrine is explicit and its translation into programs is deliberate. In some sense, these theories privatize the near future while socializing the present and the distant horizon in distinctive ways, and one could think a lot further along this public–private trajectory. But I am less focused here on how phenomena are classified (esp. dualistically) than on teasing out what Pierre Bourdieu (1990) called “generative schema” (in the plural) that arise from “experience,” in both the recurrent–reproductive and historical–disruptive senses of that concept.³ One aims to understand how such templates may be created, how framed, how transposed from one practice of life to another. How do they, then, refer to and refine each other across the experiential horizon: from praying to budgeting, from gesturing obedience to making payments, from imagining devotion to providing emotional care and material sustenance? Asking such questions focuses ethnographic attention on the lived futures that emerge in the “gap” in the temporal doxa.

Projection and prophecy in current monetarism and fundamentalist Christianity, especially in their public forms of explication, are the doctrines I explore here. To sharpen a sense of the specificity of the present dispensations, I counterpose each of them with other formulations of the future that coexist within their own intellectual arcs of possibility: neoclassical economics and biblical tradition, respectively. The growth theory of Walt Rostow, for the economics case, and the theory of prophecy of Abraham Joshua Heschel, for

the biblical case, serve to highlight specific points of convergence and divergence within and between the two traditions and their variant doctrinal framings. I may risk personal or intellectual nostalgia by making comparisons that inevitably seem to counterpose conditions “then” and “now,” “there” and “here”: thought in the post–WWII era in Britain and in the post–Cold War era in the United States. But it is neither the particular ways in which the near future used to be addressed nor any necessary ambition to restore them that interests me. Rather, close attention to these cases as examples helps to identify how different temporal philosophies are ideologically marked and made culturally plausible and available.

Because the near future cannot disappear altogether, comparison can refine understanding of the operative time frames, terms, and arenas in which people now crave “intelligibility.” One can ask whether the near future has really been “compressed” into the dailiness of postmodern spontaneity; whether, alternatively, care for the near future has become gendered; or whether it is so rigidly programmed into the formal calendrics of financial debt and benefit, self-renewal as a citizen, or insistent work schedules that experientially based intelligibilities have no room to gain any semiautonomous traction in the social imagination at all. Force and neglect create their own spaces and constraints. The final section of this article brings together recent ethnography that fills in some of the temporal gaps. But the necessary preliminary exercise, and the main part of my discussion, explores exactly how the near future has been evacuated in the first place. Looking at the precisely articulated ideologies of time future can make the lived future a more tractable ethnographic project than it has been in an era when memory, and “the past in the present,” was the main focus of temporal thinking in anthropology.⁴

Macroeconomic time and the decline of the near future

It has taken a very long time for the “long run” to become as important a concept as it has in public economic speech at the turn of the 21st century, largely through an orientation to “growth” within a monetarist, rather than an institutionalist, theoretical framework. Conventional histories attribute the conceptual division of economic time into the long and the short run to Alfred Marshall, in his *Principles of Economics*, published in 1890. Over a revolutionary career, he defined a shift from theories of value based on land or labor to a mathematical economics based on market demand and supply. The short run became the period of response to demand during which producers could only reallocate existing factors of production, which therefore entailed price fluctuations as ephemeral pressures moved through the market. The long run, by contrast, became the period during which the supply of all factors could be adjusted, resulting in eventual

“normal prices,” which reflected what Marshall called “persistent causes.”

Thus we may conclude that, as a general rule, the shorter the period which we are considering, the greater must be the share of our attention which is given to the influence of demand on value; and the longer the period, the more important will be the influence of cost of production on value. For the influence of changes in cost of production takes as a rule a longer time to work itself out than does the influence of changes in demand. The actual value at any time, the market value as it is often called, is often more influenced by passing events and by causes whose action is fitful and short lived, than by those which work persistently. But in long periods these fitful and irregular causes in large measure efface one another's influence; so that in the long run persistent causes dominate value completely. [1890:bk. 5, ch. 3, para. 5.3.31]

Marshall was not altogether clear on what these persistent causes are or how they relate to the short run and the intermediate. In one passage, he implies that they are the customary arrangements of political and cultural communities, differing from one country to another (Marshall 1890:bk. 1, ch. 3, para. 1.3.17). He expresses concern about “the intermediate effects [of economic freedom] while its ultimate results are being worked out; and, account being taken of the time over which they will spread, what is the relative importance of these two classes of ultimate and intermediate effects?” (Marshall 1890:bk. 1, ch. 4, para. 1.4.10). He also notes that this long run was in some sense hypothetical rather than empirical, because “the tendencies which are being described (often) will not have a sufficiently ‘long run’ in which to work themselves out fully” (Marshall 1890:bk. 1, ch. 3, para. 1.3.21). The distinction, then, is analytical; empirically, both long- and short-run processes are working together and can be difficult to disentangle. So, for several decades after his publication, the market-based long run took a back place to analysis of the short run and its intermediate forms of governance.

