Introduction

Tomorrow's Cultures Today?

Were it not for its blatant, reactionary conservatism, anthropologists might have been excited by Samuel Huntington's 1993 prophecy that "the great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural" (Huntington 1993: 22). Finally, an admonition of the salience of culture! Of course, that's not quite what Huntington meant, and anthropologists, along with a host of other critics, have picked apart the desultory confusion of civilization, religion, language, race and politics that make up the "units" of Huntington's paean to Arnold Toynbee (Besteman and Gusterson 2005; Hannerz 2003; Palumbo-Liu 2002; Said 2001; Tuastad 2003). The absurd stereotyping that pits "Islamic," "Buddhist," and "Confucian" civilizations against the "West" alternates between the moronic and the Machiavellian; it is no mistake that Huntington's work has become a master text in the twenty-first century drive toward US global hegemony. Perhaps because of the wealth of pernicious error, however, few critics have examined the temporal confusions in Huntington's discourse. Each "civilization" seems to be stuck in a given timeline: for example, the "West" with modernity and capitalism (eighteenth century), China with "Confucianism" (Han Dynasty, 141 BCE), "Arabs" with Islam (seventh century CE). Each of these "civilizations" follows the dictates of its civilizational imperative, a wind-up cultural discord that "clashes" in the present. The future is said to depend on whether or not these cultural pasts will become the future, whether or not "non-Western countries" will "join" the "West" (the instinct to bracket everything here is difficult to resist). But are we talking about the present or the past? Join modernity (usually attributed to the eighteenth century)? This is most evident in Huntington's discussion of "torn" countries, where the weird, cultural time warps are more evident. Russia is characterized not

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only as belonging to the "modern" (via Marxism), but also to the "Slavic-Orthodox" (seventh century CE with the development of Russian?):

> A Western democrat could carry on an intellectual debate with a Soviet Marxist. It would be virtually impossible for him to do that with a Russian traditionalist. If, as Russians stop behaving like Marxists, they reject liberal democracy and begin behaving like Russians but not like Westerners, the relations between Russia and the West could again become distant and conflictual. (1993: 44–45)

What's interesting here is not only the now-familiar tactic of placing other peoples in the past of the West (that is, tradition versus modernity), but also in the strange multiplication of timelines—each "civilization" is characterized by a sort of distinct timespace aligning through shared, cultural temporalities (Huntington's "kin-country" syndrome). Cocooned in their (other) temporalities, civilizations, in a way vaguely reminiscent of time travel episodes on *Star Trek: The Next Generation,* are unable to communicate with one another. The "West" seems just as much a slave to the past as anyone else (albeit on a different timeline) and the future for Huntington means not a convergence of timelines, but rather their multiplication in the frisson of the "clash." The future of culture, then, is always already the return to the past.

This has long been the paradox of culture, where the present collapses onto the past on its way to a future that can only be the recapitulation of what came before. It is, for example, at the heart of Matthew Arnold's 1869 prescriptions for cultural progress, where we "progress" toward perfection guided by, as Arnold wrote, "the best which has been thought and said in the world," that is, a Janus-faced adulation of past "civilization" en route to a future illuminated in the penumbra of the past. "Progress" here appears as curiously retrograde: forward, yet backward; different than today, yet ultimately dependent upon its consonance with yesterday.

And it is exactly the case with globalization today, which combines a faith and belief in perpetual change (Schumpeterian creative destruction) with an abyssal vision of repetition and stasis, an Elidean myth of the eternal return for advanced capitalism where we "progress" to a state of free market nature that is supposed to have always existed beneath a patina of State planning.

Consider a recent myth, the novel *Cosmopolis* (2003) by Don DeLillo, which chronicles the slow fall of a New Economy wunderkind Eric Packer as he travels down forty-seventh street in midtown Manhattan to get a haircut. True to myth, it is a curiously haunting, contradictory novel, which, nevertheless, tells us a great deal about the eerie similarities to the world we ascribe to the West's imagined others and the world we think we live in.

