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# Afterword: Expertise in Our Time

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## Introduction

What do we talk about when we talk about expertise? What does it mean to be an expert? Who decides what counts as expertise and what does not? Today, at a time when we are awash in digital information, often to the point of information overload, these questions reflect a kind of expertise anxiety that may well be a hallmark of the contemporary, so-called digital age. This anxiety is exacerbated (especially, I would argue, among academics), by what I think of as expertise inflation: we live in a time when it seems like almost anyone with Internet access, a well-curated blog, clever branding and enough interest, can be a self-proclaimed expert on almost any topic. It is no accident that, after reading the collected articles in this issue, I was inspired to think about contested perspectives on expertise as a sign of our times—both the epochal time of the digital age and the turbulent times, as Annelise Riles (2013) called them in her keynote address to the Canadian Anthropological Society—post-2008 market meltdown. The key contribution the authors in this thematic section make to the anthropology of knowledge is not only their close attention to the production and circulation of various modes of expertise; rather, what makes these articles so compelling and, indeed, so *timely* is their insistence that expert knowledge is always bound up with temporality. Expert knowledge, as Alexandra Widmer points out in her introduction, becomes expert knowledge precisely by “mobilizing and naturalizing experiences of time” and by compelling people “to orient themselves in time in particular ways.”

Just as expertise anxiety and expertise inflation can be used to describe the way that the neoliberal “knowledge economy” is experienced and felt in the new digital age, so too have other contests over expert knowledge located elsewhere in space and time been inextricably linked to the politics of temporality. As Nicola Mooney points out in her article, keen anthropological attention has been paid of late to those more spatial aspects of

contemporary life; to relationships between the global and the local. However, the significance of the temporal tends to be lost, or at least pushed to the margins, when we focus so much of our attention on flux and flows. As these articles demonstrate, bringing time and the temporal into focus provides a way to think critically about connections between types and effects of expert knowledge across a wide variety of contexts that might otherwise seem loosely connected at best: objects of conversion, including 150-year-old eyeglasses and demographic reports in Vanuatu (Mitchell and Widmer, respectively), protests against educational reforms in Chile (Rita Henderson), British colonial depictions of Jat Sikhs in India (Mooney), and the working conditions of anthropologists-as-employees in a small Canadian university (UdoKrautwurst).

Several of the articles (particularly those by Widmer, Mitchell and Mooney), discuss anthropological expertise as it is produced and circulates alongside other kinds of expert knowledge. The question of the relative value of anthropological expertise and how best to wield it, though not the explicit focus of the collection, was nonetheless always in the back of my mind as I contemplated these articles. Perhaps this is due in part to the fact that, like Widmer and Mitchell, I have also conducted fieldwork in Vanuatu, where I had to come to terms with the ways in which my own expertise was understood by my local interlocutors. After much hand-wringing over whether or not I was comfortable with my role as a cultural expert, I realized that, if we do not lay claim to our own expertise, someone else will gladly do it for us (Cummings 2005). As Krautwurst so adeptly reminds us (and here it is worth noting that the “us” both he and I refer to is anthropologists who work in the academy as researchers and teachers) in his essay, not only are anthropologists, as members of “the faculty” part of an “enunciatory community of expertise,” we are also experts at something quite particular—doing ethnography and interrogating common sense. However, our expertise does not exist in a vacuum. For those of us working in the academy, the conditions under which we are able to produce and exercise our expertise (by doing fieldwork and writing ethnography) are caught up in the ways in which we, as university employees, are made to conceptualize and then fit our time into research time, teaching time and service time. As the working conditions under which we compartmentalize our time change in the neoliberal university, so too do the conditions under which we are able to produce and circulate our own expertise.

For instance, I know of few colleagues who think of themselves as experts at service, yet, as Krautwurst

points out, time served is increasingly one of the key econometric measures against which faculty are assessed. Furthermore, as I discuss in further detail at the end of this article, the role of student/consumer demand in shaping our expertise, so omnipresent in academic work-life today (for instance, in the way that we conceptualize our expertise as teachers with strengths in particular high-demand areas), is often downplayed in the research-focused future we discuss with our graduate students. The fact that neither service time nor student/consumer-driven demand are part of the anticipatory regime into which anthropology graduate students are inculcated but *are* such crucial aspects of contemporary academic life, deserves scrutiny—exactly the kind of ethnographic scrutiny that Krautwurst asks us to undertake. His article questions how the way we think critically about expert knowledge, or attempt to do an anthropology of knowledge, might be tied up in and shaped by our own disciplinary norms, practices and expectations (or disappointments) surrounding expertise. Below, I explore a few of the themes and insights about time and the expert that arise in this collection of articles, always keeping in mind what they might tell us about the conditions of circulation and production of our own expertise. In the end, I return briefly to the questions Krautwurst raises about anthropologist-as-employee and employee-as-anthropologist.

