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Time after Time: Narratives of the *Longue Durée* in the Anthropocene

Stephen W. Sawyer

1 No doubt this time it's different.

2 *This* planetary crisis requires us to reconsider our relationship to narrative. A new sense of the scale and impact of human settlement has convinced humanists and social scientists that it is time to engage with the Anthropocene. What follows offers an attempt to sketch out some of the narrative ramifications of this engagement and our growing literary and historical interest in this novel age in which humans have become a global geophysical force. I hope to offer up some hypotheses situated at the crossroads between social scientific investigations of the Anthropocene and a dramatic shift in the scales of time and space that have been motivating both literary and social scientific investigations in recent years—toward deep time and global spatial contexts. Due to the tremendous scope and scientific implications of these fields, my ambition is reduced to providing some remarks about new potential areas of collaboration between historians and literary scholars around a nascent but galloping interest in scholarship on the Anthropocene and a resurgence in the interest of deep time as well as the *longue durée*. In particular, I would like to emphasize the potential for developing *longue durée* narratives in this moment of questioning around the agents and effects of geological change.

3 What follows also builds on the new attention among literary and historical scholars to the legacy of the *Annales* school—the historical school that developed the most sustained theoretical reflection on thinking historical continuity and change across the *longue durée*. This resurgent interest is in part a push to overcome ostensibly damning disciplinary trends as well as transformations in higher education and the call for new engagement by intellectuals in public life. As David Armitage and Jo Guldi have noted, "in many realms of historical writing, big is back."[1] In their recent *History Manifesto*, Armitage and Guldi credit Fernand Braudel, leader of the second generation of the *Annales* School, with developing one of the most sustained reflections on the *longue durée*.[2] However, in spite of the major contributions of Braudel and his colleagues in

this area during the 1950s and 1960s, Armitage and Guldi argue that thinking across long time scales slowly disappeared from the historian's radar in the 1970s-2000s. "The reasons for its retreat," they suggest, "were sociological as much as intellectual"; "the motivations for its return are both political and technological." (Armitage and Guldi, 2013, 9) Technologically, they argue, we have acquired new analytical tools that have contributed to creating a new "ecosystem" rooted in "the abounding sources of big data" that are of "ecological, governmental, economic, and cultural nature, much of it newly available to the lens of digital analysis." (*ibid.*, 9) The attempt to expand the breadth of temporal scale has also been part of a response to a political shift: the slow but steady breakdown of the nation as the dominant paradigm in literary and historical studies and an attempt to find new territorial scales of scientific inquiry more adapted to thinking across the long term. In short, a temporal solution has been provided to a spatial problem. "All the uses of the *longue durée* reflect efforts to stretch the concept of the time period, to get away from the rigidity of periodization thinking in units of decades and centuries," writes Sandra Gilman in her "Oceans of Longue Durée" (330). Similarly, Wai Chee Dimock's *Through Other Continents: American Literature across Deep Time* has suggested, "some historical phenomena need large-scale analysis. They need hundreds, thousands, or even billions of years to be recognized for what they are: phenomena constituted by their temporal extension with a genealogy much longer than the life span of any biological individual, and interesting for just that reason." (5) Building on this perspective, Edward O. Wilson has attempted to restore the pertinence of categories of deep history by defining it as a study in which "human behavior is seen as the product not just of recorded history, ten thousand years recent, but of deep history, the combined genetic and cultural changes that created humanity over hundreds of [thousands of] years." (*In Search of Nature*, ix-x) Writing across temporal and spatial boundaries, then, it has been argued, will fulfill a professional, political and even moral imperative for historians and literary scholars to finally undermine the stranglehold of methodological nationalism as well as get back in touch with a larger public audience by responding to some of the fundamental concerns of our day. Or, in the words of Armitage and Guldi, "the longue durée has an ethical purpose," to the extent that "it proposes an engaged academia trying to come to terms with the knowledge production that characterizes our own moment of crisis, not just within the humanities but across the global system as a whole." (Armitage and Guldi, 2013, 37)

4 But for all of the rising tides of big history and literary studies of deep time, this renewed push toward the *longue durée*, and even "universal history," has met with some rather tepid reactions among scholars.[3] Social scientists in a forum around David Armitage and Jo Guldi's article in the *Annales* such as Lynn Hunt have noted that for all its merits, merely clamoring for a return to the *longue durée* is insufficient for developing a critical perspective on some of the broader trends in higher education, particularly the impact of new university structures after the slow democratization of higher education that pushed historians toward greater specialization. Historians have also launched a stinging critique against Bill Gates's overwhelming financial support for a high-school history curriculum rooted in "Big History."[4] Meanwhile, literary scholars like Sandra Gilman have also expressed concerns, noting

> What are the limits of the *longue durée* ? The very ubiquity of the term, detached from the Braudel context, free-floating and multiplying, suggests that it has become something of an automatic response, by now a gesture half empty that formulaically extends conventional chronological divisions without asking new

> questions about them or their assumed primacy. In this context the language question is often approached by historians and literary critics alike as an add-on, relegated to footnotes on sources and editions, decoupled from space and time, whether the time is that of the *longue durée* or any other chronological unit. (Gilman, 331)

5 In other words, while there appears to be a general consensus that it is time to move toward new forms of trans-national and trans-temporal history, the critical implications of this enterprise have remained highly unsatisfying. For the time being, clamoring through manifestos that "big is back" proves more descriptive than prescriptive to the extent that it is a promise that remains unrealizable within our current conceptions of the *longue durée*.

