Political apologies and the question of a 'shared time' in the Australian context

Dr Michelle Bastian

Chancellor's Fellow, Edinburgh College of Art, University of Edinburgh

Michelle.Bastian@ed.ac.uk

Abstract

Although conceptually distinct, 'time' and 'community' are multiply intertwined within a myriad of key debates in both the social sciences and the humanities. Even so, the role of conceptions of time in social practices of inclusion and exclusion has yet to achieve the prominence of other key analytical categories such as identity and space. This article seeks to contribute to the development of this field by highlighting the importance of thinking time and community together through the lens of political apologies. Often ostensibly offered in order to re-articulate both the constitution of 'the community' and its future direction, official apologies are prime examples of deliberate attempts to intervene in shared understandings of political community and its temporality. Offering a detailed case-study of one of these apologies, I will focus on Australian debates over the removal of indigenous children from their families, known as the Stolen Generations, and examine the temporal dimensions of the different responses offered by former Prime Ministers Howard and Rudd. I show that the implicit utilisation of the ambiguity of linear time (as both divided and continuous) is critical to their justifications of their contrasting approaches. However, I argue that insofar as both Howard and Rudd remain within a linear temporal framework, they are unable to respond adequately to the complexity of social life. Instead I show how traditional understandings of time continue to be problematically utilised in the explanation and management of social life. I conclude by exploring how a more nuanced notion of 'shared time' might be developed.

[p94 →] Arguably a central task of many humanities and social science disciplines has been the analysis and critique of methods of social inclusion and exclusion. Responding to this task has led to the rise of a multitude of approaches developed within post-colonial theory, feminist theory, queer theory, critical race theory and political theory, as well as work in human geography − which has sought to strengthen, extend or transform these [p95 →] approaches through an explicit analysis of spatiality. One consequence of this work is that core metaphysical questions around identity, causation, free will and space, which have often been seen as the domain of an abstracted elite, have become essential analytical categories in our understandings of social and cultural life. Challenging the way these concepts have primarily been thought within Western metaphysics of presence, it is now widely accepted that identity, social change, agency and spatiality need to be understood as partial, relational, situated, hybrid and non-teleological. Rather than being purely logical categories, these core concepts have been shown to be shaped by politics, context and tradition. Remaking social relations along less exclusionary lines thus requires that we challenge the supposed neutrality of these concepts and instead show how they are mobilised in varying ways in the construction of 'insiders' and 'outsiders'.

There is, of course, one further key metaphysical concept – time – and in this case it is not clear that understandings of time as a neutral medium for social life have been effectively challenged. On the one hand, there is a wide range of work that argues that our ways of conceptualising and experiencing time are culturally and politically shaped. As Nancy Munn's classic essay on time in cultural anthropology neatly sets out, "the diffuse, endlessly multiplying studies of sociocultural time reflect time's pervasiveness as an inescapable dimension of all aspects of social experience and practice" (1992: 93). Further, texts such as John Hassard's *Sociology of Time* (1990) and Alfred Gell's *Anthropology of Time* (1992) clearly situate time as a key problem within each discipline. On the other hand, Munn notes that despite the availability of such texts there is relatively little work that attempts a comprehensive analysis of the socio-cultural production of time. Similar concerns have been expressed across a range of areas, including, most notably, in Barbara Adam's work (1995), but also more recently in relation to health (Strazdins et al. 2011), social activism (Panelli and Larner 2010) and environmental injustice (Auyero and Swistun 2009), to name but a few examples. That is, even while the importance of the temporal dimension is recognised, the continued claim from across a range of social science and humanities disciplines – that time is a missing element of analysis – suggests that it has yet to develop the same kind of analytical purchase as other reworked metaphysical concepts such as identity and space.

Even so, in relation to the particular interest of this paper around mechanisms of social inclusion and exclusion, one might be tempted to point towards the vast literatures on history, genealogy, memory and trauma as evidence of the widespread attention to the temporal dimensions of belonging (e.g. Halbwachs 1992; Caruth 1996; Antze 1996; Foucault 1990). Indeed it is clear that such literatures have contributed enormously to a shift away from the idealisation of static, homogeneous communities, towards an understanding of belonging as dynamic, [p96 →] non-linear and as drawing on multiple histories. However, here we must be careful not to conflate these approaches with an attention to time *per se*. Within the discipline of history, for example, there has been a range of calls to distinguish

history from time in order to more fully understand the kinds of conceptual imperatives driving various ways of writing and doing history (Hall 1980, see also Aminzade 1992; Jensen 1997; Gallois 2007; Cladis 2009; Ermarth 2010). The concern is that without explicit attention to the way time itself is thought, unexamined assumptions, for example regarding time's linearity, neutrality or all-encompassing character, may implicitly shape these analyses in problematic ways. Thus despite the usefulness of this work for thinking through many of the temporal aspects of community, the political nature of the conceptualisation of time itself still needs to be more thoroughly foregrounded.

In order to respond to this issue, I want to focus on a detailed case study that will allow me to illustrate the distinctiveness of an explicitly time-focused approach, while also drawing out some of the specific ways concepts of time are utilised in political debates about the makeup of a community. This case study will analyse the differing Prime Ministerial responses to Australian debates around the offering of an official apology to Indigenous Australians for the removal of children from their families, known as the Stolen Generations. Focusing particularly on their understandings of continuity, discontinuity and simultaneity within and across moments of time, I will explore how traditional Western philosophies of time continue to problematically shape understandings of who can belong to the political community and in what ways. Aspects of this have already had some prominence within debates about nationalism, for example, including the centrality of the development of imagined experiences of simultaneity within particular spatial borders (e.g. Anderson 1991), which is often held in tension with an awareness of the structural impossibility of attaining such an experience (e.g. Bhabha 1990). However while I will contribute to discussions around issues of simultaneity and synchronicity, I also want to pick up on a thread in the debates around national apologies that has centred on the different effects of conceptualising time as either continuous or discontinuous on the national community.

More generally, political apologies are particularly promising analytical sites for examining official attempts to redefine, restore or extend popular accounts of who constitutes the political community and how they do so (e.g. Edwards 2010; Schaap 2007: 9 and Bhandar 2007: 106). Often ostensibly offered in order to re-articulate both the constitution of 'the community' and its future direction, official apologies are prime examples of attempts to intervene into shared understandings of political community and its temporality. Further, the Australian context provides a compelling place to stage my analysis for a number of reasons. First, there is a great deal of public awareness in the country around the role of [p97 →] history in the construction of political community. Centred in particular around what has come to be known as the History Wars (Macintyre and Clark 2004, see also Reynolds 1999) there has been widespread discussion over the division between 'positive' accounts of national heroism and determination versus 'negative' histories of settler's complicity with dispossession and racism. These debates have also framed understandings of the apology and Prime Ministerial decisions over whether one should be offered or not (e.g. Attwood 2005).