Marshall's student, John Maynard Keynes, famously pointed out that “in the long run we're all dead” and that (perhaps apocryphally) “at Cambridge we leave the long run to the undergraduates,” perhaps as a simple logical exercise, in light of the successive crises of the interwar years. The economic theory that has shifted the focal length more confidently toward the long run is monetarism: an established theoretical orientation with a very long history that has grown in strength from the 1950s onward and focuses on eradicating institutional and governmental interventions in market prices in the form of taxes, regulations, protections, and redistributive subsidies, to free up market dynamics. Much anthropological writing on “neoliberalism” stops at a simple depiction of the “undermining” of the state and the “freeing” of markets. But there were solid reasons to make

a monetarist argument in the era of National Socialism and Stalinism, and alternative techniques were put forward to limit certain sources of price fluctuation. In 1944, Hayek was already advocating monetary policy as a possible instrument for achieving free markets and stable prices at once: “Many economists hope, indeed, that the ultimate remedy (to fluctuations) may be found in the field of monetary policy” (1944:121).

Under monetarism, the state assumes the responsibility of regulating the money supply so that the value of money itself—through inflation or deflation—does not run its own separate interference on price determination by consumer demand and supply. This, then, becomes the basis for recuperation of the long run as a viable working horizon: focus on a continuing stable value of money (particularly in capital markets, through the interest rate), faith in freed-up market forces to produce innovation, and calculation by increasingly sophisticated mathematics and model building, all complemented by a whole range of financial instruments that address (and take advantage of) market risk. If extra-market influences on capital and profit, such as currency inflation and unstable conditions in the world, can be limited by state policy and financial institutions, then conditions for investment can favor the kind of growth and “progress” through markets that Adam Smith predicted and that have been reiterated down through the ages since. For example, “Capitalism helps drive history toward freedom via an algorithm that for all we know is divinely designed and in any case awesomely elegant. Namely: Capitalism's pre-eminence as a wealth generator” (Wright 2005). I should note that Smith was not claiming this progress for capitalism but for markets; he was not claiming it for the use of capital but for the division of labor and the growth of skills (under the labor theory of value). But the temporal framing and indexing to “progress” were famously launched in the first paragraph of *The Wealth of Nations* (Smith 1927). Paul Krugman (2005) picked up the temporal theme in a critique of monetarist politics in which he pointed out (in his own inverted commas) the “infinite horizon” in current U.S. political-economic thinking.

I quote Robert Wright for two reasons. He gestures to the religious domain, as does Hayek, and parallels in that domain are the ones I explore below. But more importantly here, he implies that the link of logic between short and long run is quite opaque: “for all we know.” Referring back to Hayek, it is clear that Marshall's discomfort on this question gets replaced under monetarism by a positive embrace of the evacuation of logic from this temporal range. Reasoning from experience can be, as Hayek writes, “an incomplete and therefore erroneous rationalism” (1944:205); “if in the long run we are makers of our own fate, in the short run we are the captives of the ideas we have created” (1944:2). Monitoring movements in very specific indicators and applying financial instruments that discipline very specific temporal zones explicitly preclude linking long and short runs

through a humanistically based concept of shared intelligibility. Douglas Holmes and George Marcus (2006) present Alan Greenspan's operative mode of decision making when he was chairman of the Federal Reserve as highly personalistic and intuitive, more like a deeply informed ethnographer (according to their analysis) than a functionary of a system. The *Economist* (2004: 29) refers to Greenspan as magician, which would be quite consonant with the inhabitation of a space that explicitly does not reduce to the principles that surround it: rational choice in the short run and "makers of our own fate" in the long run.

As logic and model, this combination of rational choice in the very short run, growth in the very long run, and "submission" in the interim needs theoretical elaboration and rhetorical exposition to convey it to the public. Unlike taxes, regulations, and entitlements, this monetary oversight function of economic governance is almost impossible for the ordinary citizen and consumer to see or to relate to, except when it goes seriously wrong. Mainstream historians of economics advocate seeing monetarism as the culmination of capitalist economic governance. *From Mercantilism to Monetarism*—with all stages of pioneering and golden ages in between—is the subtitle of a recent primer in macroeconomics (Vaggi and Groenewegen 2003). The *New Palgrave: Money* entry on monetarism explains briefly why and how monetarism developed, using terms that clearly imply a superiority to this mode of economic governance. The entry defines monetarism thus: "Monetarism is the view that the quantity of money has a major influence on economic activity . . . and that the objectives of monetary policy are best achieved by targeting the rate of growth of the money supply" (Cagan 1989:195). Because of judicious intervention by the central bank, the "demand function for monetary assets is claimed to be stable in the sense that successive residual errors are generally offsetting and do not accumulate" (Cagan 1989:199).

With these assumptions about the working of markets, "monetarist thought puts primary emphasis on the long-run consequences of policy actions and procedures. It rejects attempts to reduce short-run fluctuations in interest rates and economic activity . . . as generally inimical to the otherwise achievable goals of long-run price stability and maximum economic growth" (Cagan 1989:203). This is very similar to Marshall's position a hundred years ago, but the projection of the long run, when prices achieve stability, is possible to model now in a way that Marshall was frustrated to be unable to achieve. With the long run modeled, market fluctuations can be anchored retrospectively from that futuristic point and thereby seen as instances of the "almost infinite sequence of ripple effects" (Lindsey and Wallich 1989:235) that make markets work.