6 Key, then, to any return to the *longue durée* is a more serious reconsideration of the social scientific foundations of the *longue durée* in its previous manifestations and an acknowledgement of the limitations of these earlier formulations for thinking about longer time scales and beyond national boundaries today. In short, the question remains: Given that there is a renewed interest in the *longue durée* among historians and literary scholars alike, especially through the category of deep time, how might this new concern be different from the one developed in the civilizational studies of a Toynbee or the *Annales* histories of Braudel? The answer, I would like to argue, resides in considering the temporal imperatives brought on by narrating in the Anthropocene.

The *longue durée* and geo-history

7 In their call for the return of the *longue durée*, Armitage and Guldi pay only passing attention to the scientific foundations for investigating deep historical time. It is striking that for all of their insistence that we must move beyond studies of a few generations or even a few centuries, they show exceedingly little interest in the actual scientific arguments that grounded earlier theories of the *longue durée*, and Fernand Braudel's in particular. As a result, instead of attempting to root the *longue durée* scientifically, they focus on long-term historians' capacity to engage with a wider public on salient issues. From this perspective, the short-term histories that reigned throughout the 1960s-1990s, they suggest, broke with a longer tradition that had guided the birth of modern historical consciousness: "What we think of as modern western historical writing," Guldi and Armitage argue, "began with the desire to shape the present and the future derived from classical models."[5] Our focus on a few decades, they insist, has left this engagement behind through a provincialization of temporal and territorial scales, reduced to the exceedingly petite.

8 It is certainly true that previous generations of scholars before the 1960s drew upon *longue durée* perspectives in order to shape public opinion in the present and for the future. One has only to look so far as Toynbee's postwar collection of essays, *Civilization on Trial*, to appreciate the potential of a *longue-durée* history for assessing the prospective problems of contemporary society. As one of his reviewers wrote in 1949: "*Civilization on Trial* is oriented toward the future as much as toward the past." He continued, insisting on Toynbee's attempt to root his work in the deep past: "Toynbee tries to hammer into the reader's consciousness his conviction which no one will seriously dispute, that the five or six millennia of civilized history are but a small fraction of the 600,000 or more years ascribed by scientists to the human race, the 500

to 800 million years of the existence of life on earth and the 2,000 million years which seem to have passed since the appearance of our planet." (Baron, 1949, 111) But for all of its ambition, it was not long before Toynbee's approach came under fire in the famous critiques of Pieter Geyl and Hugh Trevor Roper in the 1950s.[6] Of course, Toynbee did seek to provide a *longue-durée* perspective on the present and future—along the lines called for by Armitage and Guldi. But in so doing, his critics insisted, he also succumbed to a baroque messianism that was entirely unfit for the post-war social scientific approach to history. At the very least, such critics of Toynbee should serve to remind us that any call for a return to the *longue durée* must move beyond a simple nostalgia of historians who dug deep to look forward.

9 Indeed, there were already voices in the 1950s who attempted to rescue long scales of history by responding to the criticisms leveled at historians like Toynbee. It was precisely in the context of the rebirth of post-war social science in Europe in the late 1950s—just as Geyl and Trevor-Roper were hastily burying Toynbee—that Fernand Braudel attempted to provide a more rigorous foundation for the *longue durée*. Instead of focusing on an idealist, quasi-hegelian ideal of civilizational progress as the key concept animating the human *longue durée,* Braudel attempted to root the longest time scale in a deeply revised conception of the relationship between history and human geography.[7] Braudel launched his campaign against the standard uses of temporality in history by arguing that the *longue durée* required a different consideration of the relationship between human time and the more invariable rhythms of the natural world. His ambition, as he stated it, was to explore the imperceptible relationship between man and his environment: "a history in which all change is slow, a history of constant repetition, ever-recurring cycles." (Braudel, *The Mediterranean*, 20) This emphasis on man's relationship to nature therefore introduced "an almost timeless history," he insisted. However, the key word to this approach was "almost"; for there was change over time, even if it was change that had been so slow as to be invisible to the previous historian's gaze. Reintroducing this longer scale of temporality broke with the vacuous idea of geography as a mere unchanging backdrop upon which human activity took place.

10 Braudel explained this approach more thoroughly in his 1958 article on "La longue durée." He insisted that our histories had been so shortsighted as to focus on the high frequency and rapid shifts in politics at the expense of other time frames: "it is undeniable that, in general, historians of the last 100 years have concentrated almost entirely on politics, focusing on the dramas of 'great events,' and working in the shortest time scales."[8] He therefore established a sharp dichotomy between the short time frame of political decisions in the realm of policy and the longest-term geological time that structured those decisions. "Man has been prisoner for entire centuries of climates, vegetation, animal populations, cultures; in other words, a slowly constructed equilibrium that one cannot challenge without threatening everything."[9] As a result, he insisted, it was the semi-immobile structures of human existence that had yet to be explored by historians: "all of the levels, all of these thousands of levels and thousands of ruptures in historical time may be understood through this profound, semi-immobility. Everything gravitates around it."[10]

11 This attempt to demonstrate the interaction between human time and geological time had deep roots in Braudelian historical perspective. Braudel was of course aware of the tradition of the civilizational approach to history. He, however, would provide a

renewed social scienticity by elaborating a more robust methodology. In a set of conferences given while he was a prisoner of war in Germany for his fellow soldiers, he provided the basic structure of his vision apropos of his native Lorraine:

> In the eighteenth century, Lorraine experienced multiple transformations, almost an awakening. If we pay close attention to the villages, we see that almost all of them increased the size of their arable lands [...] You know the traditional villages in the Lorraine [...] Village, field, forests, three zones of life [...] the soup, daily work and the exceptional occupation of woodcutting [...] In the eighteenth century the boundaries of the forest that had remained unchanged since the thirteenth century were attacked at multiple points and large isolated farms were created.[11]

12 Introducing the impact of long-term environmental conditions on the immediate political events of the French Revolution, Braudel argued that this *longue durée* of soil occupation and agricultural activity had finally given birth to the tremendous growth in population enabled by the expansion of arable land in the eighteenth century. As a result, the region could play a central role in the French Revolution. He concluded: "I am not suggesting that this history of the East is to be entirely deduced from the increase of new arable land, from this small geographical sign..., of course not. But this example, chosen as an illustration, demonstrates rather a geographical aspect of the large movement of history."[12]

13 Braudel's historical project gave birth to what he famously titled "geo-history." Such an approach required paying particular attention to man's immediate and more short-term political and cultural production through their interaction with the *longue durée* of nature. Employing this methodology, he opened his magisterial book on the Mediterranean with over 75 pages on the mountains, bodies of water, climate and trade routes on sea and land. Insisting on the hostility of its climate, soil, and natural rhythms, Braudel argued that the story of Mediterranean civilization was a story of conquest and suffering, in which man was pitted against the overwhelming force of this recalcitrant and stubborn natural world. "It was necessary to conquer hostile swamps, protect oneself from devastating floods augmented by unforgiving winters and expel malaria."[13] He concluded, "we are witness to a difficult, precarious life; any equilibrium often came at the expense of man."[14]

14 It was precisely this difficulty—the overwhelming challenge of the natural context of the Mediterranean—that revealed the peculiar alignment of the short-term political events and the long-term geological and geographical situation of historical actors. The peculiarities of this world were understood by examining how political possibilities took form based on natural constraints. This *geo-history* therefore required understanding the natural conditions with which a given society was in contact.[15] As Braudel himself defined it in his programmatic article "Géohistoire : la société, l'espace et le temps," it was "the study of a double liaison, from nature to man and man to nature, the study of an action and a reaction, combined, mixed, confounded, renewed endlessly in the reality of the everyday."[16] As Guilherme Ribeiro has noted (Ribeiro, 340), the relationship between man and nature in this conception went in two directions. On the one hand, there were the natural conditions that controlled or constrained human endeavors. On the other, there was the story of the human triumph over these same conditions, as in for example the construction of a boat that is stable enough to conquer the seas or break out of a given area in spite of seasonal difficulties (Braudel, "Géo-histoire," 102-103). These facts belong to different categories and take

place at different speeds, notes Ribiero: there is the "immobile, or almost immobile" history, "indefinitely repeated under the same conditions," and on the other hand is a history that is "very, very slow in spite of the insistent push toward progress." (Braudel, "Géo-histoire," 107-109)

15 It was this approach to the *longue durée* that pushed Braudel to claim that history could only be properly written by building bridges to the other social sciences. Braudel accepted that his vision of historical study had an imperialist relationship to other social sciences. As he made clear in his article on the *longue durée*, his approach included an attempt to bring them all under the great tent of history. But what is of particular interest for us is that this attempt to unite the contributions of other social sciences under the helm of history was rooted in history's privileged position to combine multiple temporalities into one narrative.

16 Lévi-Strauss's structural anthropology held a special place in this push toward a united social science. In Braudel's view, Lévi-Strauss's structuralism provided a social scientific theory of the longest, *almost* unchanging reality of human existence. "Claude Lévi-Strauss is an excellent guide, let's follow him," Braudel argued persuasively. By breaking down myths into signs, Braudel insisted that Lévi-Strauss was able to provide a micro-sociology that opened up toward the ostensibly constant forms of everyday existence. Braudel recognized this important contribution; he suggested however that these long-term structures uncovered by Lévi-Strauss needed to be confronted with the "encounter between the infinitely small." (Braudel, 1958, 747)

17 To be clear, Braudel was not critiquing Lévi-Strauss's use of history; he was not suggesting the replacement of one time scale for another. In fact, he was doing quite the opposite by arguing that Lévi-Strauss had provided an essential contribution to the social sciences by moving beyond an analysis of "events," however great that might be. But in Braudel's view, uncovering the extended and ostensible timelessness of the structures of myths was only a portion of the story. If historians had erred through an overwhelming emphasis on the short term, the anthropology of Lévi-Strauss fell on the opposite end of the spectrum. What was necessary within the social sciences was the ability to combine the two. Unlike Armitage and Guldi's recent call for a return to the *longue durée*, Braudel did not mathematically replace a short-sighted history with a long-range one. The two were not locked in a zero-sum game. Instead, as Braudel argued: "the final effect then is to dissect history into various planes, or, to put it another way, to divide historical time into geographical time, social time, and individual time." (Braudel, *The Mediterranean*, 21)

18 Braudel's breakthrough then was to develop a methodology that allowed for the intersection of multiple time scales in response to a specific historical problem. His argument that history could serve to unite the other social sciences was rooted not only in its relationship to time, but most importantly in its ability to weave natural time and cultural time together into one narrative. "Whether it is a question of the past or the present," wrote Braudel, "an awareness of the plurality of social time is indispensable for a common methodology between the human sciences."[17] So instead of replacing the short with the long, or simply calling for a new commitment to the *longue durée*, he attempted to ameliorate working conceptions of time within history, anthropology, and geography to establish a more sustained dialogue between the human and the natural. Any given historical enterprise needed to investigate the

clashing of the multiple time scales generated by the interaction between human time and natural time.