However, a second reason why this context is particularly compelling is the centrality of time itself to articulations of the relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians (Lloyd 2000), as well as within the non-indigenous settler population (Gunew 1997). Here a variety of techniques have been used to deny coevalness (to deny a common occupation of time) as a central part of maintaining social inclusions and exclusions (Fabian

1983). So while the deeply politicised character of national history has become more generally accepted, and is clearly addressed in different ways by leading political figures, what I will suggest is that the way time itself is politicised has not been made explicit. As a result, forms of exclusion supported by particular accounts of time are not adequately addressed.

Initially this paper will contrast the different responses between two former Australian Prime Ministers, John Howard, who notably refused to make an apology to the Stolen Generations on behalf of the Australian government, and the subsequent Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, who made the apology as his first act of parliament. I will suggest that Rudd's apology sought to create a more inclusive sense of national community, one that supports a wider sense of responsibility and of how the nation is constituted, in part through challenging Howard's implicit philosophy of time. While for Howard, the past was something to be left behind, Rudd emphasised the interconnections between past and present and in so doing extended the range of experiences that were pertinent to the present. However, this article is motivated by the concern that despite the manifest differences between the two, there are actually significant similarities in the broader temporal logic utilised by each, which suggests that they both remain within the same problematic temporal framework. As a result I will argue that neither is able to adequately respond to the complexities of a multicultural, settler society. Instead I will show how concepts of time first articulated by Aristotle and Newton, continue to be used problematically to explain and manage social life. Throughout I will be particularly interested in the seeming potential of a unified time for supporting a more inclusive community, which arises in certain literatures on political apologies. Although I will challenge this approach, I will conclude by looking more closely at the notion of 'sharing time' which underlies this response and will suggest three key issues for thinking through a more complex notion of coevalness. [p98 →]

The Timing of an Apology

In examining the new-found prominence of the public apology in political life, a number of theorists have sought to explicitly attend to the variable conceptions of time that come into play. Jean-Marc Coicaud, for example, in his examination of the reasons why political actors either do or do not offer an apology, argues that a key differentiating factor is how the past is understood to be related to the present. He suggests that those seeking to eschew responsibility for past wrongs emphasise the elusive and discontinuous aspects of time. While, on the other hand, 'the idea that apology is possible and needed rests both upon the assumption that we can know what has happened and that this matters' (Coicaud 2009: 99-100). For Coicaud, then, the shift towards offering an apology rests on an understanding of the past and present as connected, 'in the sense that the past continues in and has a bearing on the present'(2009: 100). Most importantly, he directly ties the act of apology to a specific conceptualisation of time, claiming that the apology depends upon 'a *unified conception of time*' (my emphasis, 2009: 100). Although there are a variety of currents in analyses around political apologies, the need for a unified time echoes through them. Adam Czarnota, for example, has argued that a reconciliation between different conceptions of time is perhaps 'a necessary precondition to political and social reconciliation in the contemporary complex world' (2007: 150). He thus suggests the need to think through "the *ethical value of*

synchronisation" (emphasis in the original 2007: 160). For Andrew Schaap, it is important to maintain a critical relationship to the notion of reconciliation, since it problematically presumes a state of conciliation in the past to which the reconciled society would return. He does not, therefore, suggest that the past can be understood a site of connection or unity. Nevertheless he argues that reconciliation continues to be a useful concept insofar as it shifts toward positing a 'counterfactual we' that anticipates a unity that is 'not yet' (2007: 9; 2006: 629). That is, while the past might not be characterised in terms of social unity, the hope that future might be acts as an important driver for the reconciliation process. As I suggested above, the question of whether a more inclusive political community does in fact require a unified time, whether real or aspirational is central to this paper.[1] To begin, however, I first want to explore how the shifts between a discontinuous and a continuous time, identified by Coicaud, operated in the Australian context.

On the 13th of February, 2008, a formal apology was offered by the then-Prime Minister Kevin Rudd to Australia's Indigenous peoples for the forced removal of Aboriginal children from their families from 1910 into the 1970s. It had been a long time coming. Over ten years earlier, the previous [p99 →] government, led by John Howard, had received the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission's report, *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* (HREOC 1997). A key recommendation was for the government to formally recognise its role in these separations, in part by offering an official apology. Howard, however, had refused to do so. In many ways Howard's justifications for why he did not believe it to be appropriate, or necessary, to offer an apology lines up directly with Coicaud's analysis. Coicaud identifies two main strategies used to deny the links between the past and present and thus to justify a refusal to apologise. Although related to questions of historicity, both clearly rest on a particular philosophy of time. First is the strategy of claiming that 'reality and its temporal character leave us unclear about what has happened and what has not happened' (2009: 99). The second strategy Coicaud identifies is the argument that 'assuming that we can sort out facts from fiction as they unfold in time, the existing separation between the stages of time makes all this quite irrelevant' (ibid.). Arguably the second strategy did the most work for Howard. For example, he claimed that it was anachronistic to judge those who sanctioned and carried out the removals in the past according to present values since, according to him, at the time of their occurrence the removals would have seemed justified. The assumption of a break between the past and present also underpinned his stance of refusing intergenerational responsibility. His clearest statement of this position was at the 1997 Australian Reconciliation Convention where he claimed that 'Australians of this generation should not be required to accept guilt and blame for past actions and policies over which they had no control' (1997: n.p.). Finally, he refuted the ability of an apology in the present to address trauma arising from the past, suggesting

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[1] Here I am particularly aware of challenges to the notion of community arising in Continental Philosophy (e.g. Derrida 1997; Agamben 1993; Nancy 1991; Blanchot 2000). This work explicitly argues against the desire for a unified time, whether in the present or in the future. I will return briefly to these approaches at the end of the paper, but for the moment, I want to explore how these claims play out in the context of my case study.

that responding in such a way would merely be a 'symbolic gesture' (ibid.). The alternative response he advocated was to develop 'practical programmes' that left the past behind and focused on what was possible for the future (ibid.). What each of these responses suggest is that, as John Frow argues, Howard held to 'a historical relativism which seals past and present in their separate and internally homogeneous temporalities' (2001: 83). Underlying Howard's response, then, was an implicit philosophy of time that assumed a fundamental hiatus between past and present. Indeed Howard appeared to believe that the settler population was able to separate from its past, without the need for apology, simply due to the discontinuous nature of time itself.