In *Cosmopolis,* time is defined by perpetual, vertiginous change, with every event, invention, or fad cresting and disappearing in increasingly accel-

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erated sinusoid distributions. It is life in the shadow of Moore's Law (chip density doubles every eighteen months)—unending "creative destruction."[1] In this accelerated world, things become obsolete almost as soon as they are introduced:

> He took out his hand organizer and poked a note to himself about the word skyscraper. No recent structure ought to bear this word. It belonged to the olden soul of awe, to the narrowed towers that were a narrative long before he was born.
>
> The hand device itself was an object whose original culture had just about disappeared. He knew he'd have to junk it. (9)

This is accelerating "creative destruction"—first the skyscraper then, a heartbeat later, the PDA upon which the demise of the skyscraper has been written. In *Cosmopolis,* "all that is solid melts into air" gives way to something even more ephemeral—one airy mass blowing into the next, with nothing ever solidifying at all. Eric's slow trip to his eventual demise traces the ephemerality of all culture and social life in the age of globalization where nothing will really matter (or literally *be* matter) for long.

In the end, even time itself proves curiously outré, melting under the glare of white-hot advanced capitalism. Eventually, "future," "present," and "past" all seem like media effects, as when Eric's own CCTV cameras broadcast his own future:

> His own image caught his eye, live on the oval screen beneath the spycam. Some seconds passed. He saw himself recoil in shock. More time passed. He felt suspended, waiting. Then there was a detonation, loud and deep, near enough to consume all the information around him. He recoiled in shock. Everyone did. (93)

In the speed-up of advanced capitalism that critics like Paul Virilio decry (but also, perhaps, celebrate), media represent the future to us rather than the present or past. "Progress" becomes so ubiquitous that the shadowy world of "non-progress" is utterly occulted in its blinding glare. The speed of information and the rate of advance and obsolescence have increased to the point of media singularity. This is, after all, one of the motors of advanced capitalism—creating, for example, a state of perpetual expectation for the next generation of information technologies, the frantic sense of a gap between what one owns and the more advanced products that one should be buying. In advanced capitalism, we are urged to buy the future.

But does this mean that change accelerates? There are two ways, after all, to look at this: a state of perpetual change is the same as perpetual stasis.

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Ubiquitous acceleration is the same as standing still. Fukuyama's "end of history" suggests the extent to which time is discounted in the global age.[2]

When Eric sees his own future, it may not be a sign of proleptic speed-up but rather an indication that the future itself has ceased to be meaningful. That is, "the future" has become the preferred modality for living in the present and can be said to no longer exist "in front" of us at all; in the world of consumption, it actually seems to exist *behind* us, as products we do not yet own. Instead of a future characterized by the brachiating of new possibilities and unforeseen occurrences, we get the rapid, linear succession of "new" products that are endless iterations of consumer desire succeeding one another like cards on a blackjack table. This is one of the most maleficent effects of globalization: the attenuation of alternatives to market-driven teleologies. We don't need to speculate on what the future may bring when the answer is on the next page of the catalog. Thinking outside of these narrow futures has passed from being heretical (in the Cold War) to being ridiculous—the subject of fantasy rather than speculation.

This has been sorely evident in the "culture wars," largely a conservative invention that pits its "values" and "civilization"-based protagonists against parodic representations of intellectuals propounding what looks to be, in fact, a very mild multiculturalism. As one of the conservative demagogues, Lee Harris (2004: 218), instructs his straw-men interlocutors:

> Intellectuals in America, Europe, and elsewhere must abandon the pursuit of abstract utopias and fantasy ideologies and return to the real world. They must undertake a critique of their own inherent distorted points of view, in order to comprehend the visceral and emotional dynamic at the foundation of all human cultures and their history. They must cease to attack those codes of honor that the modern West has inherited from its various traditions, political, cultural, and religious. They must not permit the culture war within the West to degenerate, as it threatens to do, into a civil war.