Multiple temporalities in the Anthropocene

19 One of the major motivations for returning to the *longue durée* has been the methodological implications of climate change in humanities and social sciences and in particular the advent of the Anthropocene. Armitage and Guldi, for example, place climate change at the center of their manifesto, insisting that "we need long-term data on the climate and economy to tell us when someone notices that the earth is changing." (*History Manifesto,* 64) And yet, for all of its political value, this call for a long-term attention to climate change seems to lack a larger scientific motivation in their manifesto beyond simply making historical study more relevant to a wider audience and other public problems. By these standards, climate change is just one among many types of problems that historians should explore to continue to make their works more relevant. As a result, their discussion of the importance of *longue durée* histories for coming to terms with climate change and their dissatisfactions with the current state of the art in this area sidestep a larger need to consider the impact that climate change and specifically the Anthropocene may have on the very relationship between culture and nature in our (historical) narratives.

20 Armitage and Guldi argue that "history's relationship with the public future lies in developing a *longue-durée* contextual background against which archival information, events, and sources can be interpreted." (117) Their argument that the long time scale remains a "contextual background" upon which events can be analyzed or situated is fine as far as it goes. However, it does leave aside one of Braudel's essential contributions for thinking about the relationship between the long and the short—the *longue durée* was more than a mere backdrop. It was a scale of history with its own rhythm that intermingled and combined with the short and medium term. The vast introduction to *The Mediterranean* was precisely an attempt to break down the idea that Mediterranean civilization sat on top of the natural world like oil on water.

21 The relationship between natural time and human time has been given new salience in the age of the Anthropocene. In his "The Climate of History," Dipesh Chakrabarty has noted for example that Braudel's position "was no doubt a great advance for the nature-as-backdrop argument" to the extent that "nature played an active role in modeling human actions." (205) And yet, Chakrabarty lamented, it remained insufficient for coming to terms with the new context of the Anthropocene because it did not understand humans as geological agents like other natural features surrounding them—humans interact with nature through culture, not as geological agents like volcanoes, rivers, or tectonic plates. In their recent work on the Anthropocene, Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz have highlighted a similar break from the Braudelian method, suggesting that Braudel wrote in a context of "the separation of domains and time between nature and society inherited from industrial modernity that left profound scars in history writing."[18] While these works are correct that Braudel did not rearrange the separation between nature and culture, by denouncing his apprehension of nature, they also ignore the broader methodological structure that supported his historical analysis. While his understanding of the relationship between nature and culture has become radically

dated in the context of the Anthropocene, his attempt to use narrative to recombine multiple temporalities may still have much life left in it. In short, while considering Braudel's attempt not merely to combine nature and culture into one narrative, but more importantly to use narrative to combine multiple temporalities, we should be careful of throwing out the proverbial baby with the bathwater.

22 So right as these clarifications are, what needs attention is what our new human geological age means for the interaction of the multiple temporalities of the short, medium *and* the *longue durée*, or precisely how political and economic events and decisions interact with the climate and nature to generate a new kind of historical narrative. From this perspective what is needed is not simply a reconsideration of the role of man in climate change and the relationship between the natural and cultural, but a somewhat mind-bending reorientation of the temporal scales that makes up a sophisticated historical method. Indeed, in the Anthropocene, just as culture no longer sits upon a natural context or backdrop, the short term does not sit upon the long term, but quite the opposite: it is the short term that governs the long. This could have important consequences for how we construct historical and literary narrative.

23 The temporal realignments of this new geological age provide an increasingly useful framework for taking into account, and integrating into our accounts, a *new longue durée*—one that does not ally the long and the short along the divide between nature and culture. In particular, it forces us to reconsider the relationship between the human and the natural that was at the heart of the *Annales'* attempts to introduce thinking about long expanses of time. Historians and social scientists have launched both methodological and theoretical analyses based on the new recognition that humans may have become the most important geological force on the planet. What has emerged is a broader combination of scientific and moral conviction that the implications of this new geological age necessarily blur the boundary between the excruciatingly slow passage of geological time and the staccato pointillism of human history.

24 We may then reconsider Chakrabarty's thoughtful investigations of the implications of the Anthropocene where he suggests that "anthropogenic explanations of climate change spell the collapse of the age-old humanist distinction between natural history and human history." (201) In a context where the distinction between human and natural histories has come undone,[19] the question, however, remains: Do we have the proper methods and narrative tools to come to terms with the implications of this extraordinary transformation? Or, in other words, Chakrabarty's assessment that the Anthropocene requires a reconsideration of "our capacity for historical understanding" (201) leaves us with what may be an equally important next step: How does the undoing of the distinction between the human and the natural realign the temporal categories for making sense of our past, present, and future?