In contrast, an analysis of Rudd's apology shows that, just as Coicaud suggests, he in fact drew on an alternative philosophy of time, one in which the past is continuous with the present. This can be seen particularly in a number of statements where Rudd deliberately sought to draw [p100 →] the events of the Stolen Generations into the continuous story of the Australian political community. Directly challenging Howard's denial of intergenerational responsibility he claimed that 'as has been said of settler societies elsewhere, we are the bearers of many blessings from our ancestors, and therefore we must also be the bearer of their burdens as well' (Rudd 2008: n.p.). From this perspective, rather than being discontinuous with the present, the acts of removal become an integral part of the story of how 'we' arrived in the present. Even further, Rudd directly contradicted the claim that the forced removals of indigenous children occurred in a remote and unknowable past, pointing out that removals continued into the 1970s. As Rudd argued in his apology speech: 'The 1970s is not exactly a point in remote antiquity. There are still serving members of this parliament who were first elected to this place in the early 1970s. It is well within the adult memory span of many of us' (ibid.). This argument challenged the logic of Howard's denial of intergenerational responsibility, which rested on an implausible account of discrete, rather than overlapping 'generations', and thus further challenged his underlying philosophy of a discontinuous time. In making the apology, then, Rudd did indeed appear to be setting out an account of temporality as continuous, a temporality in which Indigenous experiences are understood as coeval with the temporality of the nation state, rather than divided from it.

Importantly, given my specific interest in the broader relation of time to conceptualisations of community and belonging, there is much in Rudd's speech to suggest that his attempt to draw upon a different philosophy of time (even if only implicitly) not only provided legitimacy to the apology itself, as Coicaud suggested, but also resonated with Czarnota's concern with reconciling time itself. That is, Rudd's effort to rearticulate time also arguably addressed concerns he had about the political community more generally. For Rudd, the previous government's failure to act had produced a dislocation, one that divided the time of the nation itself, and thus also divided the community. Recalling the failure to respond to the *Bringing them Home* report in a timely way, he noted that 'from the nation's parliament there has been a stony and stubborn and deafening silence for more than a decade' (2008: n.p.). According to Rudd, however, until settler Australians fully respond to the injunction to acknowledge and take responsibility for the removals, 'until we fully confront that truth, there will always be a shadow hanging over us and our future as a fully united and fully reconciled people' (2008: n.p.). Thus, in highlighting this lapse, Rudd not only emphasised

the previous government's failure to respond to this ethical injunction in a timely manner, but appeared to be suggesting that due to this failure, the proper flow of time had been halted or arrested and, as a result, the community was out of joint. [p101 →]

One of Rudd's hoped for outcomes of the apology therefore, was a 'reconciliation across the entire history of the often bloody encounter between those who emerged from the Dreamtime a thousand generations ago and those who, like me, came across the seas only yesterday' (2008: n.p.). This quote is interesting for a number of reasons. First, in tracing Australia's origins back to two different points, he utilised an understanding the nation as being produced through multiple trajectories, suggesting a more complex understanding of the past, while also challenging notions of a timeless nation (Connor 2004). Second, even while recognising this diversity he ultimately suggested that the act of apology had the potential to bring this multiple and disjunctive past into a kind of concordance. Czarnota's emphasis on the need to reconcile the complexities of social time itself is thus evident in Rudd's own approach. In particular he called upon Australians to come together as follows: 'Let us turn this page together: Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, government and opposition, Commonwealth and State, and write this new chapter in our nation's story together. First Australians [indigenous peoples], First Fleeters [colonial settlers], and those who first took the oath of allegiance just a few weeks ago [recent migrants] — let's grasp this opportunity to craft a new future for this great land, Australia' (2008: n.p.). Rudd's apology did not, therefore, only articulate an alternative temporal relationality in order to transform the nation's sense of responsibility for the past, he also sought to encourage a new sense of coevalness within which Australians could begin to occupy the same shared flow of time, thus realigning the community itself.

A doubled temporal logic

In relation to the apology, then, both Rudd and Howard supported Coicaud's thesis that the act of apology, and the refusal to apologise, are rooted in different philosophies of time. For Howard, a discontinuous time supported his efforts to delegitimise Indigenous calls for a response from the state, while, for Rudd, a continuous time helped to legitimate his decision to make such a response. In as much as debates around political apologies feed into questions about political community more generally, what the above appears to suggest, is that when thinking through the relation between time and community, and particularly the question of the time of an inclusive community, an understanding of time as continuous is essential. However, in this section, I want to develop a more detailed picture of the implicit philosophies of time used by Howard and Rudd. This is because even while they may sit on opposite sides of the 'History Wars' debate – in that Howard actively championed [p102 →] a glorious history of achievement, while Rudd acknowledged the need to address histories of dispossession and conflict – from a temporal perspective their approaches are not as distinct as they may first appear.

First, even while holding to an account of time as discontinuous, in relation to other members of the nation, Howard's temporal logic was quite different in regard to Anglo-settler history. Far from claiming that the past holds no relevance to the present, Howard in fact positioned it as eternally relevant. A paradigmatic example of this can be seen in his accounts

of the continuing relevance of the World War I battle at Gallipoli. Taking place in what is now Turkey, the military engagement resulted in large casualties for the Australian and New Zealand Army Core (or ANZAC). Since 1916 the battle has been commemorated on the 25th of April as Anzac Day in both Australia and New Zealand. Throughout the 80's and early 90's, attendance at Anzac Day events, particularly the Dawn Service, had been waning and during his tenure as Prime Minister (1996 -2007), Howard actively sought to reinvigorate the tradition. His speeches at these services emphasise his belief in the continuing relevance of Gallipoli for the contemporary Australian community. For example, in an opinion piece on the intensification of Australian nationalism, historian Mark McKenna asks his readers to consider a range of quotes from these speeches where Howard describes the Anzac tradition as: 'a creed to which we can all aspire'; 'a great tradition which has shaped the character and the destiny of this country more than any other tradition or influence'; one that occupies 'the eternal place in the Australian soul' (Howard quoted in McKenna 2007). As McKenna argues, the language Howard utilises 'pines for tradition, yearns for the mystical, searches for the transcendent moment' (2007). In stark contrast to his approach to the Reconciliation debates then, Howard asserted that the past does indeed have significant meaning and continued impact on the present. In specific contexts, therefore, Howard also held a conception of time where the present is continuous with the past.

Similar to Rudd, Howard's use of a continuous time also played an important role in his attempts to shape the political community in particular ways. That is, even while the continuity he proposed in the above example was in relation to the specific legacy of the ANZACs, he nonetheless held that it had the potential to be all-encompassing and, as noted previously, to be a 'creed to which we can all aspire'. Indeed at a ceremony in Gallipoli in 2000 he stated that "today we join the past with the present; we confirm that that Anzac tradition permeates our modern life as it has permeated earlier generations" (quoted in Ball 2004: n.p.). Thus, for Howard, as for Rudd, claiming continuity with the past was central to his vision of a unified community.