So, through the concept of growth and the technologies for management of the money supply, monetarism moves the near future out of the kind of limelight that it once oc-

cupied in economic theory and, at the same time, evokes a strange new economic subject: one who can be rational, submissive, ingenious, and infinitely desirous all at the same time. As Benjamin Lee (1997) suggests, there is a profound tension here, unless, of course, there happens to be a division of affective labor, with some deciding, some submitting, others desiring, and yet others managing to be ingenious. Lee sees two forms of public subjectivity: the rational reader-citizen acting on shared information and the spectator-mass media consumerist facing an infinite differentiation of choice. I think the situation is even less coherent than that when transposed into the domain of the everyday. The new indexing of diagnosis of the present to an "infinite horizon" in the future places people in emotional and sociological *terra nova*. The nesting of temporalities and their relative emphasis and mutual entailment for different populations, or for the same population in different affective states, becomes the ethnographic question. Bruno Latour's (1993) point about the modernist production of hybrids is still relevant but with a nuanced addition. Under monetarism, the processes that create difference fall squarely into the undertheorized midtemporal range of "ripple effects," or they fall under theoretical signs—articulation, stages of growth—that have been explicitly rejected. The vagueness of definition about the subjectivities and localities of the midrange and the suspicion of their adherence to "intelligibility" implicitly leave them to emergent horizons of imagination. Advocates call this zone "freedom" (Friedman and Friedman 1980), a strong claim on a concept that carries powerful resonance for so many peoples, from so many historical experiences (Berlin 1958; Patterson 1991).

Just as a reminder of the magnitude of the change, and without nostalgia, one can look at the once-famous theory of economic growth published by Rostow in 1960, which is almost the alternative Rorschach to monetarism. Rostow draws out the shared human values rather than the libertarianism in classical political economy, and he focuses on poor nations, on institutions, and typically on the middle temporal range. In his most famous book, *The Stages of Economic Growth* (subtitled *A Non-Communist Manifesto* and, therefore, not opposing capitalism), he wrote of benchmarked stages, interim processes, and the failing in "wisdom" that would "separate the analysis of the long run and the short run" (Rostow 1965:501).⁵ This is the language of the five-year plan, of institutional sequencing and the creation of precisely the cumulative effects that monetarism avoids addressing. It may signal planning in ignorance—"planning without facts," as Wolfgang Stolper (1966) puts it—but it was based on understanding of vectors and synergies that could be optimized by thought and action over the midrange.

In a democracy, the pressure to understand some kind of near, foreseeable future may be compelling. Some aspect of the theory needs to have traction in the public's mind. To see how "growth" has been reframed for the public, I read

almost the whole list of recommended sources on the website of the Washington-based antitax think tank and lobby group called the Club for Growth. It includes *The Wealth of Nations* and other classics of monetarist and libertarian thinking: Hayek's 1944 *The Road to Serfdom* (addressed to "Socialists of All Parties") and Milton Friedman and Rose Friedman's *Free to Choose*, published in 1980. Again, the distant future is the moment of truth. Hayek writes, "Wherever the barriers to the free exercise of human ingenuity were removed," (1944:16) history shows "the gradual increase in wealth which freedom brought about" (1944:19). The Friedmans reiterate this same set of claims about growth in the long run, choice in the short run, and ingenuity in the space between, with monetarist financial management to work the fine tuning.⁶ And other popular economics texts on the Club for Growth list make the same point. *The Citizen's Guide to the Economy* argues, "The crucial requirement for maintaining growth and progress is that successful experiments be continued and unsuccessful experiments be terminated" (Sowell 2000:73) through market competition.⁷ Here is also reiterated the faith in "ingenuity" and "experiment" that enters at many crucial points and justifies the proliferation of financial instruments to allow rapid and flexible investment in newness.

So explanations of freedom in neoliberal thinking appear to concentrate on choice, in the very short run, and the anchoring notions of the distant future ("ways of life"). Although they barely mention failure, it would be a mistake to jump straight to cynicism here. Ingenuity and experimentation about the times of life, including the configuration of a near future, is a crucial topic for the human sciences and for thinking through the ethics of life and professional practice (see Carrithers 2005). Neoliberalism connotes more complex and varied a configuration of ideas and technologies than one term can encompass. It bears careful unpacking rather than mobilization as the kind of epithet one sometimes finds in our literature.

Prophetic time since the 1970s

The public, too, is focused on the future, but which future among the many that open up? There may well be other futures that correspond to the monetarist future, but the evangelical concept of prophetic time is striking as a replication and transformation of the near future as a kind of hiatus, whose intelligibility is explicitly in abeyance. Here, the anthropological and other disciplinary literature is far larger and the primary sources more amenable to study than they are for monetarism. They express variant interpretations but also a general conviction that, since some profound changes in branches of Christianity in the 1970s, one is living in a "future unfolding" (Harding 2000:240), waiting and reading the signs, or living in "the time that remains," a "caesura," an unfinished pause (Agamben 2005:64), or "living in paren-

theses" of a prophetic time (Robbins 2004:159). Again, the near future is evacuated, in a way that is just as disorienting and yet internally logical as its secular counterpart in economics.