True to the McCarthy-esque spirit, Harris calls for a sinister reeducation in order to safeguard the security of the nation. And, again similar to the McCarthy era, the "enemies" with whom he struggles are more or less imaginary. The "tenured radicals" making the blacklist of GOP-funded think tanks are not, after all, advocating utopian communes; for the most part, what drives conservatives into apoplectic rages are the rather mild admonitions that the government should make good on its own vague multiculturalism and acknowledge the many, structural inequalities that bedevil the supposedly raceless and classless society in the US. In contrast to Harris's stentorian ultimatums, the scholarship of, say, Michael Bérubé impresses with its comparatively benign calls for tolerance. See, for example, David

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Horowitz's *The Professors: The Most 101 Dangerous Academics in America* where people who would never have been fingered as "radicals" in the 1960s and 1970s are excoriated as the enemies of liberal democracy, including Elizabeth Brumfiel, an archaeologist and ethnohistorian whose research on class and gender dynamics in Mesoamerica and Aztec civilization does not exactly constitute a clarion call for the revolution (cf. Brumfiel and Fox 1996).

What this all shows is that conservatives have already limited debate to a set of hypostatized binarisms that facilitate their facile observations and broad stereotypes: West and non-West, meritocracy and affirmative action. In these terms, debate, such as it is, is largely over before it has even begun. That is, what are missing in these "culture wars" are actual alternatives: As Jameson (1991: 281) complains, "The surrender to various forms of market ideology—on the *Left,* I mean, not to mention everyone else—has been imperceptible but alarmingly universal. Everyone is now willing to mumble, as though it were an inconsequential concession in passing to public opinion and current received wisdom (or shared communicational presuppositions), that no society can function efficiently without the market, and that planning is obviously impossible."

Accompanying the economic realism that informs this universal acceptance of the "market" has been a similar iron consensus coalescing around the idea of culture. The notion of a banal homogenization of culture is treated as more or less axiomatic in the global age. The political spectrum devolves around whether the opening of a T.G.I. Fridays in Ankara should be celebrated or decried. Other cultures are to be preserved (literally, in many cases, placed in a preserve) as part of vague patrimony for the world, but no one's pinning their hopes on systems of generalized reciprocity for the twenty-first century. Indeed, the degree to which the "culture wars" present a consensus about what exactly "culture" is and what it will be is what I find most disturbing. Like Eric stuck in traffic in DeLillo's novel, culture in the age of globalization is on its way to nowhere; the future will be shelling out the same hamburgers.

So, if the future for the Ancient Greeks exists behind them as they walk backward, then for the West (and for advanced capitalism), the future is a point along a highway—in front of us, but utterly predictable and quotidian. When we get on the expressway, we already know its terminus (or our exit). And other than to get off, there's no real option—it is not a mistake that twenty years of commentators have fastened on (now exhausted) metaphors of highways for information society—the highways take us somewhere, opening up a path where, perhaps, none existed before, *but* they also block off other possibilities. As Marc Augé (1995) writes of "non-place," culture in the age of globalization is emptied of signification and difference, a tabula rasa

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upon which might be arranged the commodities that take the place of other cultural forms in the postmodern era. Traveling down the highway into the future, we know both where we're going and, courtesy of the proliferation of strip malls and fast food, what we'll find.

And what about anthropology in all of this? The current version of the culture wars, as David Palumbo-Liu (2002: 110) points out, resuscitates the long-discredited tradition of "national character" studies in anthropology in order to demonize middle-eastern peoples and to legitimate continued military and economic incursions into the region. In these works, "national interests seem indistinguishable from a 'way of life,' and national policy seems synonymous with large, civilizational imperatives." In other words, whole regions of the world can be characterized as violent or irrational, while the US and the West are represented as reasonable, tolerant, and scientific. The "future," such as it is, pits these groups against one another: the outcome will be a highly selective vision of "us" or "them" in a future that is more about the end of alternatives than their emergence.