Far from being inclusive, however, this particular assertion of temporal continuity works to support multiple exclusions. As cultural theorist Martin Ball notes, in the story of Gallipoli, 'the Aboriginal [p103 →] population is conveniently absent. The convict stain is wiped clean. Postwar immigration is yet to broaden the cultural identity of the population' (2004: n.p.). Additionally, as Marilyn Lake, among others, has argued, women too are absent (1992). Thus, the supposedly unifying creed that traces an unbroken path through the Australian soul actually works to dislocate multiple members of the community from the temporal trajectory of the nation. Even as the stories of Gallipoli are made eternally relevant, the Stolen Generations, being subject to the vagaries of time, are put under an ontological erasure that renders their experiences immanent, uncertain and thus, seemingly, irrelevant. As a result, Howard's claim that the present is continuous with the past is neither self-evident nor neutral. Instead the choice of Gallipoli as the anchoring link performs complex exclusionary work. This confirms that in and of itself using a conception of time as continuous need not be inclusive at all. [2] Further, when viewed more broadly, it becomes clear that the implicit

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[2] Indeed see (Ireton and Kovras 2012) who identify a sense of continuous time as key to refusals to apologise in the context of post-colonial Cyprus.

temporal philosophy guiding Howard's political approach is not only one that proposes a historical relativism as Frow suggests, but is actually characterised in terms of a doubled logic in which time can be either continuous or divided, depending on the context.

Second, Rudd himself can also be seen to be utilising a similar kind of doubled temporal logic. Indeed this logic is discernible within the apology itself – at the very point when continuity seems so indispensable. This is because alongside his affirmation that the past is continuous with the present, he also articulates a hope that the apology itself will produce a division from the past for the sake of the future. That is, while the act of offering the apology rests on the recognition of the past as meaningful for the present, one of the temporal paradoxes of apologies more generally is that ideally they should also bring this past to a close (Arendt 1998: 236-243). Thus, at the heart of Rudd's speech is the desire to create a division between the discordant community haunted by its past and a reconciled community ready to embrace its future. The contrast between these experiences of community is supported by a contrast in experiences of time. On the one side is an experience of disjunction and delay, while on the other is the experience of wholeness and futurity. Located between these two experiences is the apology. In offering it, Rudd suggests that 'if the apology we extend today is accepted in the spirit of reconciliation in which it is offered, we can today resolve together that there be a new beginning for Australia' (2008: n.p.). The apology thus offers the possibility of realigning the disjunctive community of the past only insofar as it is accepted as a break in time, as a new beginning.

Rudd's use of a conception of time as discontinuous is further evident in the way he likens the past to a book, one with distinct pages and chapters. For example, he claimed that 'it is for the nation to bring the first two centuries of our settled history to a close, as we begin a new chapter'. So while he recognises the government's responsibility for the [p104 →] continuing trauma affecting Indigenous Australians as a result of removal policies, the apology, once offered, appears to furnish an all-encompassing release. In his effort to realign the nation's temporality and combat what he sees as a dangerous dislocation created by the decade long refusal to acknowledge responsibility, like Howard, Rudd also articulates a need to put the past to rest. This shift happens quite swiftly in the apology, for example Rudd declares in quick succession; 'it is time to reconcile. It is time to recognise the injustices of the past. It is time to say sorry. It is time to move forward together' (2008: n.p.). In this way the apology works as a kind of pivot, enabling a shift from disjointed multiple pasts and origins to a past represented by a single book comprised of discrete sections. So even as Rudd offers an account of the nation's past as not being traceable back to a single point of origin, he overlays this account with the promise of a new point of origin from which all Australians might set out together. In this way, the apology, although requiring a sense of continuous time in order to appear as legitimate, also works as a device for dividing time in order to separate different experiences of community from each other and so re-time the nation.

So if Rudd shows similarities to Howard in terms of the underlying temporal logics, his approach also furnishes further evidence that the notion that a continuous time is not necessarily all-encompassing. The apology offered by Rudd was couched within an overarching framework that situated the work of reconciliation between two groups: Indigenous and non-Indigenous. While from a certain perspective this makes sense, one result

is that the complexity of the relations among non-Indigenous Australians drops out of the picture. Although there are a few allusions to a differentiated settler population, these are notable for their almost ahistorical character. For example, Rudd refers to 'those like me who came over the seas only yesterday'. This phrase aims to highlight the length of Indigenous presence within Australia, stretching for tens of thousands of years, in contrast to the small fraction of time settler Australians have occupied the land. As important as this aim is, Rudd risks homogenising the settler population in such a way that, first, erases a particular history of racism. In a 220 year history of non-Indigenous settlement, which includes the White Australia Policy[3] and the Pacific Solution,[4] are all those coming across the oceans really 'like me' – like Rudd? Second, as Sneja Gunew argues, the question of who has the right to be considered 'in time' with the nation has not only played out between Indigenous and settler Australians, but also operates as a mode of exclusion within the settler population itself. That is, 'modernity' is often characteristic only of British Europeans, while non-Anglo Europeans are paradoxically situated 'as being outside European modernity and part of a grouping of subaltern subjects who remain in need of [p105 →] enlightenment and civilization' (Gunew 2004: 34). Once again, an account of time as continuous can be seen to work as a mode of exclusion. The effort to utilise a conception of time that might be more inclusive and yet avoid homogenising those to be 'included' would therefore need to be better able to take these kinds of complexities into account.

There is thus an unexpected similarity between Rudd's apology and Howard's refusal to apologise. That is, both use a doubled temporal logic in which time can be either continuous or divided. Crucially both use this logic to divide social conflict from the present and locate it in the past. Howard uses the device of 'previous generations' for example, to confine conflict around the removals to an inaccessible past. Rudd, on the other hand, uses the apology itself and its capacity to enable the political community to 'turn the page,' to put the past behind the nation so that it can now move confidently towards the future. Indeed Tony Barta, for one, has made strong criticisms of Rudd's characterisation of the apology as a new beginning, even suggesting that it 'might be considered a victory for Howard's 'practical reconciliation' (Barta 2008: 210). Further, a closer analysis of each of their uses of a continuous time raises questions about the ability of this mode of time to resolve conflict within a complex and multi-faceted society. What this suggests is that insofar as the temporal models that feed into the logics of political life are left implicit, there can be a failure to identify the sometimes unanticipated similarities between political actors. But further, the question I am particularly interested in here is whether a more explicit account of the role of time in social life might open up alternative ways of thinking about the interrelations between time and community, in the Australian context, but also more generally.

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[3] A set of immigration policies that restricted non-white immigration to Australia from Federation in 1901 into the 1970s (see Jupp, 2002).

