



ELSEVIER

Landscape and Urban Planning 61 (2002) 181–191

LANDSCAPE
AND
URBAN PLANNING

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Wild times and domesticated times: the temporalities of environmental lifestyles and politics[☆]

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Abstract

In this paper, I explore how environmental movements and lifestyles, like all forms of human action, produce their own characteristic kinds of time. During this exploration, I introduce a number of concepts which I suggest are useful in understanding these temporalities—chronological and kairological time; linear and cyclic time; segmentation and plot; orientation and synchronisation. Whereas the environment as described by the natural sciences is one dominated by chronological, linear time, human time is also kairological, suffused with meaning and intention. The varieties of human action also produce their own distinctive temporalities—some linear, some cyclic, some oriented to external goals, some self-sufficient. The logic of kairological time also requires that we understand individual events and actions as ‘figures’ against a temporal ‘ground’—one that is characteristically organised into an overarching narrative, or broken up into distinctive time segments. Furthermore, human experience is not just situated in time, but orients itself within time—it faces ‘backwards’ into the past, ‘forwards’ into the future, or commits itself to the present. Finally, lived time is also sometimes synchronised with other times—with that of proximate or distant others, or with historical narratives of progress or decline.

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Keywords: Time; Environmental lifestyles; Politics

1. Introduction

Environmental processes and problems as understood by science have their own, various temporalities. While some are fast, immediate and catastrophic, most are long, slow and gradual (Driver and Chapman, 1996). By contrast, human experience and action—whether individual or collective—tend to operate at a temporal scale between these two extremes. Thus, while some environmental problems seem to happen

too quickly for an adequate human response, most occur so gradually that they remain difficult to incorporate within human consciousness and action, and for most people remain abstract, theoretical and distant.

But the differences between the temporalities described by natural science and those of human experience are not just ones of scale. Human time is not just quantitative but also *qualitative*. Events as we experience them are not just long or short, fast or slow, before or after each other. They are also experienced in terms of *meanings*: as moments of urgency or resignation, remembrance or anticipation, routine or revolution. Such meanings, too, are understood against the background of larger *stories*, within which the events are embedded—stories with beginnings, middles and endings, that tell of victory or defeat, progress or loss.

[☆] A version of this paper was first presented at How Far do They Reach? How Long do They Last? Environmental Problems and Policies in Ecosocial Contexts, The Pori Workshop on Environmental Issues, 25–29 August 1999, Pori, Finland.

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This paper explores some of the ways in which the temporalities of environmental concern and action insinuate themselves within those of lived human existence: in the routines and decisions of everyday life; in the orientation of the self in ethical time; in the moments and narratives of campaigning and protest; and in the synchronisation of individual and collective times in the experience of commitment and belonging. In the account which follows, I will draw on a distinction between three such modes of belonging, all of which manifest themselves in various forms of environmentalism (cf. Szerszynski, 1997). The first mode of belonging is that of the ‘banal association’, the more-or-less instrumental gathering together of autonomous individuals for the pursuit of some common goal or project (Mellor and Shilling, 1997). The second is that of the sect or ‘neo-tribe’, characterised by bounded subcultures, shared practices and symbolic codes, and face-to-face relations (Douglas and Wildavsky, 1982; Mafessoli, 1996; Hetherington, 1998). The third mode of belonging I will refer to is the ‘communion’, the sense of the self as belonging to an imagined community—dispersed through space and time, most of the time experienced only in and as the background of human thought and action, but foregrounded in moments of ethical choice and action (Anderson, 1983). In the paper, I will introduce a number of further distinctions and concepts: chronological and kairological time, linear and cyclic temporalities, plot and segmentation, orientation and synchronisation. I want to suggest that these provide a useful set of resources for thinking about the different temporalities of environmental action operating in these various collectivities.

2. Chronos and kairos

A useful way of opening up a space for a consideration of the qualitative dimension of time is by distinguishing between *chronological* time and *kairological* time. Kermode (1967) identifies two words used in classical Greek that are translated as the English word ‘time’. The first, *chronos*, refers to the familiar notion of time as succession, as measurable and homogenous. The modern clock time is a variant of this. The second term is *kairos*, “the time of episodes with a beginning, middle and an end, the human and living time of inten-

tions and goals” (Jaques, 1982, p. 14). This is the kind of time that can be ‘right’ or ‘ripe’, that can be the time of something or someone, the time that approaches, that can make demands against which our responses can be judged appropriate or inappropriate (Gault, 1995).

This notion of kairological time is touched upon in John Urry’s sophisticated sociological account of time and the environment. Urry describes a number of contemporary social changes as indicating or contributing to a displacement of *clock* time by *instantaneous* time: the extension of our senses through the mass media, the speeding up of economic and political processes through communication technologies and globalisation, the emergence of 24 hour cities and the subsequent desynchronisation of the activity patterns of individuals, and the volatility of consumer and political preferences. Urry also identifies a third mode of experiencing of time, often arising as a reaction against this rising dominance of the instantaneous in contemporary life. This *glacial* time manifests itself in a consideration for future generations, in the desire to protect local distinctiveness from global homogenisation, and in a concern about long-term global environmental change as revealed by the natural sciences (Macnaghten and Urry, 1997, Chapter 5; Urry, 2000, Chapter 5).