As David Harvey (2000: 154) explains, the tragedy of the end of "utopic" thinking is precisely the truncation of the imagination to the hegemony of the "real": "If the mess seems impossible to change then it is simply because there is indeed 'no alternative.' It is the supreme rationality of the market versus the silly irrationality of anything else. And all those institutions that might have helped define some alternatives have either been suppressed or—with some notable exceptions, such as the church—brow-beaten into submission." A world where corporations and governments define the terms of the future is a world where the status quo will remain fundamentally unchallenged. What remains of utopias in the Western imaginary are what Louis Marin (1993) calls the "degenerate utopia": Disneyland, Celebration, Florida and the neighborhood shopping mall engage the utopian as the apotheosis of the commodity in what Walter Benjamin describes as the "hell" of the new (Buck-Morrs 1989).

But while anthropology's ghosts continue to haunt conservative journalism and policy making, anthropologists have in the meantime cultivated a healthy skepticism for "culture" in the wake of its pervasive (and always already political) adoption in the public sphere. What has been erroneously labeled as the "anti-culturalist" camp looks to the formation of these bounded, cultural entities with suspicion, noting, after Eric Wolf, that "Names thus become things, and things marked with an X can become targets of war" (Wolf 1982: 7). What these contemporary approaches evidence is incredulity towards culture—in the very best sense. In the hands of cultural anthropologists, "culture" has been rendered adjectival—subordinated to more nominative analyses of power, class, race, and identity.

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Moreover, "the future" isn't usually thought of as anthropology's purview. In fact, anthropologist's closest disciplinary neighbor—among those of us who are less concerned with anthropology qua science—is often thought to be history. As archaeologists or physical anthropologists, anthropologists may study a fossil record, a historical record, or an archaeological record. As cultural anthropologists, we may study contemporary society, but, until comparatively recently, through an "ethnographic present" with one methodological foot planted squarely in historicism. For example, Franz Boas's "culture history" called for the "reconstruction" of cultural development through an analysis of the diffusion of cultural elements (Mead 1959: 38).

In fact, anthropology has in many ways defined itself against an Arnoldian sense of culture as synonymous with progressive civilization. Indeed, Arnold's definition of culture was in many ways opposite of what anthropologists strive to understand—it eschewed what people actually did for what they *should* do—ultimately a kind of Platonic ideal.[3]

At any rate, the public, when they think of anthropology, tend to identify it with the study of small societies, "tribes," "communities"; the "anthropological gambit," after all, as Micaela di Leonardo (1998) terms it, has to do with the humorous juxtaposition of "the primitive" and "the civilized." The future will bring only more revelations of sameness and difference in a tableau vivant of savagery and civilization. However, a moment's reflection allows one to challenge this: neither of the terms in the anthropological gambit—"primitive" or "civilized"—is really true and anthropologists, far from being consigned to the study of the quaint or, at any rate, safely distant, cultural other, have long studied the contemporary present and, even, the future. After all, activist anthropology is precisely involved in producing future change. Acting to close down the College of the Americas (Gill 2004), or organizing graduate students at Yale (Kadir 2006) simultaneously advances a kind of cultural future, that is, a way of life less imbricated in violence and inequality. That is, nested in these critical exposés of violence and exploitation are other challenges to cultural mores overdetermining the domination of the weak by the powerful (for example, neoliberal emphases on "individualism" and "meritocracy").

But there's a more speculative side to this as well. Writing at a time when sociology and anthropology blurred together in various ways, H. G. Wells (1914: 205) wrote that "the creation of Utopias—and their exhaustive criticism—is the proper and distinctive method of sociology." Like sociology, nineteenth century anthropology was never far from utopian speculations about the future. The "savage" and "utopian" tropes arose together out of the Western imaginary, conceptions of the utopian future dialectically generated in changing ideas of the "savage" past (Trouillot 1991).

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It was not until the twentieth century that cultural anthropologists would accede to a religiously synchronic "ethnographic present" disdainful of nineteenth century evolutionism, on the one hand, and utopian (or dystopian) speculation, on the other. But that does not mean that anthropologists gave up their purchase on the future. In fact, I would argue that the opposite is true: anthropological research in the cultural "present" is enabled by a relationship with historically specific *futures.* The history of these relationships has never been a part of the "ethnographer-as-hero" mythic cycle that anthropologists tell themselves (with the help of Susan Sontag); yet this work may demarcate both what and how anthropologists know.