### Expertise and Orientations in Time

A kind of time known as “the future” looms large in each of these articles. In every case, the workings of expert knowledge pay little heed to the complexities of the present, failing to do them justice. Fortunately, the expertise of anthropologists, which as noted above, often circulates alongside other kinds of expert knowledge, is firmly grounded in the ethnographic present. A strength of these articles is their steadfast attention to the everyday realities of the present and their dedication to taking lay knowledge, which inhabits the present, seriously. The irony here is that it is through this focus in and on the present that the complexities of various futures come into focus. For not all futures are created equal and, as these articles demonstrate, visions of the future and contested understandings of what is at stake in the future, look very different depending on whose expertise defines them and to what end. For instance, Mitchell and Mooney, focusing on historical missionary and colonial expertise on the New Hebridean island of Aneityum and in India under British rule, respectively, each illuminate the means by which experts deployed new temporal frameworks to implement their agendas. On Aneityum, Reverend Geddie, an expert not just on Presbyterianism

but, more generally, in the art of persuasion and conversion, understood the significance of temporality for inculcating Christian conduct. Convincing islanders to convert to Christianity, for Geddie, meant refashioning local cycles of ritual time (and therefore chiefly expertise) with a more suitably Christian temporality; for instance, a seven-day week with a Sabbath. Mitchell suggests that paying attention to the materiality of conversion to Christianity—encoded in everyday objects such as eyeglasses, stones, books and arrowroot—deflects the tendency to view conversion and its temporalities in singular ways, either as cultural projects of continuities or as ruptures with the past. Geddie's success on Aneityum is not only reflected in contemporary Christian practice, it is also reflected more broadly in the contemporary understanding, throughout Vanuatu, of the introduction of Christianity as a moment of rupture between the heathen past (the time of darkness) and the Christian present (the time of light). Similarly, Mooney describes the way that British colonial experts framed the Jat Sikh community as unparalleled farmers and soldiers, a framework that has since been taken up by the community itself as a post-colonial badge of honour and identity marker (regardless of how many contemporary Jat Sikhs actually participate in farming or soldiering). Expert colonial knowledge of the Jat Sikhs as farmers and soldiers par excellence drew heavily on a time; once categorized as superior yeomen with great military prowess, the Jat Sikhs were conceptually brought into the modern time and space of the British and, furthermore, were understood to be temporally "ahead" of other colonial subjects—simply put, less traditional and more modern.

In the articles by Widmer and Henderson, *anticipation* is highlighted as a key feature of future-oriented expertise. Anticipation seems, at first glance, to be beyond critique or reproach; after all, those things we anticipate are those things we look forward to, hope for and wish could come sooner. Or are they? Perhaps it depends on who you ask. In contemporary Vanuatu, Widmer writes, "The present is governed according to the future." The future at stake in this case is the one anticipated in the expert knowledge of demographers, one in which the archipelago, and especially its urban areas, are anticipated as overpopulated and underdeveloped. In the present, this anticipatory expert knowledge marks certain segments of the growing population for improvement and intervention; in this case, young mothers. Moreover, expert anxiety over young mothers, and their potential to derail a certain kind of future (one in which Vanuatu develops according to expert plans and timelines), translates into often-complementary forms of lay

knowledge about gender and generation: young women (particularly unwed mothers) are held collectively and individually responsible for the birthrate and are alternately castigated as pitiful, reckless, selfish and strong-headed. While demographic experts, or those development experts informed by demographic predictions, are adept at targeting certain populations for intervention, it is worth noting that a little anthropological, ethnographic expertise could go a long way in this case. During my own fieldwork in Vanuatu (also with young women, many of whom were unwed mothers), exasperated expatriate development workers would often ask me why, in my expert opinion, so many unwed girls and women get pregnant. My expert opinion—that many of these same development workers were so taken in by discourses of demographic doom that they failed, quite simply, to systematically *ask young women themselves*—usually fell on deaf ears. Likewise, Widmer shows how the anticipatory temporality of demographic expertise focuses attention and often interventions in ways that are not often particularly useful in the present: stories of young mothers giving birth on mats on the floor in Port Vila hospital for lack of space in the overflowing maternity ward are cast as indicating a problem with an excess of young mothers, rather than with the desperately under-resourced conditions at the hospital.