[4] The policy of transferring immigrants seeking asylum to small Pacific island nations for processing, rather than allowing them to land on mainland Australia. First implemented in 2001, it has been the centre of a number of controversies around its legality and also due to the poor conditions at the centres. See for example, (Magner 2004)

Making Time, Making Community

In seeking to draw out the variety of relations between time and community, a broader framework is therefore required. Crucial to the development of such a framework is the observation, common in the social sciences, that the time of social life is not singular but is experienced, represented and conceptualised differently in different contexts. That is, treating time as an integral component of the political requires an understanding of it, not as an inflexible constraint, or as an inert medium, but as socially and culturally variable (see Rutz 1992: 2). Far from being objective and quantitative, as I have already outlined above, the variability of conceptions of time supports its mobilisation in attempts to include or exclude different constituencies from the political community. From this point of view, one of the key difficulties with the move towards either a continuous or a synchronised social time, as part of addressing relations of inequality between social groups, is the incongruity of this claim with a recognition of the fundamental inevitability of multiple times in [p106 →] social life. That is, if time is always diverse, might not the goal of unifying time actually be allied with the same doomed political drive towards homogenisation that extols a unified culture, language and identity? However, if this is the case, how are we to respond to questions about time's continuity or discontinuity, which were so crucial to the debates outlined above? What I want to explore in this section then is whether a closer analysis of traditional Western accounts of time might help to shed light on this particular debate. But more broadly, I am interested in exploring how the logics of a single unified, all-encompassing time might support elisions between temporal notions such as continuity and synchronicity on the one hand and political claims for social inclusivity and commensurability on the other. In so doing I will provide a broader outline of some of the ways time plays a role in the construction of community and also address why it is that I have concerns about the ability of a unified conception of time to address inequalities in the way some theorists might hope.

First, then, is the question of the relationship between a continuous and a discontinuous time. In the previous section, I suggested that although it appeared that the temporal logics underlying the apology consisted primarily of Rudd asserting a continuity between past and present, which fundamentally challenged Howard's assertion of a discontinuity, things were actually not so clear. Instead, I painted a more complicated picture that suggested that although Rudd and Howard might offer different accounts of history, Rudd in fact continued to utilise a similar temporal logic to his predecessor. Helpfully, the question of whether time is continuous or divided is one of the primary paradoxes of time addressed by Aristotle in the *Physics*. While noting that time can indeed be understood as continuous succession, he also notes that insofar as the past is not the future, but is distinct and separate from it, then time must also be divided (Aristotle 1984). That is, according to common, everyday understandings, Aristotle suggests that we actually understand time as being both continuous *and* discontinuous. He locates the source of this ambiguity in the difficulty of clearly defining the character of the now, or the present moment. An analysis of the now shows that it is both that which links time together (since it is what connects the past with the future) and also what bounds or limits it (since the now marks the beginning of the future and the end of the past) (see 222[a] 10-12). The complexities of his account are legion, but for my purposes here, his initial statement of the ambiguities of time already provides an

important perspective on the putative benefits of moving towards a unified time. Intruigingly, Aristotle's analysis suggests that debates over whether the past is continuous with the present or divided from it, are not, in fact, debates over two different temporal logics, but instead point to an ambiguity arising from the framework of linear time itself. Somewhat counter-intuitively, this ambiguity suggests [p107 →] that asserting continuity as the solution to discontinuity is ineffective, since one is not strictly the contradiction of the other. Instead, 'connection' and 'disconnection' are interdependent ambiguities inherent to the conceptualisation of linear time itself.[5]

If Aristotle's account suggests that the hope of a unified linear time is structurally impossible, there is still nonetheless the question of the common-sense appeal of such a notion. That is, Howard and Rudd both linked their ideal community to a social time that was itself idealised as unified and homogeneous. For each Prime Minister, relations of continuity between the past and present were key to producing a shared, all-encompassing present upon which the nation's future could be based. Whether this is a regrouping around the values championed in relation to Gallipoli, or around a shared recognition of past wrongs, both proposed a vision of a community unified through its recognition of particular continuities between the past and present. Thus, even while I have suggested that there can be no settling of the question of time's continuity or discontinuity, the notion that a single all-inclusive flow of time is the proper time of a cohesive community remains powerfully influential.

Of course thinking of time in this way is far from intuitive to everyone, and there is a wide awareness that the sense of participating in a synchronous time of the nation was partly the result of newly developed media and transport infrastructures (e.g Allen 2008; Putnis 2010). Added to this industrial and material restructuring, however, have been the shifts in conceptual frameworks that were prompted by the gradual take up of notions in classical physics, particularly Newtonian time, within social life more generally (e.g. Bernet 1982: 91). While this account proved useful for particular problems in mathematics and physics, I would argue that despite its supersession by Einstein's General Theory of Relativity, there continues to be an uncritical transposition of this framework into our understandings of social life which negatively impacts on the options available to us for thinking through the possibilities of community.

To put Newton's account briefly, like Aristotle, he understood time as a sequence of nows. However, there is less ambiguity in his account in that the emphasis is much more on conceptualising time as continuous. That is, for Newton (1993), time moves from the past toward the future in a single all-encompassing flow made up of non-repeatable moments. All events can be placed along a single line of time, within which each event is understood as being simultaneous with all other events that occur in the 'same' moment. I would argue that this assertion of a particular kind of universal commensurability within the moment, and especially Newton's offering of a 'natural' scientific grounding for such a notion, could be regarded as one of the key conceptual supports for modern Western understandings of the ideal community. As I have discussed in other contexts, Newton's conception of a time

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[5] See in particular Jacques Derrida's discussion of this issue in the essay "*Ousia* and *Grammē*: Note on a Note from *Being and Time*" (1982).

arguably makes [p108 →] most sense within social life when it is utilised to manage logistical problems, such as those of transportation (see Bastian 2011; Greenhouse 1996). The ability to leave one's house at seventeen minutes past the hour in order to catch a train to work at thirty-three past the hour, for example, requires a certain faith in the notion that all those others whom I need to coordinate myself with, including conductors, platform guards, train drivers and indeed the train itself, are in the same time as me. That is, I need to believe that their lives and movements are commensurable with my own, in such a way that if we all 'keep to time,' then everything will go like 'clockwork'. While this faith is itself dependent on the reliability and accuracy of the technological devices we use for social co-ordination (see Landes 2000: 139), it is also dependent on the assumption that despite the many qualitative differences in each person's life the potential for synchronisation with others is ever-present. In logistical contexts the assumption of potential synchrony is undoubtedly useful, however, it is important to note that this kind of synchronisation is enabled by increased uniformity and homogeneity. That is, linear time works as a device for bringing communities together in an orderly way insofar as it allows us to minimise or ignore qualitative differences. While this may be reasonable in the case of transport, as we have already seen, this promise of an all-encompassing simultaneity is not only utilised in attempts to solve logistical problems, but political ones as well.

