

# Introduction

Aimée Joyce, Katie Aston and William Tantam

'Tenses' is a publication that emerges from the experiences and reflections and topics of new researchers and their engagement with current anthropological debates on 'time'. The collection includes a range of writings crystallising critiques and narratives explored in the Department of Anthropology Doctoral Writing Up Seminar, 2012-2103 under the supervision of Professor Victoria Goddard. The doctoral students involved worked across a number of field sites, including the UK, Jamaica, Poland, Romania and Spain, and on diverse topics including religion, kinship, gender and folklore. In spite of this 'time' or, more specifically, temporality emerged as a shared theme. The works included in this publication explore our thoughts as practitioners but foreground the lived experiences of our research respondents, explorations of the tenses in our research and ask questions about the role of these past, present and future in anthropological practice. The authors of these articles aim to tease out how their respondents encounter tense; how does it make meaning in their lives, and how do their life stories make sense and use of time? The written and visual contributions open up a conversation about the tenses of research practice impact on Anthropology and its methods.

3

## 4

Nancy Munn, writing on the complexities of time from an anthropological perspective, stated that the challenges posed by the study of time were due in part to the fact that it is “difficult to find a meta language to conceptualize something so ordinary and apparently transparent in everyday life.” Concerns about time in anthropology have been wide ranging, covering the distinction between a structural and oecological time division; processes underlying time reckoning; calendric patterns; cultural constructions of time and of de-temporalized experience; time as a medium of control; etc. Having come across particular configurations of time and space and different registers of time within the lives of our respondents, we have found the works of EP Thompson, Alfred Gell and Pierre Bourdieu offer guidance for critically engaging with time in practice. Particularly we are interested in an approach that draws attention back to subjective temporal experiences, thus focusing on tense and tempo rather than a priori notions of time. We want to explore how the “modern” subject’s ideas about time are anchored in a present that has as its “context of meaning” an engagement with the past and future. With increasing interest across the social sciences in memory, forgetting, crisis, futures and nostalgia (especially in anthropology) this practice and tense based approach to time offers an experiential and novel way to conceptualise our own research.

‘Tenses’ is an opportunity to take this practice based model of time and explore work on the doing of anthropological research at a post graduate level. All the contributors ask questions about

the role of past, future and present in anthropological study. We draw out how anthropologists and their respondents encounter and come to understand time and its influence, how they represent and materialize tense both in the field and when they return to the academy to write their monographs and articles.

This publication is a way to expose the work of emerging academics while employing a variety of presentation styles. Utilising a wide range of ethnographic evidence and theoretical frames here is an opportunity for young scholars to explore a variety of writing and visual forms, inclusive of traditional and innovative styles, in the Goldsmiths ethos. When we were designing this publication we asked for work in three broad formats. Firstly we asked for articles in the traditional format, where ethnographic data was analysed and theory was introduced and discussed. Secondly we asked for 'ethnographic impressions' these are shorter and with less emphasis on theory, these pieces aim to evoke situation when the importance of time, tense or tempo to research was brought sharply into focus. Finally a number of contributions are primary photographic works, exploring how time is captured by photography or how photography is used to document the tempo of fieldwork.

'Tenses' is split into three sections, the past progressive; the conditional perfect; the simple present. The first section, the past progressive, contains pieces interested on action going on at a certain point on the past, yet they also emphasis the role that ideas of duration and course have on these actions. This section

## 6

contains work by Zahira Araguete-Toribio and Katie Aston. Zahira's piece is a photo essay documenting the exhumation of a civil war mass grave in Spain. She explores how this exhumation contains multiple tempos dependant on the time of the families and the time of the archaeologists and the connection between these two relational times. Zahira has also contributed the cover image for this journal. The watch belongs to José Sánchez-Paniagua, resident of the village Puebla de Alcocer in the province of Badajoz, Spain. It is one of the only things he owns belonging to his grandfather. Pedro Sánchez-Paniagua was a socialist miner from the same town. At end of the Civil War, when Francoist troops took the village, Pedro was imprisoned and was later murdered and buried with other people from the locality in two trenches situated in the countryside. Whilst in prison, knowing he would soon die, he gave the watch to his sister just days before his execution so that he could leave something for his son. Zahira met José and photographed his watch while working on the exhumation of the mass grave that he hoped would hold his grandfather's remains. Katie Aston's piece is a short article about one aspect of her fieldwork on humanism, atheism and non-Religion in England. She looks particularly at one humanist marriage ceremony and considers the way ideas about the past, present and the future, are compressed in a single event and how the event rearranges tense for all those involved.

The Second section, the conditional perfect, brings together a selection of articles that are about something that might have happened in the past, or how the past was reinterpreted or

imagined in attempts to redefine the future or validate the past. This section also concerns how researchers are often led to imagine or dream the past alongside their respondents based on the material objects they encounter in the field. Gabriela Nicolescu begins this section with a piece drawn from her research in the Muzeul de Artă Populară in Bucharest, Romania. Her article considers how contemporary displays of 'folk objects' collected during communism disrupt ideas of the past, present and future. The next work is a photo essay by Aimée Joyce. The essay is a response to a set of lost photo collages she encountered while conducting research on space and religion in a Polish Marian sanctuary on the border of Belarus. This section closes with an article by Alexandra Urdea. This article begins with a box of photographs discovered by Alexandra in the Horniman Museum stores as she prepared for her fieldwork in Romania. The article traces the lives of the images in the archive and uncovers how they altered and shaped the understanding of a 'peasant past' for the ethnographers, museum workers, anthropologists and villagers who encountered them.

7

The final section of this publication is titled the simple present, there is a certain irony employed in this title. Grammatically we use the 'simple present' when talking about encounters and events happening, once, never or several times in the here and now. But as the pieces in this section demonstrate the present tense is inextricably tied to the past and the future, in other words the present is anything but 'simple'. Both pieces in this section are ethnographic impressions. Steph Grohmann's piece

## 8

is based on an encounter that happened after her fieldwork in Bristol but is directly tied to this work as both concerns space, home, and the politics of homelessness. Through the encounter that motivates this article Steph considers what happens to people for whom tense is not continuous, who experience life in a disassociated manner. The final piece in this publication is from William Tantam and begins with an interview he conducted while researching football in Jamaica. The interview concerns the domestic chores, problems and interventions that one player faces while attempting to get to a daily amateur football game. Through focusing on this football match, temporally and spatially William draws out how the player's experience of time is altered in the 45 minutes that constitute the game.

'Tenses' allows the reader to get a sense of the unique atmosphere of the Goldsmiths Anthropology Department, and to read critically engaged work on the practice of Anthropological research at a post graduate level. While contributing to the Anthropological conversation about time and research design, the use of a range of presentation styles and the heavy visual content of the publication aims to open conversation across disciplines. This publication is an opportunity to open up a multi-vocal conversation, a conversation across our research; a conversation across disciplines within Goldsmiths; maybe even a conversation across Anthropological departments in the University of London.