In Chile, as Henderson demonstrates, the anticipated future, one in which development will flourish, is not merely planned but, rather, is *enabled* by the work and knowledge of neoliberal planning experts. The future is more than anticipated; it is seen to be a collectively shared *fait accompli*. To anticipate and enact this "flourishing future" requires that experts and lay people alike ignore the conditions of the present—for instance, the detrimental effects of neoliberal educational reforms that motivated the 2011 student protests. Moreover, the envisioning of a single, shared, uncontested future requires a peculiar reorientation to, if not a complete effacement of, the unsettled and unsettling past in Chile. As in Vanuatu, where young mothers, and even youth in general, challenge proper expert-informed orientations to the present *and* the past, so too do anticipatory frameworks in contemporary Chile have the unintended consequence of reorienting students' attitudes to both the past and the future in a way that produces inter-generational fissures. For instance, former teacher (and returned exile) Don Tito recalls having learned, in his own days as a student, to be political in particular ways and to orient himself to the future by envisioning himself as an active participant in bringing it to fruition. Today's students, he says, are differently oriented and, indeed, fearful of *both* the past and the future: increasingly

restrictive curricula (from which, for one thing, the word *dictatorship* has been expunged in favour of the less politically loaded *military government*) and an increasingly privatized education system both discourages them from imagining themselves as active participants in history and limits their imaginings of future possibilities to that of cheap and flexible labour. In short, educational reform experts in Chile ignore the present (and selectively engage the past) to anticipate the future.

Henderson's article, with its ethnographic attention to the present (she herself worked as a teacher in the reforming Chilean education system), exemplifies how we might put our own disciplinary expertise to good use in the service of a critical anthropology of knowledge. Understanding educational reforms in Chile requires understanding what Adams et al. (2009) call *abduction*, a mode of temporal politics that replaces histories of the present with histories of the future. In Canada, such abduction in the academy can be seen in anticipatory slogans such as "The University of the Future" or, in the case of my own institution, "Tomorrow is Created Here." Krautwurst's article is ultimately a call for us (anthropologists working in the academy as both teachers and researchers) to pay the same attention to the academy in transition at home that Henderson pays to educational reform in Chile and to which each of the authors here pay to their respective field sites and ethnographic documents.

### Time, Seduction and Doing Damage

Why is it that the kind of ethnography of the academy under neoliberal governmentality that Krautwurst calls for has, for the most part, been left undone (see Menck and Young 2005 for one notable exception)? One reason, he notes, is that "we have been too busy as *ethnographers* [that is, putting in the research time required to succeed as academics] to be aware of the field qua field shaping expertise." He also notes that the sort of econometric, "audit culture" expertise that is usually called upon to study, measure, evaluate and shape the future of the academy is so far removed from the kinds of questions anthropologists ask and methods we employ as to make our own expertise seem woefully inappropriate and inexpert. Here, by way of conclusion, I'd like to suggest a few other reasons, inspired by the other articles in this issue, to underscore the urgency of Krautwurst's suggestion that we need to "do damage" (Fabian 1991) in and to the current academic status quo by studying not just up but *across* and turning our critical gaze to the conditions of our own employment as they determine the conditions of our own expertise-making.

First, to borrow from Krautwurst's discussion of ducts and "duction," expert knowledge is *seductive*. And although it is not an explicit focus of these articles, the key role of material objects in this seduction is implicitly raised in several of the articles (and explicitly by Mitchell). We have been presented with several examples of material objects imbued with seductive expertise. Reverend Geddie's eyeglasses, the rusted printing press and the ruins of the once-impressive Presbyterian church on Aneityum act as haunting reminders of Geddie's expertise in the art of persuasion and they continue to index the temporalities of conversion. The real-time population clock in Port Vila flashes its expertly generated doomsday numbers directly across the road from the central location of market house, the one place in the town where it might be viewed by ni-Vanuatu, expatriates and tourists in equal numbers, turning individual issues of fertility and sexuality into a spectacle to be consumed (and fretted over). When he enters his field site, Krautwurst dons a white lab coat, which he describes as "one of the most potent signs of modern times about modern times." In Chile, economic reforms mean that one of Henderson's informants is able to orient himself to the future, not by investing in his family's future but by purchasing a television on credit. In the Punjab, the introduction of European temporalities was accomplished, at least in part, through the introduction of calendars, clocks, railways and irrigation systems.