25 Inspired by Braudel's attempts to rethink the historiographical relationship between human activity and the environment across the *longue durée*, it would seem that the advent (or rather the discovery of the advent) of the Anthropocene should transform the scholar's conception of multiple historical time frames *once again*. In the age of the Anthropocene, human political and cultural decisions have not just been a short-term process structured by long-term trajectories. Instead, since the eighteenth century, the short-term political decisions as well as cultural transformations of human settlement have played an increasingly primary role in shaping the very environment that

previously structured it. In other words, if humans have become the dominant geological force since the industrial revolution, it is insufficient to understand the multiple temporalities of this revolution as taking place on the backdrop of "almost timeless" temporal frames of nature. Rather, we must consider how the short-term decisions have set humans on a new environmental course that will no doubt last thousands of years.

26 Steffen, Crutzen and McNeill have argued for the Anthropocene by suggesting that the industrial revolution has brought on "underlying global change [through] human-driven alterations of i) the biological fabric of the Earth; ii) the stocks and flows of major elements in the planetary machinery such as nitrogen, carbon, phosphorous, and silicon; and iii) the energy balance at the Earth's surface." These vast transformations are "pushing the Earth into planetary *terra incognita*." (Steffen, Crutzen and McNeill, 614) From the perspective of writing narrative, the human impact on the very organizational structure of the planet in the Anthropocene means that we may need to attend to the inversion of temporalities that this new condition implies. Or, as Latour has recently argued: "through a surprising inversion of background and foreground, it is human history that has become frozen and natural history that is taking on a frenetic pace." ("Agency," 12)

27 This disorienting circularity is precisely what needs to be considered in our return to the *longue durée*. Building on Braudel's critique that he was unsatisfied "with the traditional geographical introduction to history that often figures to little purpose" including "descriptions of the mineral deposits, types of agriculture, and typical flora," (Braudel, *The Mediterranean*, 20) the emergence of the Anthropocene would seem to suggest that we can no longer content ourselves with remarking that the human is now a geological force that potentially generates or permanently removes the very mineral deposits, types of agriculture or typical flora that shape it in return. The advent of the Anthropocene seems to have added a troubling element to the magisterial history of the climate introduced by Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Braudel's successor within the *Annales*: How might we write a history over the *longue durée* that integrates an understanding of the multiple temporalities resulting from the fact that humans are both victims *and* agents of (de)glacialization?

Narratives of the *longue durée*

28 So, in at least one important sense, Braudel's project remains relevant. This is hardly a question of saving soldier Braudel. It is however a question of recognizing that the return to the *longue durée* must move beyond a somewhat thin re-invocation that our histories *should* cover more than a few generations. Braudel built his conception of the *longue durée* on an attempt to combine the temporalities which each of the social sciences had specialized in—the synchronic approach of sociology, the *longue-durée* almost immobile structures of structural anthropology, the geological time of human geography and the short *durée* of traditional political history—into a common narrative. In so doing, he was breaking down the barriers between social sciences. Today, I would suggest, our contemporary attempt to reactivate *longue-durée* analysis in the context of the Anthropocene needs to pay more than passing attention to the Braudelian project and consider its relationship to other social sciences and humanities. It is all the more true as historians, cultural theorists, literary scholars and

anthropologists have engaged in a radical questioning of the traditional limits between nature and culture.

29 Recent anthropological investigations have both reaffirmed and recalibrated how the relationship between nature and culture might be understood. In fact, the radical reformulation of the culture/nature distinction in contemporary anthropology has, for the first time, opened the door to a history of continuity between the human and the natural. Such a history undermines the opposition between culture and nature as structural to social scientific investigation to the extent that it denies the *a priori* distinction between the two realms. As Philippe Descola has demonstrated, the very separation between nature and culture that Braudel's *longue durée* relied upon is only one way (among the four that he charts) in which this relationship has been constructed across the globe.[20] *Par delà nature et culture* offers a critical perspective on the nature-culture relationship as it has been developed in structural anthropology and the social sciences to present and argues that far from being a universal mode of investigation that is available for understanding all relationships between a given culture and its natural environment, it is one compromise among many, "the singular expressions of which must be examined, just as we must seek to discover the rules of their perpetuation and distribution." (119) Although he never mentions Braudel, in this description of the traditional opposition between nature and culture in the social sciences, Descola captures the implicit understanding of Braudel's notion of the two-way relationship between nature and human culture. Indeed, Braudel remained prisoner to the nature-culture distinction that Descola refers to as naturalism and that emerged out of Western European modernity. Braudel's understanding of nature and culture as constraint (e.g. poor soil) on the one hand and the overcoming of natural limitations on the other (e.g. a solid boat for stormy seas) was indeed rooted in the same conception that Descola unmasks and questions: "either culture is shaped by nature—shaped by genes, instincts, neuronal networks or geographical constraints, or nature only takes form and relief as a potential reservoir of signs and symbols that culture draws upon."[21] Challenging this vision, Descola suggests that dependence on this dualist cosmology is increasingly problematic faced with the multiple other modes for considering the nature-culture relationship.