In order to draw out the implications of the promise of synchrony within social life, and the political in particular, I want to introduce anthropologist Carol Greenhouse's approach to social time, which suggests a number of reasons why we should be cautious about utilising a notion of an all-encompassing synchronised present when responding to the complexities of social life. Of fundamental importance is her claim that what is at the root of the way we use time in social life is not 'nature but rather social contest' (Greenhouse 1996: 4). Within a range of continental philosophy, for example, public time is described as arising through the development of techniques to measure the natural world, specifically the sun and other astronomical bodies (see for example,Heidegger 1996: §80-81). For Greenhouse, as for many anthropologists and sociologists, time is instead understood as a tool of social coordination that varies according to which 'social' is to be coordinated. Thus when different social worlds vie for dominance, part of the struggle is inevitably over which 'time' will dominate. Indeed, I have suggested in this paper that the apology itself could be seen as a key site of struggle over how time is to be conceptualised.

Given the centrality of social contest, Greenhouse further argues that understanding linear time as a simple fact of life, and therefore as separate to power, is 'a mystification essential to modern Western political thought' (Greenhouse 1996: 86). We have already seen one example of this in Howard's claims that Indigenous experiences were no longer [p109 →] relevant simply due to the passing of time. That is, from a Newtonian perspective these experiences have no ontological status in the present since they have ceased to be. Indeed, it would be illogical or anachronistic to try to claim that such experiences had some kind of existence in the present. What this suggests initially, then, is the need for a healthy suspicion of the seeming self-evidence of linear models of time, including more nuanced accounts of synchrony or continuity, since time's status as 'natural', 'scientific' or 'real' can be mobilised for political ends, making particularly hierarchies themselves appear as natural and thus

inevitable.

As a result, understanding our use of time in social life to be driven, first by conflict, rather than, say a desire to measure intervals precisely, leads Greenhouse to claim further that varying conceptions of time are integral to attempts to legitimise a unified political authority over a diverse group. That is, she argues that 'ruling or aspiring elites address, in temporal terms, the political challenges from new forms of cultural diversity among their constituents' (Greenhouse 1996: 8). Far from there being a single homogeneous time guiding social life, Greenhouse instead paints a picture of political actors competing over which time will win out. Examples of this can be seen in a wide-range of contexts. David Gross, for example, has argued that "who or what stakes out and superintends the trans-individual temporal sense" was a key battle ground between religious and secular authorities during the rise of the modern Western state (1985: 55). While E.P. Thompson has vividly outlined the way broader conflicts around time between factory owners and workers gradually narrowed to fit within the overall construct of hourly-based labour during the rise of industrialised capitalism (1967: 79-86). Other more recent essays that suggest a similar link between conflict and rearticulations of time include Neil Fleming's claim that media representations of a continuous and coherent line of time helped support British colonial policies on the government of India (2010). The link between concepts of time and attempts to prove political legitimacy in Israel has also been studied from a number of perspectives (e.g. (Moshe 2009; Golden 2002). Finally Shoshana Keller (2007) has analysed the way political conflicts in Uzbekistan have been partly played out around whether its national identity should be guided by a Eurasian Islamic historical time or the European historical time envisioned by communist writers. This suggests that when analysing the way time is used by those seeking to mould a particular vision of the political community, it becomes vitally important to understand that this takes place against a backdrop of multiple competing times.

Consequently, the seemingly common-sense notion that there is, or could be, an underlying unity or commensurability in regard to the temporality of social life is far from the actual case. Instead Greenhouse argues that formal time concepts such as linear time actually work to hide the complex temporalities at work in a diverse society. That is, [p110 →] 'every temporal form suspends or rearranges the temporality of the "other" or others; that is what formal representations of time *are*' (Greenhouse 1996: 85). So to return to the example of logistical times already discussed above, prior to the coming of 'railway time' (and afterwards Greenwich Mean Time), many UK cities and towns had their own 'times' told in reference to the position of the sun and calibrated to their location (see Zerubavel 1982). Bristol solar time, for example, is ten minutes behind Greenwich Mean Time. In the shift to a 'standard time' all these other times were suspended in favour of the country following GMT. Crucially, this 'standard time' was not neutral, but was actually 'London time', thus reinforcing, for the rest of the country, the dominance of the capital. In this way then, the imposition of a single time can be seen to be 'about' managing the multiple times of others in as much as it arises as a response to the perceived unwieldiness of diverse local times by particular kinds of elites.

Importantly, as I suggested above, while utilising a Newtonian notion of an all-encompassing time may be useful in solving logistical problems (though of course the shift to 'standard time' was not without conflict), my concern is that it continues to act as a method

for responding to political conflicts as well. Thus I would argue that espousing a single time as a solution to social conflict – far from creating a 'shared time' – actually supports a reductive approach to the complexities of social life, obscuring the varying, multiple and contradictory rhythms and trajectories it is composed of. The temptation then becomes to idealise unity and synchrony, and where conflicts are present, to assume that they are ultimately commensurable within a properly aligned and shared time. Most importantly, if Western accounts of linear time only ever ambiguously support claims for either connection or disconnection, then claims for continuity or discontinuity over time are never apolitical truth claims, but instead involve acts of selection and decisions regarding relevance. Translate these possibilities to the social realm and we begin to see why time is so important in situations of social conflict, as Greenhouse argues. That is, conceptualising time as being made up of nows (which both produce connections and destroy them) provides a flexible medium in which to legitimate whichever connections or disconnections are preferred within social life, while also hiding the hierarchies folded into this supposedly all-encompassing flow by suggesting that this temporal model is simply common-sense.

Thus, while one might argue that the fact that Rudd and Howard used the same temporal framework is not a crucial issue, after all in reality they acted in very different ways (i.e. one apologised and one did not), there are larger issues that give cause for concern. Specifically, assuming that time simply *is* a single all-encompassing flow, without attending to the broader set of values and assumptions it supports, could end up undermining good-faith efforts to rearticulate community in more inclusive [p111 →] ways. This is particularly the case in complex social situations such as Rudd sought to intervene into. Indeed an uncritical assumption of commensurability in the present moment could arguably be said to be what was at the heart of his faith in the apology to offer a new beginning for the nation. This is because, despite the qualitative differences between all those who make up a community, linear models lend a certain common-sense believability to the claim that being together in the same moment means that each social member is *with* all the others in some deeper sense. I would argue that this is precisely the trap that Rudd falls into when he announces a certain unification of the Australian political community at the moment of the apology, simply by virtue of everyone experiencing it at the same time. As Derrida argues in *The Other Heading* (1992), even within the pressing experience of an imminent crisis, one cannot simply take it for granted that history, identity or culture can be aligned. Despite this, Rudd characterises the moment of the apology as a new point of unification from which Australians might all set off together in unison. Due to the apology, the community becomes realigned, gets back in step, clocks and watches set to the same time. As if by setting off again from the same point we can't help but arrive at the destination all together and without fractures. So while it is not the case that all those who have recommended a unified time as a guide for social life have done so in the same way or even in a simplistic way, I would argue nevertheless, that the promise of commensurability it offers has not been sufficiently uncovered, analysed and critiqued.