In the twenty-first century, laying open these subcutaneous relationships has never been so important. As the future recedes to ever-more terrifying recapitulations of the present, the "anthropological gambit" itself is no longer an option for anthropologists. That is, it is no longer tenable (and, of course, never was) to argue, as Ruth Benedict did in *Patterns of Culture* (1934), that other peoples could be conceived as a "laboratory" for cultural differences. But we need—more than ever—to revisit the idea that anthropology might provide material and critique for cultural futures, for the imagination of different lifeways less premised on exploitation and ecological degradation. And not simply as an ancillary effect of anthropological research, either; I argue that raising the possibility for radical alterity is one of the chief roles of cultural anthropology in the twenty-first century.

Accordingly, this book has two major goals: (1) excavating anthropology's "future work" over the past two centuries and (2) suggesting where the future of thinking about the future may be (and may be heading) in anthropology. It in no way argues that anthropology should take up the dubious practice of cultural prediction. Rather, this book gradually develops the idea that anthropology's role is to gesture to radical alterity and, in turn, shift attention away from the inexorable tide of mass-produced homogeneity to divergent cultural practices and possibilities, not a self-legitimating cultural relativism that rationalizes the cultural other only as a prophylactic against cultural change and a blind behind which power can continue uncontested, but as the shocking revelation that difference begets difference. To take Gregory Bateson's famous dictum (1979) utterly out of context, we need to understand the cultural future as a difference that makes a difference. In other words, the future lies not in peddling the anthropological gambit of incommensurability, but in vouchsafing the possibility that ways in which we think and act may be very different in the future and in doing so, opening up a space (or a spacetime) for critical reflection on the present.

Chapter 1 begins with an examination of the future in nineteenth century anthropology, one enabled by a kind of cultural "time machine" (after

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the work of Johannes Fabian) that examined other peoples as existing in the past in order to provide clues for the future. And yet these temporal perambulations were fraught with paradox. An examination of the work of Alfred Russel Wallace, J. G. Frazer, E. B. Tylor, and others suggests the sorts of uneasiness of the nineteenth century future and also sets up the continuing problem for anthropology: how can culture simultaneously exist in past, present and future? What an examination of the nineteenth century suggests is the way time unravels under the anthropological gaze. The singularity of cultural comparison sets up conurbations of timelines and time paradoxes that continue to bedevil us today.

Chapters 2 and 3 center on Margaret Mead and Chad Oliver, whom I regard as the most important "apical ancestors" in our speculations on the future of culture. Mead wrote widely on every possible subject; there is no anthropologist alive today who wrote so broadly. And yet, one of the most important "Meads" that emerges is Mead the futurist, attempting to evoke radical alterity in her evocations of the future of culture, which, as she settles into her (self-appointed) role as in loco parentis to the counterculture, more and more favors youthful possibility over technocratic planning. Chapter 2 traces her development from a committed social engineer in her wartime work on morale with Gregory Bateson and her participation in the Josiah Macy conferences to her development of a model of cultural "microevolution" emphasizing becoming, complexity, and the unpredictable. Rather than dismiss Mead's later work (as many anthropologists have), I revisit it in order to unearth Mead's growing predilections for a future that cannot be engineered, a position in many ways anticipating emphases on the "emergent" in anthropological studies of science and technology.

Chad Oliver never had the same cachet as Mead—he lived the (comparatively) quiet life of Chair of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Texas during much of his professional career; he is better known for his anthropological science fiction than for his scholarly output and is regarded as one of the founders of that subgenre (along with Alfred Kroeber's more famous daughter, Ursula K. Le Guin). Utilizing stories and archival materials, I look to the overlaps between Oliver's science fiction and his anthropology, building to the general interrogation of anthropology as a colonial project and leading to Oliver's contribution to science fiction's "New Wave" in the 1960s. The end of Oliver's life sees him groping for different direction in both science fiction and anthropology as a way beyond the pessimism he saw in both projects by the end of the twentieth century.