30 More recently, Edouardo Kohn's investigation into *How Forests Think* has taken up the challenge of exploring the continuity between the human and the natural world. In his explorations of "the challenges posed by learning to live with the proliferating array of other kinds of life-forms that increasingly surround us," he pursues "a precise way to analyze how the human is both distinct from and continuous with that which lies beyond it." (9) Kohn examines how the Runa of the Ecuadorian Amazon reveal and operate within the semiotics of forest life, uncovering a form of thought that, while distinct from the human, still shares fundamental elements with humans. It is the agentive capacity of the forest itself and not simply the forest as backdrop for human activity that Kohn targets. Such studies, he insists, are particularly important for our current age: "if we are to survive the Anthropocene," Kohn concludes, "we will have to actively cultivate these ways of thinking with and like forests." (227)

31 Such a post-human anthropology opens the possibility that the Anthropocene is not just a recognition of the human role in contemporary climate change, but is more fundamentally part of a readjustment of the relationship between the human and the natural world that breaks down the traditional "European" paradigm of naturalism

brought forward by Descola. From this perspective, one might redirect Braudel's assessment of Lévi-Strauss toward the work of Descola and Kohn. For as far as they have gone in uncovering very different modes of conceptualizing the nature/culture relationship and demonstrating that the European or "Western" social science conception is not universally applicable (and even increasingly irrelevant, if not dangerous), like Lévi-Strauss, they remain tied to the immobility of these conceptions of the relationship between man and nature. In short, they do not emphasize the *historical* transformations in this relationship that our growing commitment to the Anthropocene logically demands. That is, they do not emphasize the change across time within a given culture/nature construction and how such change might actually transform the understanding of the relationship between the human and what surrounds it. I would contend that their work, however, as well as calls for the Anthropocene more broadly, demand precisely such a shift. In other words, instead of building our histories on a stable temporal relationship between man and nature, the Anthropocene invites us to consider the very possibility that the temporalities of such a relationship may also change over time, and indeed, even rather suddenly. To quote Braudel for our contemporary purposes, we might suggest that the Anthropocene situates man's relationship to the natural world precisely at "the meeting point between the infinitely small and the very *longue durée*." (Braudel, 1958, 747)

32 As I have tried to make clear, this does not mean a simple return to Braudel. Rather it means building on his attempt to articulate the long and the short time scales in one common narrative. Bruno Latour has attempted to demonstrate the need to push beyond Braudel's conception, while also recognizing its contribution through his term, "geo-story". Building on Chakrabarty's notion of the earth as agent, Latour argues that "this time we encounter, just as in the old prescientific and nonmodern myths, an agent which gains its name of 'subject' because he or she might be subjected to the vagaries, bad humor, emotions, reactions, and even revenge of another agent, who also gains its quality of 'subject' because it is also subjected to his or her action." ("Agency", 5) Such a perspective responds directly to the critical approach of Descola on the multiple modes of conceiving the relationship between man and nature. Not only must one have a critical perspective on the naturalist conception of the nature-culture distinction, one must also consider the capacity of the earth itself to become an agent, interacting with the human with its own agency. Far from a set of constraints to be dealt with or overcome in the Braudelian mode, geo-story requires a recognition that humans, river beds, earthquakes and tides all share the agentive capacities necessary for temporality and even historicity, let alone narrative.

33 The increasing emphasis on the agentive capacity of nature suggests that the traditional conception of the nature/culture within our social sciences (growing as it did out of Western naturalism) is undergoing a fundamental transformation that may only become fully clear as we begin to reinvest the terrain of the *longue durée*. As Latour argues, "humans are no longer submitted to the *diktats* of objective nature, since what comes to them is also an intensively subjective form of action. To be a subject is not to act autonomously in front of an objective background, but to share agency with other subjects that have also lost their autonomy." ("Agency", 5) In this age of the Anthropocene, Latour states, we can no longer place the Earth at a distance, removing or repositioning human societies here and there on a bluish-white orb, as we would have, according to Descola's definition of Western naturalism. Instead, we must reconsider our most basic social scientific assumptions about how human decisions

have interacted with their natural environments over time. "One of the main puzzles of Western history," Latour suggests, "is not that 'there are people who still believe in animism,' but the rather naive belief that many still have in a deanimated world of mere stuff; just at the moment when they themselves multiply the agencies with which they are more deeply entangled every day. The more we move in geo-story, the more this belief seems difficult to understand." ("Agency" 7)

34 Seen through the lens of Latour's geo-story, not only is our relationship to nature a way of understanding the *longue durée*, but we might understand that the very relationship between nature and culture has a history with its own syncopation of multiple temporalities. Latour's remark that "the great paradox of the 'scientific world-view' is to have succeeded in withdrawing historicity from the world, and with it, of course, the inner narrativity that is part and parcel of being in the world—or, as Donna Haraway prefers to say, 'with the world,'" ("Agency", 13)—suggests that we must recognize with Eduardo Kohn that forests, seas, animals and other elements beyond the human are also capable of action in the short *durée* just as humans are capable of setting the conditions for the *longue durée* of geological time.

35 The natural agency implied by the Gaia hypothesis, for example, provides a perspective on how we might be forced to reconsider our traditional conceptions of a deep natural time in opposition to the short-term cultural adaptations of the human. According to the Gaia hypothesis, as presented by Peter Westbroek, life has evolved on earth for over three billion years without interruption. He draws the conclusion that this may mean that the biota itself seeks the establishment of the ideal conditions for perpetuating life that may or may not include the human.[22] Such a hypothesis is not only intriguing for what it tells us about the Earth as agent (Gaia), it also suggests that the temporalities of Gaia are as variable as any other agent. There is no long and steady geo-stability which structures a *longue durée*, but rather regulatory mechanisms that may or may not counteract disturbances according to time frames beyond the human that unfortunately remain entirely unknown as of yet.