Sharing Time?

If responding to the challenges of envisioning an inclusive and diverse political community are not adequately addressed through attempts to produce a newly unified time, might there still not be other ways to think through the desire to share time that underlies this particular response? That is, even while I have raised concerns about a unified time, the underlying motivation for this response, namely to contest the way particular concepts of time support certain social groups, while undermining others, is one I share. In the final section of this paper then I want to explore the question of whether the impulse to share time must necessarily be tied to a model that assumes an inclusive time is one that is all-encompassing.

Challenging the denial of a shared time is at the heart of possibly the most well-known account of the links between time and social inclusion and exclusion. Anthropologist Johannes Fabian's work calls for an end to exclusionary techniques which temporally distance non-western others from the present, arguing instead for the need to view others as coeval with the self, where coevalness describes 'a common, active [p112 →] "occupation," or sharing of time' (1983: 31). Responding to his call is important since, far from being merely a methodological problem arising within certain anthropological methods, the denial of coevalness has, in fact, become entrenched in 'the cultural conventions of political self-legitimation in modern nation-states' (Greenhouse 1996: 2). Even so, Fabian's notion of coevalness has come under attack for remaining within a totalising colonialist framework (e.g. Osuri 2006).

Despite this, there is evidence to suggest that there are possibilities of advancing the notion of coevalness in a more radical direction. Indeed Fabian himself is careful to state that he is not suggesting that there should be an attempt to unite everyone within the same social understandings and representations of time. In fact he acknowledges that this would "indeed amount to a theory of appropriation" (1983: 154). Instead what I want to propose is that we come to understand the call to share time as a call to recognise more clearly the way that a community's co-temporality is always multiple and never absolutely synchronous. To recognise coevalness would then entail breaking the conceptual bond that links 'harmonious community' with a 'synchronised time' in order to instead develop notions of community that would admit the possibility of being in different times, *at the same time*. While the work of rethinking community in such a way would require more space than I have available here, I want to end my analysis with a discussion of three points that I believe would be integral to such work.

The first element of this approach would undoubtedly draw on the body of work within continental philosophy that seeks to rethink community around a non-teleological model where the present is never present to itself (as Rudd seemed to believe it to be), and where the future is ultimately unforeseeable. This reconceptualised community is one that is never fully self-enclosed, but instead is dislocated by nonsynchronous elements, including the untimely, the out of joint, and the messianic (see Derrida 1994; Agamben 1993; Blanchot 2000; Nancy 1991). Crucial to this work is the effort to affirm the ethical value of a disjunctive and de-synchronous time for the political. For Rudd, the disjunctive time of the

political community was primarily a problem to be rectified. As a result, he failed to recognise that it was precisely the disjunctive experience of community and time itself that made room for Anglo-Australians to reassess their past and current actions and to acknowledge the ways their privileges are produced through the suffering and dispossession of Indigenous peoples. Instead he sought to move beyond the disjointed and multiple time of the nation, dividing Anglo-settlers from their past just as this connection was officially recognised for the first time. A greater attentiveness to the untimeliness of the Australian community might have also enabled a better recognition of the further disjunctions between the histories and times of the settler population itself and perhaps allowed Rudd to provide a foothold for other ways of [p113 →] thinking through responsibility in a context of multiple histories of racism and exclusion (see Hage 2001; Chakrabarty 2001).

Sharing time in a community characterised by a radical suspicion of a single, homogeneous time would instead mean that addressing responsibility for past wrongs could not be satisfied by an apology made in a single moment. As Alice MacLachlan has pointed out, an apology cannot be pinpointed in such a way, since so much depends on what actions are taken subsequently (MacLachlan 2010: 380). Further, for Derrida a process of reconciliation that aims to re-establish normality actually betrays the radical nature of forgiveness. Instead he argues that 'forgiveness is not, it *should not be*, normal, normative, normalising. It *should* remain exceptional and extraordinary, in the face of the impossible: as if it interrupted the ordinary course of historical temporality' (2001: 31-32). Far from setting the times to rights then, Derrida suggests that an apology worthy of the name would interrupt time. This could not be a clean division, but rather an interruption that meant that the dominant culture could not carry on as it had before.

In this case, then, a recognition of the untimely would enable a greater awareness of the fact that the rush to turn the page, to move forward, to set a new agenda, potentially leaves very little room for an apology itself to do any work. Writing before Rudd's apology Rosalyn Diprose also argued that a truly 'open apology' would be marked by interruption, suggesting that for the Australian political community 'to be unsettled, for the future to contradict the past, indigenous testimonies must affect the fabric of dominant culture' (2002: 158-159). Like Derrida she argues that such an unsettling could not occur through the offering of an apology that aimed only towards regaining self-control, discharging a debt or annulling one's guilt (Diprose 2001: 131).

The advocacy of interruption can also be seen in Sara Ahmed's work where she argues that while the tendency to try to shift quickly from an acknowledgement of racism to a call for action 'is understandable and complicated' it can nevertheless 'work to block hearing' (2004: §56). This is because 'in moving on from the present towards the future, it can also move away from the object of critique, or place the white subject "outside" that critique in the present of the hearing' (ibid.). Instead it is important that 'white subjects inhabit the critique, with its *lengthy duration*, and to recognise the world that is re-described by the critique as one in which they live' (my emphasis, 2004 §57). An open apology would, therefore, accept an enduring contestation without evasion (Diprose 2001: 130). To share time in this context then, would be to remain within the untimely experience of being put into question, particularly the way the pasts, presents and futures of the dominant settler society are interrupted in such a way that they are unpredictably reshaped by the agency of others.

[p114 →]

The second element of a radical approach to coevalness would pick up on the question of the ability of the agency of others to reshape time, and particularly to begin to ask how recognising this agency might not just interrupt time, but actually transform what is meant by 'the ordinary course of historical temporality' referenced by Derrida. Indeed, far from being 'ordinary' the conflation of a conception of time as forward-moving with ideas of 'progress', which underlies notions of historical time, is more truly understood as an experience of the minority. That is, far from being a straightforward medium that encompasses everyone, occupying a place in 'history', 'progress', 'the future, indeed 'time' itself, has only been available to certain kinds of persons, and even then only in certain contexts. For the majority, including Indigenous peoples, being 'in time', particularly 'historical time' is not something that is at all 'ordinary'. What is also required, then, are the kinds of challenges made within post-colonial theory that rework assumptions about who needs to 'catch up' with whom. This is of vital importance in the Australian context where, as Deborah Bird Rose argues, 'European ideologies of conquest assert that conquest is finished, and that it was the product of so many compelling and inescapable causes that it was inevitable. Ideologies throw the ball back to Aborigines, metaphorically, telling them that they cannot live in the past, and will just have to adapt to the new order' (1992: 197). We have already seen evidence of this method of 'temporal distancing', as Fabian has called it, in Howard's approach to reconciliation. Finding ways of challenging the ways time is used to bestow value and prestige on certain groups of people at the expense of others, including approaches such as Dipesh Chakrabarty's emphasis on 'provincialising modernity' (2000), is thus vitally important.