At one level, the coincidence would seem surprising. The horizon of one perspective is apocalyptic and the other infinite. Economics is secular, entailing a generally uniformitarian–universalist concept of time, whereas evangelical thought is dispensationalist, in which the entire working of the world changes from age to age according to the nature of God's presence in it. But if one looks into religious analyses of the specific era or dispensation to which humankind now belongs, and at their comparable downplaying or rejection of durational human reasoning, the similarities between the two modes of thinking about time are striking. As in the history of neoclassical economics, alternative temporal emphases coexist within what is generally understood to be the "same" overarching tradition, so the foregrounding of one over the other must be seen as a history rather than an entailment. So, to suggest historical convergences between the two temporalities—in economics and in religion—is not necessarily far-fetched.

For evangelical Christians, the interim between the first and second comings of the Messiah is the time in which present life is lived. The Book of Revelation of St. John the Divine predicts how the Second Coming will be heralded. Current church leadership works out the implications for life in the present, in an enduring attitude of expectant waiting. Tim LaHaye, of *Left Behind* fame, and Thomas Ice have published a "Complete Bible Prophecy Chart" with an exegesis in *Charting the End Times* (2001) that lays out in great detail the temporalities of the two eternities and of the time in between, comprising the successive dispensations of prophetic time, each with its own properties and biblical referents. The current age is Dispensation Phase 6, between the Pentecost (when "the Holy Spirit was sent to indwell in all believers") and the Second Coming. The current era is named the Age of Grace or the Age of the Church. It begins with "Law Fulfilled" (Matt. 27:50–51) and ends with "Rapture of the Saved" (1 Tim. 4:16–17) and is depicted as lasting "1970+ years" (LaHaye and Ice 2001:83).

As the authors lay out all the details of the schema (LaHaye and Ice 2001:116), it becomes clear that the "plus" in this number is extremely significant. Every dispensational age between the two eternities, before and after time, has a definitive length except the present one.⁸ The First Temple lasts 374 years; the exile in Babylon, 70 years; the second temple, 586 years; the Third Temple, 7 years; and the Millennial Temple, 1,000 years.⁹ In between the Second and the Third Temples is the here-and-now, the Spiritual Temple: an exceptionally long and unfinished period that has lasted almost 2,000 years already and has no necessary end in sight. In an alternative figure, based on the Book of Daniel rather than Revelation, LaHaye and Ice literally refer to this

period as “the gap,” a “parenthetical period” linked to a hiatus between two verses in the prophetic text: between Daniel 9:26—which ends on “desolations” after the Messiah is “cut off”—and Daniel 9:27—which begins “And he shall confirm the covenant with many.” What happens during this period, which refers prospectively to the open-time history of the church? How does this “gap” in the logic of the Daniel text work as the referent for its ongoingness? Two processes are at large: “Continual Growth and Increasing Apostasy,” that is, “a sowing of the Word throughout the age . . . imitated by a false countersowing . . . doctrinal defection,” which is manifested by people “disbelieving God and doing their own thing” (LaHaye and Ice 2001:48, 34).

The vacillation is constant, unrelenting, and unresolved. “Doing one’s own thing” explicitly includes not only crimes of “lust” but also the transgression of reliance on human intellect and experience alone. Examples of apostates include all uniformitarian–universalists: evolutionists and enlightenment thinkers, “particularly in higher education” (LaHaye and Ice 2001:40). All are grouped together as “scoffers,” a term taken from the second epistle of Peter, chapter 3, starting at verse 3: “There shall come in the last days scoffers . . . saying, Where is the promise of his coming? . . . all things continue as they were. For this they willingly are ignorant . . . of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (King James Version). The attempt to render the current moment in time as subject to reason, whether by extrapolation from other times and places or by thinking through logical entailments, is explicitly rejected in favor of faith.

Exploring the richness of this text, its elaborate numerologies, and its implications would require more space than is available here. But these few passages suffice to show how the midrange of personhood, history, and reasoning is profoundly attenuated and seen as morally dangerous. Several recent ethnographic works on Christianity go considerably further in explaining the premises, but they seem to me consonant on this point. The order of salvation “must not be taken chronologically since it is, in a sense, contained in a timeless moment” (Crapanzano 2000:101). Living in that moment requires a “profound cognitive, emotional and spiritual reorientation” (Crapanzano 2000:123), involving living in the present with the knowledge that what it means will only become clear in the millennial future (Robbins 2004:162). The experiential past is no longer relevant; the main cry is “make a complete break with the past” (Meyer 1999:215), meaning the immediate personal past of family, kinship, and idolatry. To bridge the ultimately impossible process of connecting the pre-Christian biblical text, which of course comes from a previous dispensation, to the practice of a Christian everyday life in this one, the preachers, as Ezekiel 22:30 puts it, “stand in the gap” between God and the people (Harding 2000:12). The idea of a gap, a space, a rupture in time that cannot and should not be mediated by

“scoffing” but endured by waiting, by identifying, by witnessing is the basic approach to time in the near future.