Conclusion

36 Coming to terms with the reversals of agency and its attending temporalities means resisting the call to de-animate nature and therefore render its temporalities one-dimensional. We may then engage with Kohn's ambition that thinking and knowing are not exclusively human affairs and begin to consider what impact this may have on narrating our understandings of society, culture, and our world across time. As he reminds us, seeing the "myriad ways in which people are connected to a broader world of life" necessarily changes "what it might mean to be human." (6) The question of *longue-durée* narrative today is not simply to engage more directly with current public concerns but to consider: first, the fact that our social sciences and literary studies seem to be capable of overcoming the categorical distinctions between nature and culture that gave birth to them; and second, in order to do so, they must engage with a new multiplicity of temporalities that necessarily emerge within an attempt to challenge the delimitation of a socially constructed reality.

37 Indeed, if the Anthropocene teaches us anything for our future narratives, it is that time and historicity itself are not specifically human. We may not build our interaction with nature by claiming a monopoly on the short term any more than we may hive off

the long-term onto a world beyond the human without agency or "thought." In short, our understanding of how humans relate to that which we previously defined as "non-human" requires a temporal analytic that situates "us" (that is the human as well as that which is beyond it) in time. As Latour has provocatively argued: "the problem for all of us in philosophy, science, or literature becomes: how do we tell such a story?" ("Agency," 3)

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NOTES

1. David Armitage and Jo Guldi, "The Return of the *Longue Durée*: An Anglo-American Perspective," *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, forthcoming. In French, see the forum "La longue durée en débat," *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*. See also David Armitage, "What's the Big Idea? Intellectual History and the Longue Durée."

2. So does Dimock in her *Through Other Continents*: "What would happen if we go beyond 1776 and 1620, if we trace threads of relation to the world that antedate these allegedly founding moments? What would American literature look like then, restored to a *longue durée,* a scale enlargement along the temporal axis that also enlarges its spatial compass? Scale enlargement is, of course, most eloquently proposed by Fernand Braudel and by historians of the Annales school, as an alternative to standard national histories, organized by dates and periodized by decades, if not by years." (Dimock, 4)

3. On a return to universal history, see David Christian, "The Return of Universal History."

4. See Andrew Ross Sorkin, "So Bill Gates Has This Idea for History Class..."

5. As they suggest, "Long-term visions of the past remained bound up with policy-making and public conversations about the future, and that was a motive to go long." (*History Manifesto*, 20)

6. Pieter Geyl, *Debates with Historians*; Hugh Trevor-Roper, *Encounter*. On the current return of interest in Toynbee, see Kumar Krishan, "The Return of Arnold Toynbee?"

7. For a brief comparison of the *longue-durée* perspectives of Toynbee and Braudel, see Felipe Fernandez-Armesto, *Civilizations, Culture, Ambition, and the Transformation of Nature* and Harold R. Alker, "Pour qui sont ces civilisations ? II".

8. "C'est un fait que, dans son ensemble, l'histoire des cent dernières années, presque toujours politique, centrée sur le drame des 'grands événements', a travaillé dans et sur le temps court." (Braudel, 1958, 729) (Author's note: all translations are by the author unless otherwise specified.)

9. "L'homme est prisonnier, des siècles durant, de climats, de végétations, de populations animales, de cultures, d'un équilibre lentement construit, dont il ne peut s'écarter sans risquer de remettre tout en cause." (Braudel, 1958, 731)

10. "Tous les étages, tous les milliers d'étages, tous les milliers d'éclatements du temps de l'histoire se comprennent à partir de cette profondeur, de cette semi-immobilité ; tout gravite autour d'elle." (Braudel, 1958, 734)

11. "Au XVIII^{e} siècle, la Lorraine va connaître de multiples changements et presque un éveil. Si l'on est attentif à ses villages, on s'apercoit que tous ou presque tous ont alors augmenté la superficie de leurs terres labourables [...] Vous connaissez les classiques villages de Lorraine [...] Village, champ, bois, trois zones, trois genres de vie [...], la soupe, le travail journalier, les occupations exceptionnelles du bûcheronnage [...] Au XVIII^{e} siècle, la ligne des bois, demeurée inchangée depuis le XIII^{e} siècle, est attaquée en des points multiples et c'est alors que sont fondées ces grosses fermes isolées." (Quoted in French in Gemelli, 35)

12. "Je ne dis pas que cette histoire de l'Est soit à déduire de l'augmentation de l'espace des terres labourées, de ce petit signe géographique..., non bien sûr. Mais cet exemple, choisi à dessein, nous montre assez bien un aspect géographique d'un large mouvement d'histoire." (Quoted in French in Gemelli, 35)

13. "Il a fallu la conquérir sur les marais hostiles, la protéger des fleuves dévastateurs, grossis par l'hiver impitoyable, exorciser la malaria. Conquérir les plaines à l'agriculture, ce fut d'abord vaincre l'eau malsaine. Ensuite, il fallut amener l'eau à nouveau, mais vivante celle-ci, pour les irrigations nécessaires." (Braudel, *La Méditerrannée*, 27)

14. "Nous sommes en présence d'une vie difficile, souvent précaire, dont l'équilibre se fait en définitive régulièrement contre l'homme." (*Ibid.*, 40)

15. "La vie d'une société est dans la dépendance de facteurs physiques et biologiques [...] en symbiose avec eux, ils modèlent, aident ou gênent sa vie, donc son histoire..'" (Braudel, "Géohistoire : la société, l'espace et le temps," quoted in Ribeiro, 339)