Indeed, there are already a wide range of Indigenous strategies of 'provincialising' Europe and contesting its sole claim to modernity. Deborah Bird Rose, for example, records a wealth of stories about time offered by the Yarralin people of Northern Australia, in her book *Dingo Makes Us Human* (1992). In one example, she notes that Hobbles Danayarri has argued that in fact 'it is Europeans who are living in the past, still following a law that has no future' (1992: 197). While this critique may appear strange to those privileged by the European appropriation of progress, when seen in the context of the spectacular failure of the European dreams of civilising conquest, of the domination of nature, and of the free market, the settler-descendants still holding onto these centuries-old dreams can indeed be seen to be following laws with no future. As Rose writes, in reference to other conversations with Danayarri, 'failing to understand their place in the world, and the interconnectedness [p155 →] of life, Captain Cook's successors continue to visit destruction on the systems that support them' (1992: 198). Writing on the differences between Western and Indigenous Law, philosopher Mary Graham makes a related critique in her discussions of the differences between societies based on private property and those based on a 'custodial ethic'. She writes that Indigenous philosophy 'posits that the tendency to possess is more deeply embedded in the human psyche than is the tendency to share. In other words, possessiveness is a more "primitive" mode of behaviour than sharing or altruism' (Graham 2008: 188). That is, while 'possessive behaviour is asserted or exhibited spontaneously and unreflectively. Sharing behaviour has to be inculcated in the first place and then 'maintained'' (ibid.). Thus far from

being the pinnacle of progress, Western law is here presented as having a long road still to travel if it is to be one that could support a sustainable and ethical way of life on the Australian continent, rather than one that often only supports short-term ends (Graham 2008: 189). An openness to supporting the power of these accounts to remake European settlers' relationships with time might, therefore, unsettle and unlock the implacable assumption that Europeans are those at the head of the race, and thus make entrenched methods of temporal distancing less tenable.

Finally, a third element of this approach would reach beyond the above approaches that have, arguably, begun to develop a familiar ring to them. That is beyond the revaluation of the dislocating role of the untimely, and the critiques of progress narratives, there is still the issue of the 'ordinariness' of dominant western conceptions of time. My interest here is to suggest that the unsettling involved in a more open sharing of time may actually have the potential to deeply transform dominant notions of the character of social or public time itself. This is because even while critical concepts such as 'originary time', 'duration' and the 'to come' have been developed by continental philosophers to challenge entrenched metaphysics of presence, they are nonetheless often articulated in opposition to a 'vulgar', 'public', 'calculable' or 'objective' linear time that remains locked within traditional common-sense accounts and which are still often understood to be *the* time guiding the social. Thus it becomes important to ask how these critiques might need to be reworked in relation to a more sophisticated account of social time. What would it mean to be 'untimely' in a context where there is no assumption of a 'proper' flow of linear time, but rather where the dominant social time is understood as always as a response to multiple concurrent times, as Greenhouse suggests? That is, what is the untimely for a social time that is, for example, linear *and* cyclical *and* intermittent depending on the contexts and circumstances? Further, challenges to notions of progress could be pressed to work even further by questioning whether assumptions about [p116 →] the future itself, as the place where solutions are to be found and thus as that aspect which we need to be vitally concerned with, might also rest on unexamined preconceptions. How might Rudd and Howard's accounts of reconciliation be reconfigured, for example, if the future were understood as something that was behind us rather than in front?

To explain what I mean here I want to return to Rose's discussions and particularly a passage where she recounts one of the ways Yarralin people conceptualise their orientation in time in everyday life. She writes that this orientation is understood as follows;

> we here now, meaning we here in this shared present, are differentiated from early days people by the fact that they preceded us and made the conditions of our existence possible. In relation to them, we are the 'behind mob'? - those who come after...the future is the domain of those who come after us. They are sometimes referred to as the new mob, or simply as those 'behind to we' (Rose 1992: 206).

When I first read this passage I felt both conceptually and physically disoriented, even a bit queasy. I was so used to thinking of myself as 'in front' of those who came before that the notion that those in the present follow on 'behind' after their ancestors literally made my head spin. While this indicates, first, how deeply ingrained (indeed, how deeply embodied)

Western accounts of time can be, it also indicates how much more malleable time is than it might at first seem. That is, as a range of anthropological literature has shown, an orientation in time towards the future is far from being universal. Even so its apparent self-evidence has made it a pivotal presupposition for a breath-taking array of Western concepts. Justice, responsibility, forgiveness, politics, agency, salvation and mourning represent just a few. In the Australian context, then, sharing time remakes the world in absolutely fundamental ways. Such a realisation requires, however, that linear social time as not simply *the* time, but rather, as I discussed above, as a method of attempting to co-opt and/or exclude diverse others. Crucially, this does not mean that other times are therefore annihilated. Rather the attempt to suspend other times is never absolutely successful (e.g. Nanni 2011). Instead, as Mike Donaldson argues, Indigenous conceptions of time remain important tools of resistance and contestation (1996). A community that sought to resist the lure of a homogenising universal time would therefore need to find ways of being acted upon by the agency of these other times, and of developing ways of conceptualising the coexistence of these times without seeking to homogenise them.

To learn to share time would thus also require that the metaphysics of time that guides white settler culture is also re-described, reworked and remade. Importantly, this is not a call to action, but rather a call to be [p117 →] acted upon. As Rose, suggests, the work that needs to be done is the work that would put white Australians 'in proximity to people and places whose agency can start to remake us' (1999: n.p.). So in exploring how time might be thought otherwise, it is not a matter of acting to find new modes of living time, but rather receiving the gifts of time that have already been offered (Rose 1992: 203). The critiques mentioned above provide contrasting orientations within time that offer particular others the gift of disorientation. Perhaps if the experience of disorientation is given enough time it may help to produce a reorientation in the accounts of responsibility and community that have thus far guided the Australian political community, and understandings of political apologies more generally. Thus in contrast to Rudd who argued that, 'unless we as a parliament set a destination for the nation, we have no clear point to guide our policy, our programs or our purpose; we have no centralised organising principle'(2008:n.p.), I would argue that perhaps it is precisely by not setting a destination, but by staying with the experience of a disjointed and dislocated time that the apology Rudd sought to offer on behalf of settler Australians, might have the time it needs to do its work.

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Michelle Bastian is a Chancellor's Fellow at the Edinburgh College of Art, University of Edinburgh. Her work focuses on the role of time in social methods of inclusion and exclusion. She has recently been published in *Environmental Philosophy* and *Feminist Review*. To find out more or to contact please visit: www.michellebastian.net