Back to Hayek to bring the almost choral harmonies and rhythms to the fore:

It is men’s submission to the impersonal forces of the market that in the past made possible the growth of a civilization . . . it is by thus submitting that we are every day helping to build something that is greater than any one of us can fully comprehend . . . it is infinitely more difficult rationally to comprehend the necessity of submitting to forces whose operation we cannot follow in detail than to do so out of the humble awe which religion, or even the respect for the doctrines of economics, did inspire. [1944:204–205]

Growth is the ultimate value. The “craving for intelligibility” and “rationality” would seem to be direct transformations of the idea of “scoffing.”¹⁰

Again, one can look at an alternative that lies at the center of the Abrahamic traditions. I cannot reflect knowledgeably on Islam, although clearly the idea of prophecy is central in that faith. My example comes from a famous Jewish work. Prophecy refers, in general, to revelation, which can refer to several things: immediate spiritual contact between the (individual) human and the divine (the metaphor of the “spark”); human–divine interactions about the ongoing human life course and community life (the content of biblical prophetic teaching about how to live the covenant); and the merging of divine and human in an ultimate vision of collective being (the “end of days”).

Examples of the first two—the inspirational present and the measurable human future—are found in the magisterial work of Heschel (1962, 1996).¹¹ Heschel begins his two-volume work on the prophets of the Bible solidly and explicitly in the measurable future. These are the opening sentences of the book:

What manner of man is the prophet? A student of philosophy who turns from the discourses of the great metaphysicians to the orations of the prophets may feel as if he were going from the realm of the sublime to an area of trivialities. Instead of dealing with the timeless issues of being and becoming, of matter and form, of definitions and demonstrations, he is thrown into orations about widows and orphans, about the corruption of judges and affairs of the marketplace. . . . The things that horrified the prophets are even now daily occurrences all over the world. [Heschel 1962:4]

In Jewish thought and practice, the era of the prophets came to an end, and the injunctions that they left behind were programmed into the intimate and collective causalities of daily, seasonal, and life-cyclical time as laid out by the rabbinical tradition from the first century.

Heschel's mind also moves, however, in this and another work, from moral time toward the inspirational present and he asks, "What manner of man is the prophet?"¹² In medieval Jewish thought, he argues, even after the end of the prophetic era, there remained a "thirst for prophetic inspiration" (Heschel 1996:24). This concept of prophecy is entirely focused on "divine illumination" (Heschel 1996:39). Heschel quotes from *The Guide of the Perplexed* by Maimonides, the 12th-century scholar and sage: "You should not think that these great secrets are fully and completely known among us. They are not. But sometimes truth flashes out" (1996:72).¹³ So the immediate and the moral intermediate future temporalities of prophecy are solidly established in Judaism, just as they are in some branches of Christianity.¹⁴ The orientation to a "time that remains" is lower profile, even within messianic traditions. Benjamin writes that "the Jews were prohibited from investigating the future" (1968:264). So there is nothing inevitable about the derivation of evangelical logic from biblical sources. As the recent anthropologists of evangelical Christianity point out (e.g., Susan Friend Harding, Joel Robbins, and Amy Johnson Frykholm), the emergence of the phenomenon Crapanzano refers to as "literalism" has a social history. A present enactment of faith that the past, present, and future can be fused in meaning and referent by an act of disciplined thought is not what used to be called, and cultivated as, "reasoning."

The genre itself is catching. I was struck by how Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's book *Multitude* follows a similar logic and narrative structure in its attempt to depict the convergence of a common future toward "the moment of rupture . . . that can create a new world" (2004:357). Their version is, in my reading, as mysterious as the process of "growth" through the "infinite ripple effects" of monetarism or the prayerful vigilance and forbearance of evangelical prophecy. No stages to reach for, no synergies of forces picking up on one another over time: no organization and no midterm reasoning.¹⁵

What next? A temporality of dates

The individual and collective near future—thinned out of its complexity as a theory or doctrine embodied in guidelines and benchmarks and indexed to a defined, more distant collective future—still beckons or simply happens. Jameson similarly notes a thinning out ("enfeeblement") of a "modernist" sense of the "past and future within the present" (2002:214). In the search for "alternatives, systemic transformations," he advocates cutting away from the "modern" altogether and learning to identify, in precise and measurable detail, "utopian tendencies" as they develop." Hence, "ontologies of the present" (the name of Jameson's book) that demand "archaeologies of the future, not forecasts of the past" (2002:215; his final words in that volume).

I like the general direction here but doubt the matrix. The spaces opening up are not alternative or utopian in any holistic sense. They are reconfigurations of elements that are well-known already, moved in to colonize particular phases and domains of individual and collective life that have been released from answerability to a more distant past and future. The internal temporal architectures in these spaces become like M. C. Escher drawings: familiar figures, precise, and replicated yet brought together into mind-bending inversions, reversions, and shifting focal points. The spaces opened up offer innovative extrapolation from some vantage points and block any cumulative momentum from others. So temporalities are not "homogeneous" and "heterogeneous," as Partha Chatterjee (2004) suggests, corresponding to civil and political society, respectively. They also have been reconfigured and rearticulated.

In many literatures and in formal and informal daily life, I perceive a similar rising awareness of a time that is punctuated rather than enduring: of fateful moments and turning points, the date as event rather than as position in a sequence or a cycle, dates as qualitatively different rather than quantitatively cumulative. A date has always been unique. Arguably, events of the Ides of March in the year 44 B.C.E. changed Western history. The very familiarity of the idea of unique dates, however, treacherously conceals the importance of its expanded circulation. A date is the day that debt payment is due to avoid a hike in interest payments; it is an end point specified in a statute of limitations on legal claims; it sets a "use-by" threshold on commodities; it marks and evokes a collective trauma; it demands appearance in court on pain of deportation; it inaugurates and terminates contracts, the presence of peacekeeping forces, and the inclusion of nations in pivotal agreements.