Chapters 4 and 5 look to the legacies of Mead and Oliver for anthropologists in the 1970s and 1980s. Chapter 4 examines the search for extraterrestrials as an elaboration on the anthropological engagement with the

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Other through the work of anthropologists in dialogue with NASA, SETI (the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence), and other institutions involved in searching for and theorizing about extraterrestrial life. I suggest that this fascination with the "ultimate" Other is also a kind of speculation on the future of the human. Chapter 5, on the other hand, is concerned with the ways anthropologists have engaged in the "official" practice of cultural futurism, that is, those theories and methods associated with the work of futurists. Never central to a field dominated by political scientists and sociologists, anthropologists have nonetheless contributed a window onto alternative futures based on the experiences of both non-Western and ordinary peoples removed from the pundits and power elite who make up the usual interlocutors for futurists. Among other things, these evocations of cultural futures break us out of what Robert Textor has called "tempocentrism": "To one's being unduly centered in one's own temporality" (Textor 1995a: 522). Ultimately, anthropological approaches can do even more; by questioning "tempocentrism," an anthropology of cultural futures calls "our" temporality into question. Do we really live in the homogenous, progressive chronotype of the modern, or, as Bruno Latour (1993) has questioned in another context, is this another case where "we have never been modern"?

Chapters 6 and 7 evaluate anthropological future work in a present, a time where "the future" itself is bracketed away. Under conditions of speed-up, the future becomes proleptic, that is, it seeps into the present moment as "emergent" phenomena. Many anthropologists have fastened on emergent phenomena as a way of inserting anthropological voices into rapidly changing areas in science and technology—for example, genetics and reproduction—and intervening in order to create more equitable cultural futures. And yet, this race to the new may in the end turn Pyrrhic; what is construed as "emergent" may turn out to be a dull recapitulation of the past, that is, the "novel" rather than the "new." These last chapters address the possibility of the truly "new" construed as cultural changes involving new formations of power and knowledge that utterly change our conceptions of ourselves and others. Despite a long history of future work, we have yet to harness the critical potentials of anthropological futures. In the final chapter I trace the possibility of an "open" future as ultimately suggestive of both the critical new and representing the best opportunity for an anthropology of the future.

In all of these chapters, I have (mostly) resisted the urge to insert my own future work which has ranged broadly from simulations (Collins 2006a) and the application of Delphi methods to the emergence of "cyborg" identities in multiagent systems composed of human and non-human agents (Collins 2006b; Collins and Trajkovski 2006). My own experiences have both con-

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fronted me with my own tempocentrisms while at the same time convincing me of the (mostly) untapped critical potentials of the future as a site for cultural alterity. In this I have been aided by what I have come to think of as "theorists of the new," that is, the philosopher Henri Bergson and his latter-day apologists Gilles Deleuze, Keith Ansell-Pearson, and Elizabeth Grosz. But I would argue that their relevance to anthropology lies less in grafting their theory onto anthropology than in using their ideas to recognize what was anthropological all along. Like them, though, it is my hope and expectation that the future brings with it the utterly unanticipated; it is, after all, in the context of surprise and shock that we have the best opportunity for imagining alternatives to the present.

Although anthropology is usually thought of as a "time machine" taking people back through time by the study of the Other, a better image of anthropology might be as a temporal anomaly where the many specious "spacetimes" of nineteenth century cultural anthropology collide in a flash that undermines exactly what we think we mean by "past," "present," and "future." But this means a tantalizing, even surrealistic, evocation rather than a prognostication, designed as much to unsettle what we think we know as to gesture toward what will be. Ultimately, what that future might look like must remain unknown; this is the promise of culture conceived anthropologically.

NOTES

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1. That is, the "Moore's Law" attributed to Gordon Moore, the cofounder of Intel, which, in the halcyon days of the 1990s, became a rallying cry for venture capital in Silicon Valley.
2. Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992) elaborates on his idea that "liberal democracy" constitutes the endpoint of historical development (at least in his highly selective version of Hegelian dialectic).
3. And yet, by emphasizing the integrative character of culture, many anthropologists in the twentieth century were (however unintentionally) echoing the Arnoldian project by outlining a "modal personality" to which members of society should conform.

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