16. " [...] l'étude d'une double liaison, de la nature à l'homme et de l'homme à la nature, l'étude d'une action et d'une réaction, mêlées, confondues, recommencées sans fin, dans la réalité de chaque jour. C'est même la qualité, la puissance de cet effort qui nous oblige à renverser l'approche habituelle du géographe." (Braudel, "Géohistoire," 102)

17. "Qu'il s'agisse du passé ou de l'actualité [...] une conscience nette de cette pluralité du temps social est indispensable à une méthodologie commune des sciences de l'homme." Braudel continues : "Je parlerai donc longuement de l'histoire, du temps de l'histoire. Moins pour les lecteurs de cette revue, spécialistes de nos études, que pour nos voisins des sciences de l'homme : économistes, ethnographes, ethnologues (ou anthropologues), sociologues, psychologues, linguistes, démographes, géographes, voire mathématiciens sociaux ou statisticiens, – tous voisins que, depuis de longues années, nous avons suivis dans leurs expériences et recherches... Peut-être à notre tour, avons-nous quelque chose à leur rendre. Des expériences et tentatives récentes de l'histoire se dégage [...] une notion de plus en plus précise de la multiplicité du temps et de la valeur exceptionnelle du temps long. Cette dernière notion, plus que l'histoire elle-même

– l'histoire aux cent visages – devrait intéresser les sciences sociales, nos voisines." (Braudel, 1958, 727)

18. "Cette séparation des domaines et des temps entre nature et société, héritée de la modernité industrielle, a laissé des séquelles profondes dans l'écriture de l'histoire." (Bonneuil and Fressoz, [Kindle location] 541)

19. Frederik A. Jonsson has similarly highlighted the importance of reconsidering such fundamental historical transformations as the Industrial Revolution in the light of the Anthropocene: "the onset of the Anthropocene will probably also transform our understanding of the place of knowledge in the Industrial Revolution," he writes. (695)

20. Descola identifies four different modes of thinking the nature/culture relationship: totemism, analogism, animism, and naturalism. He places western social sciences under the category of naturalism.

21. "[O]u bien la culture est façonnée par la nature, que celle-ci soit faite de gènes, d'instincts, de réseaux neuronaux ou de contraintes géographiques, ou bien la nature ne prend forme et relief que comme un réservoir potentiel de signes et de symboles où la culture vient puiser." (Descola, 120)

22. "This means that the conditions in the biosphere cannot have changed very dramatically, because life can flourish only within a narrowly circumscribed range of physical and chemical states." (Westbroek, 93) "passive regulation is very unlikely to produce conditions precisely adapted to the requirements of the biota. Instead, [...] the environment in the biosphere is actively modulated by the biota itself. The earth would be homeostatic, with the biota seeking the establishment of optimum conditions for life. In the course of organic evolution an elaborate system of global biological regulatory mechanisms has emerged, capable of counteracting the adverse effects of major disturbances. The idea is known as the 'Gaia hypothesis,' after the Greek goddess of the earth." (Westbroek, 93-94)

ABSTRACTS

This article suggests that new potential areas of collaboration between historians and literary scholars have emerged around a nascent but galloping interest in two fields of scholarship, the Anthropocene and the *longue durée*. Building on the tradition of the Annales school, and in particular the contributions of Fernand Braudel, this article argues that while there is a growing consensus about the necessity of trans-national and trans-temporal history, the critical implications of this enterprise for thinking historical and literary narrative have remained highly unsatisfying. Any return to the *longue durée* necessitates a deep reconsideration of the social scientific foundations of the *longue durée* in its previous manifestations, especially its conception of the nature-culture relationship, and an acknowledgement of the limitations of these earlier formulations for thinking about longer time scales and beyond national boundaries today. Following recent work in anthropology that has attempted to break down the nature-culture barrier, this article suggests that the Anthropocene has generated a new arrangement of temporal scales and therefore a poignant rearticulation of the long and short durée as well as the agency that drives action within these two realms.

Cet article s'intéresse à de nouveaux domaines de collaboration potentielle entre historiens et spécialistes de la littérature autour d'un intérêt naissant mais pregnant pour l'anthropocène et la

longue durée. Prenant pour point de départ la tradition de l'école des Annales, en particulier les contributions de Fernand Braudel, cet article entend montrer que bien que se dégage un consensus sur la nécessité de l'histoire trans-nationale et trans-temporelle, nous ne mesurons que très partiellement les enjeux critiques de cette entreprise et son impact sur la possibilité même du récit historique et littéraire. Tout retour à la longue durée nécessite en effet de reconsidérer les fondements de ce concept dans les sciences sociales, en particulier la conception de la relation nature-culture qui en découle, et de reconnaître les limites de ces formulations antérieures, notamment les difficultés à penser des échelles de temps plus longues et supra-nationales. Suite à de récents travaux en anthropologie qui ont tenté de briser la frontière entre nature et culture, cet article suggère que l'anthropocène entraîne un nouvel agencement des échelles temporelles et donc une réarticulation radicale de la longue et de la courte durée.

INDEX

Keywords: Anthropocene, Annales school, longue durée, trans-temporal history, deep time, multiple temporalities, nature-culture distinction, narrative, civilizational studies, geological change

Mots-clés: Anthropocène, école des Annales, longue durée, histoire trans-temporelle, temps profond, temporalités multiples, distinction nature-culture, récit, études civilisationnelles, changement géologique

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