Embedded in a matrix of such dates-as-events, people's actions and imaginations pivot around compliance and delay, synchrony and avoidance, and the multiple possibilities for forward looking and backdating. (In case the reader imagines that I am just waxing poetic here, he or she could look up the process called "backwardation" in the commodity futures markets.¹⁶) In different ways, locations within the global regime are reaching toward control of date regimes. "Seize the day" takes on a whole new meaning, as Ernest Gellner (1965) pointed out 40 years ago in his prescient discussion of thought and change. Using Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, he argued that a particular conundrum attaches to the idea that tomorrow is an other day, completely other, in which the passing of the date inaugurates new absences as well as new presences. Achille Mbembe argues similarly for Africa, that tomorrow lives in a "particular time that is emerging time . . . where different forms of absence become mixed together" (2001:16). Through missed turning points, derailed processes, and dislodged future benchmarks, there is produced an "absence of the presences that are no longer so and that one remembers (the past), and the absence of

those that are yet to come and are anticipated (the future)” (Mbembe 2001:16).

In many contexts, and especially clearly with respect to the formal sector, the points of overlay and interlocking among the presences and absences can be represented by dates on the calendar. As such, they are amenable to representation in old ways as well as new ones: as if they were points in a sequence in empty homogeneous time (a certain brand of modernism) or necessary components of repetitive calendrics (religious traditions) or the time disciplines that E. P. Thompson (1967) famously defined as inaugural to the mechanisms of capitalism (the classic secularity of the formal sector). But they are also now experienced as—and increasingly constructed to be—signal event moments in near-future time at which the whole world could change. One can locate “audit culture” here, in which the date regime of accountability that “has broken loose of its moorings in finance” (Strathern 2000:2) ripples outward into other domains of social life, subjecting other processual regimes to its punctuations. Indeed, process itself seems downsized as a concept: not necessarily for theoretical reasons but because the world itself falls increasingly into the disciplines of a punctuated time that fills the gap between an instantaneous present and an altogether different distant future.

There are several anthropological literatures on the present in which I see this date-as-event floating very close to the surface of analysis: the burgeoning work on debt in political economy (Han 2004; Obukhova 2002; Roitman 2005; Williams 2004); the temporal projections of hope in the anthropology of religion (Miyazaki 2004) and of second chances in the anthropology of trauma and subjectivity (Das 2006); the manipulations of contractual terms in the anthropology of corruption (Smith 2007); the temporality of the law in the margins of the state (Das and Poole 2004); and, of course, the increasingly sophisticated attention to ideas and practices in finance itself (Maurer 2005b; Miyazaki 2003; Zaloom 2005). It is most obviously implicit in Marilyn Strathern’s edited collection on “audit culture,” as an intrinsic part of a culture “in the making . . . recognizable in the most diverse places . . . evident from the concomitant emergence, and dominance, of what are deemed acceptable forms” (2000:1). All these literatures include attention to specific date events: relived memories of them; anticipations toward them; disciplines they impose on delinquents; arbitrage spaces they open up for opportunists; ideal minutiae for forgers; livesaving validation for documents; crucial evidence for supplicants in search of alibis; and one expression of the continuing power of the state over intimate conditions of life.

Another article would be needed to do justice to the richness of the sources and intersections here; hence, the format of invitation offered by this forum. One could go one step further here, however, to suggest in what ways and with what implications it helps to tease dates into the direct light

of study and to bring all these disparate literatures together. If, indeed, a regime of dated time is filling the near-future temporal frame that has been evacuated by macrotheories of durational social process, then, necessarily, it should be resonating through many social domains and political geographies. Having myself worked primarily on processes—including temporal heterogeneity and contingent articulation (Guyer et al. 2007), all ultimately referring back to questions of historical emergence—the temporal ruptures implicit in the idea of date regimes make new but compelling sense to me. It is as if rupture has been relocated: not at the system level but at the subjective level. To enhance sensitivity to the multiplication of ruptures that such a date regime is creating in the world, analysts have the anthropology and philosophy of the “event” to turn to. The navigation of subjectivity and sociality under a consciousness of events puts process into question and forces inquiry into how events are ever aggregated (or woven) into social synchronies and cultural representations or accumulated over time, and for whom. To be living inside a process may only be experienced as a luxury or a tragedy. In between, are there characteristic or consonant struggles, submissions, and ingenuities of the “gap” in time? Narrative and collective-memory studies provide one set of answers, but they hardly exhaust the possibilities when events that intervene decisively in one life are represented as mundanely repetitive from another’s standpoint, or when other accounts are silenced or when language fails altogether. And narrative is retrospective. What kind of “stories” does imagination create when the reference points lie in the future?