How might the seductiveness of objects imbued with expertise apply to our work, as anthropologists, in the academy (or, our anthropology, as workers in the academy)? Myriad relevant objects spring to mind: cell phones, laptops, tablets and i-Clickers, to name just a few. The ubiquity of these objects in our classrooms and the collective anxiety about them that I hear in my corridor talk with colleagues is telling in and of itself. However, it also leads to my second point, inspired by the theme of these articles, about the contemporary state of affairs in the academy. All of these objects are used, by academics, administrators and students alike, to mark a shift in the academy that is understood on distinctly temporal terms: these objects are all part and parcel of the digital age and they are temporally marked (and often lamented or disparaged) as the tools of "the Millennials" or "Generation Y." On the one hand, we tend to talk (not always, but often) about these objects in terms of their seductiveness and as if theirs is a seduction that threatens to undermine our own expertise as scholars and teachers. I suspect that most of the academic anthropologists I know, if forced to make a choice, would identify more closely with Reverend Geddie's desire to shift Aneityumese understandings of

time by teaching the islanders to read and write than they would with those students who proclaim their desire to complete all of their course requirements via smartphone. On the other hand, I think that we may make too much of the temporal significance and seductiveness of these technologies in our attempts to understand the changing conditions of our own employment. For instance, research on the shifting nature of the academy, already rather limited in quantity, tends to be rather limited in scope by its temporal focus on “kids these days.” One recent collection on the nature of today’s academy is entitled *Generation X Professors Speak: Voices from Academia* (Watson 2013), and it contains an essay seductively entitled “Let X = Professor, Now Solve for Y: or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Millennials” (Falcetta 2013). Two recent ethnographic studies, Susan Blum’s *My Word! Plagiarism and College Culture* (2009) and Rebekah Nathan’s *My Freshman Year: What a Freshman Learned by Becoming a Student* (2005), also enlist generation as a key site of difference and as an explanatory mechanism. All are interesting reads and give valuable insights into the mindset and expectations of today’s students, but neither, I would argue, come close to doing damage in the way that Krautwurst suggests we ought to.

A more “damaging” approach, one that still focuses on the relationship between expertise and temporality, might focus not on Millennials as a generation, nor on their love of technological gadgetry, but rather on the fact that today’s students, as Krautwurst points out, have never known anything other than neoliberal times and have subsequently developed neoliberal agency. Richard Handler’s recent essay “Disciplinary Adaptation and Undergraduate Desire: Anthropology and Global Development Studies in the Liberal Arts Curriculum” (2013) explores students’ neoliberal agency in action and demonstrates precisely how said agency (coupled with administrative pressures) shaped his own working conditions as an anthropologist. A group of highly motivated students at the University of Virginia desired, and successfully lobbied for, curricular innovation in the form of a new undergraduate major in global development studies. Handler, who became the director of the program, documents the challenges he faced in incorporating “anthropological wisdom” (Handler 2013:189) or expertise into the new interdisciplinary major. One of the most vexing, and telling, difficulties was that students were less interested in developing deep disciplinary expertise than they were in cultivating a specific skill set that would lead to future employment opportunities in the field of international development. Undergraduate desire for a morally admirable and, most importantly, a

useful and “engaged” curriculum (which, as Krautwurst points out, has increasingly come to characterize what the Canadian university “should” do in neoliberal times) puts anthropologists in the awkward position of needing to speak responsibly on behalf of the discipline, while still achieving access to institutional resources for intellectual and pedagogical projects. Handler suggests two tactics based on his own experience: “Anthropologists can lend their energies [and expertise] outside their departments to interdisciplinary programs ... or we can try to ‘corner the market’ on trendy topics by bringing them inside the anthropology major” (2013:196). These are the kinds of choices anthropologists as university employees increasingly face, and we rarely think (or write) ethnographically about how these choices, so characteristic of our times, shape our own expert knowledge. Handler echoes Krautwurst’s call to do damage when he states, “Social-cultural anthropologists are well-suited to analyzing the political dynamics and cultural significance of university structures; now we must learn to play with them” (2013:201). Read together, the articles in this volume provide a much-needed ethnographic and theoretical toolkit for doing so. As Handler concludes, this kind of attention to our own time(s) and our own expert knowledge may be essential to our institutional survival.

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