In anthropology, the event has been worked out most fully in the study of violence and its lived aftermaths in personal and social time (Das 2006). Reference to events in the sense of ruptures begins to appear under a less catastrophic guise in work in precisely the domains of life most explicitly framed by the monetarism and evangelism I have discussed in this article. Anna L. Tsing’s “friction” in global processes, although interpreted mainly through dialogics, is also presented in its “sticky materiality of practical encounters” (2005:1) as events in time. Clara Han’s (2004) account of Chilean experience with the neoliberal policies promoted under monetarist theory profiles the asynchronies of signal events: among the temporal phases and strands of one’s own life, between oneself and immediate kin, and between one’s intimate sociality and that of neighbors, all enmeshed in a “density of . . . monetary and affective debts” (2004:177). Han suggests the tragic necessity of abandoning familiar terms of temporal coherence, which once filled the near future with meaning, to take on, instead, a concatenation of shorter- and longer-term borrowing and lending, entailing continual temporal arbitrage to stay afloat.

New converts to evangelism also struggle to create a near future, albeit without the tragic sense of loss of the Santiago poor. Robbins’s (2004) account of Christianity in

one New Guinea society presents believers' utter conviction about the nature of the immediate present and the ultimate future but a "troubled" consciousness in the face of the near-term creation of a moral synchrony between the quality of social relationships and Christian rhythms and calendrics. A critical event focuses their worry and Robbins uses it to launch a sensitive account. Christmas 1991 was "heavy" and "sinful," even threatening to break up the community and put salvation in danger, because people were unable to resolve disputes about employment in a new mining venture in time to celebrate together. After the crisis, the community council took the unprecedented step of pronouncing a "new extremely harsh law" to ensure "that they never again found themselves facing another heavy Christmas like the one just past" (Robbins 2004:xvii–xxvii, xxiii). Even such apparently minor events as a missed debt repayment or a ruined Christmas or a failed audit review appear in subjective and collective life as ruptures of process, demanding extraordinary effort to counteract and to regain any sense of momentum.

One could perhaps reduce all this to an ahistorical "life in uncertain times" or an ancient philosophy of risk "taken on the flood" (to quote Cassius in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*). There is, however, a historical specificity to uncertainty now. It is an emerging chronotope (Bakhtin 1994; see Maurer 2005a), honed into technologies that can deliberately unsettle and create arbitrage opportunities and gridlocks as well as logistical feats of extraordinary precision and power. This particular near future, unhitched ideologically from the present and the distant future, becomes a regime (or series of regimes) in its own right, separated from the "systematic connection of entities in a coherent whole that constituted the flow of modern time" (Latour 1993:78). Secular time has become effectively dispensational, as intimated by Adam Lutzker and Judy Rosenthal in their review of books on contemporary evangelism, in which they exhort scholars to address the "aporia of modernity" by taking "the next step—an internal critique of secularism—[toward] a better understanding of [its characteristic] unheimlich experience" (2001:921–922).

As with religion, one needs to look closely at the doctrines, practices, and effects of secularisms. One might suspect that for populations such as Nigerians, their long experience of modernity's aporias in practice has better prepared them for this new regimen than the Euro-American conviction of a coherent modernity has done for its home populations. In any case, people everywhere live with comparable exhortations and rhetorics now, whose terms of reference, such as dates on the calendar, give the impression of us all living in the same world at the same time, although the lived disciplines and ruptures create quite different trajectories.

The shift I describe here remains an ethnographic challenge to think about, so convincing was the mid-20th-century persuasion about the power of reasoning, with all its entailments for temporal process and the relationship

between thought and action. Empathy with the content of the present economic and religious concepts, which Lutzker and Rosenthal (2001) address, is not necessarily difficult because the ideas, like the elements of an Escher drawing, are all familiar. It is the implications of their new consonance, the "negative space" they open up in the temporal picture, and the date regime they seem to inaugurate that create a sense of novelty. Still unclear to me is whether my perspective is generational or theoretical or gendered or positioned in some other way, perhaps by only a partial knowledge of the richness of the literature or a too-tardy realization that Nigerian realities and the realities of others who had always fallen into the oubliettes and the maroon communities of modernity would become so much more widespread and more visible. I appreciate the *AE* editor's invitation to present these reflections for wider discussion.

Notes

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1. My first concerns with reasoning in this sense were inspired by Philip Mirowski's minisymposium on economic anthropology, which raised the question of the difference between rationality, rational choice, and reason (Guyer 2000). Ben Fine (1998) has also written on this distinction.

2. Fifteen years ago, Nancy Munn warned that in neglecting the future, in general, anthropologists were neglecting a crucial topic: "Futurity is poorly tended as a specifically temporal problem . . . anthropologists have viewed the future in 'shreds and patches,' in contrast to the close attention given to 'the past in the present'" (1992:116).

3. My own reading of Bourdieu is that he is inexplicit about any potential difference between experience in the sedimented, cumulative sense and experience in the punctuated sense. Attention to both is needed and to where and how they might be differentiated in subjective and collective dynamics.

4. It is striking how the anthropology of time settles so quickly into the "past in the present" and memory. This area of research is of the utmost importance, and I have made my own contributions to it. But the following consecutive sentences can illustrate a wonderfully promising statement followed by certain short-circuiting of the future. "The plain minimalist approach to time . . . fails to recognize the collusion of people in the making of material life and events through significant timing. There is still a need to rescue an 'anthropology of time' which can engage with history and the work of historians" (James and Mills 2005:14). Wallman 1992 stands as an early attempt to examine the future in classically framed ethnographic case studies.

5. Worth noting is how little attention Rostow devotes to the “Austrian School”: Hayek, Milton Friedman, and so on. He ends his short review of their contributions (in a 700-page book) with the conclusion that they came up with “some moderately useful tools for both short- and long-run analysis of the investment process” (Rostow 1990:225). Friedman is extremely critical of such “liberal” economists as John Kenneth Galbraith. See “From Galbraith to Economic Freedom,” in Friedman 1991.

6. Friedman advocated, and contributed enormously to, a microeconomics that would embed the midterm—in this case, the life cycle—in specific financial instruments. He designed means for instilling economic discipline in individual financial management such as stock ownership, savings, and individual pension investment, rather than in either wages or tax payment and entitlements. The internal consistency of his approach and the vastness of his empirical and policy works are sometimes underestimated by those who see mainly the ideological impetus behind them.

7. All these works excoriate the fallacies of basing thought on emotional or moral responses to specificity, hence, to the mid- and short-term: “Nine-tenths of the economic fallacies that are working such dreadful harm in the world today . . . stem from two central fallacies, or both: that of looking only at the immediate consequences of an act or proposal, and that of looking at the consequences only for a particular group to the neglect of other groups” (Hazlitt 1979:17).

8. These two “eternities” have their own names and atemporal properties: “Alpha” and “Omega,” “Past” and “Future,” and the presence of *Shekinah* characterizes both (LaHaye and Ice 2001:116). This last attribute, however, is not as clear in the early phase as in the final one. *Shekinah* in Hebrew and in Judaism refers to “the indwelling presence of God in this world” and, in kabbalistic thinking, as in some sense a feminine dimension of the divine (Green 1999:33–34). Here, as elsewhere, and perhaps in deference to the enormous importance placed on the Jews in evangelical religious history, LaHaye uses concepts from Hebrew and Judaism that have not been taken up in other Christian traditions, which largely depend on the Greek language and Hellenic thought. For example, LaHaye and Ice refer to the judgment seat of Christ as the “Bema,” the Hebrew word for the elevated place from which the Torah is read in a synagogue.

9. The movement into the Millennial Age can be broken down into much shorter segments and sequences, of which the Tribulation—after which LaHaye and Ice’s Pre-Trib Research Center is named—is one. It is preceded by the Rapture, from which LaHaye’s *Left Behind* series begins.

10. Some present-day U.S. evangelicals, however, explicitly inhabit the more classic Hebrew prophetic tradition, in differentiation from others, and they do focus on “the widow and the orphan.” See Wallis 2005. The entire prophetic spectrum remains a labile field.

11. Heschel finds correspondences in some medieval Muslim—especially Sufi—thought, and one can juxtapose key Christian thinking, so this is not exclusively a Jewish view. Because of the enormous complexity of the crisscrossing of ideas and derivations within and across the Abrahamic traditions, the current popular concept of the “Judeo-Christian tradition” seems inaccurate and limiting, although I am myself limited in addressing only Jewish and Christian sources here.

12. And from his preface, “the totality of impressions, thought and feeling which make up the prophet’s being . . . [his] awareness of his confrontation with facts not derived from his own mind” (Heschel 1962:vii).

13. The relevant future is the spiritual journey of perfecting the soul, in the belief that every man “has the power to be as righteous as Moses our Teacher” (Heschel 1996:98). The conditional moral future is enfolded and presumed, rather than elaborated, through

the notion that preparation for prophetic flashes of inspiration required perfection of the intellect, the imagination, and the character, doubtless avoiding at all costs the multitudinous infractions against which the ancient prophets railed. There is, however, a version of messianism in some Jewish traditions whose temporal framing is more similar to the evangelical view. A recent and public example is seen in the full-page advertisement taken out by the Lubavitcher community in the *New York Times* after the invasion of Iraq in April 2003. It announced that the by-then deceased Rebbe Moses Menachem Schneerson had uttered “prophetic words” about the event during the previous Desert Storm military campaign. “With the gift of prophetic vision, the Rebbe was able to correctly interpret events as they unfolded then” and to urge every person—man, woman, and child—to study, observe, and act with righteousness to “tip the scales in favor of humankind and bring redemption to the entire world.” The statement goes on, “Our entire generation is living on the threshold of the Messianic era. . . . All of us can work to . . . provide a more fitting reception to Moshiaich and Redemption” (Springer 2003: A9).

14. Although I cannot hazard interpretations of Islamic thought on these questions of temporality and prophecy, I understand that there are apocalyptic claims within Shi’a Islam that have some popularity in present-day Iran. Attention to varieties of Muslim approaches to the near future would greatly enrich this discussion.

15. One might note, however, that anarchists expressly avoid developing a “vanguard” plan of action as one road toward hierarchy. See Graeber 2004.

16. From the Wikipedia entry on *contango*, the condition in which the futures price is higher than the spot price because of the cost of holding the good in the meantime:

But if there is a near-term shortage, the price comparison breaks down and the contango may be reduced or disappear [because demand drives the price up towards the futures price before the due date]. Near prices become higher than far prices because for consumers future delivery does not suffice, and because there are few holders who can make an arbitrage profit by selling the spot and buying back the future. This is called backwardation. [Wikimedia Foundation n.d.]

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