However, although Urry wants us to expand our attention away from clock time to include other, multiple temporalities, in its focus on the speeding up or slowing down of our time-senses, his account still remains predominantly *chronological*. Both of Urry’s new times are still characterised by succession and interval, differing from clock time largely in terms of scale—from the ‘imperceptibly fast’ to the ‘unimaginably slow’, as Adam (1995, p. 128; cf. Macnaghten and Urry, 1997, p. 147) puts it. But time is not just about the scale and speed of linear processes. In the analysis that follows, I want to add a number of dimensions as yet undeveloped in Urry’s work on time and the environment. The first is one of reiteration and periodicity. The linear has not totally triumphed over the cyclic in our experience and conception of time; much—possibly most—of human life still proceeds through the cyclic organisation of time, through routines, schedules and calendars (Zerubavel, 1981). Even linear processes are often embedded within larger cyclic patterns, or have smaller ones embedded within them.

Secondly, in this paper I want to dwell more systematically on the qualitative, kairological nature of time in relation to the environment. We divide time into periods not just of different lengths or different speeds, but also of different qualities—into free time, pleasure time, useful time, wasted time. We also typically experience kairological time not just as a succession of meaningful moments, but as narratively organised into story-like wholes at various scales—from the micro-narratives that structure everyday life, through the biographical narratives that give shape to the sense we have of ourselves, our lives and our purposes, to the stories that maintain communities and societies at the scale of generations.

Thirdly, I will look at the *use* of time, especially in relation to ethical experience and belonging. We use the language of time and tense not just to structure and express succession and ordering, but also to ‘orient’ ourselves in relation to value, whether in terms of a past that should be preserved, a present that needs to be responded to appropriately, or a future that has to be anticipated or controlled (Reiss, 1981). We also use time to synchronise ourselves and our actions with others, to mark and perform our relationship to larger collectivities, and to make connections between the time of our concrete actions and the more abstract times of distant and global events.

2.1. *Linear and cyclical actions*

The many kinds of human actions that are linear in form can be divided into two broad classes, characterised by rather different temporalities. One class of linear actions are those instrumental actions of *production* (corresponding to the Greek *poesis* or ‘making’), actions which are oriented to the bringing about of an external goal or *telos*, whether in the form of a physical artefact or simply a desired state of affairs, which is external to and lasts beyond the activity itself. These actions characteristically take the form of a “goal-directed episode”—a discrete, finite time period, bounded at the beginning by the formation of an intention and at the end by its fulfilment or abandonment, and during which the intention acts as a kind of vector around which behaviour is, often complexly, organised (Jaques, 1982). Economic actions, although often embedded in larger cycles, typically take this linear form, in that they involve a sequence of stages clos-

ing with the achievement of (or the failure to achieve) an intended outcome (Faber and Proops, 1996).¹

One characteristic of actions that exhibit this kind of temporality is that, as Aristotle pointed out, they are self-destroying. The closing moment of the action *completes* it: without the (at least possible) attainment of the goal the action would have had no point. But at the same time as the closing moment completes the action it also *destroys* it, by removing its point, and thus dissolving the vector that animated it. When the nail has been fully hammered in, we stop hammering; when the letter is written, we stop writing (Sullivan, 1977, p. 46).

A second, rather different kind of linear temporality is manifest by those forms of activity which are oriented to the development of capacities, skills or knowledge within the actor. Such activities often occur within the context of shared practices such as sport, crafts or disciplinary knowledge systems, with more-or-less agreed standards of excellence (MacIntyre, 1985, p. 187, p. 188). These processes of *development* typically contain within them cyclic patterns of reiteration, of performing the same kind of actions again and again, but this reiteration is subordinated to the linear goal of development. Unlike acts of *production*, these activities not only have no clearly external goal; they also have no natural terminus, no moment at which their point is utterly exhausted. However, although in one sense this might be said to be because they are never complete, because their goal is never accomplished, in another sense these activities can be said to be complete at every moment, rather than just at their end.² Closer to Aristotelian *praxis* than to *poesis*, these activities are performed in some sense for their own sake, for the sake of doing them well, rather than for any external goal.

However, much human action takes *neither* of these two linear forms, but is cyclic in character. Just as with linear actions, it is perhaps useful to divide cyclical temporalities into two main groupings. The first, I want to call *restoration*—those forms of action whose goal is the prevention of entropy or depletion.

¹ However, as Faber and Proops (1996) point out, economic actions often have unintended effects which escape the subjective temporal limits of intended human action (cf. Adam, 1998, pp. 25–26).

² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 10: iv.

Like the linear, instrumental *poesis* described, they are oriented to some notion of direct effectiveness on the outside world; unlike them, however, their goal can never finally be secured. Subsistence forms of life have this restorative temporality; whereas the capitalist economies of the developed world are dominated by productivist or developmental linearities, subsistence economies are characterised by cycles of use and replenishment, plenty and paucity (Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen, 1999). Even in developed economies, this kind of restorative temporality is arguably dominant in the domestic sphere—in activities such as cooking, cleaning, shopping for consumables or the maintaining of human health (Ruddick, 1989; Jurczyk, 1998, p. 294, p. 295).

In the tripartite categorisation of human activity developed by the political theorist Hannah Arendt, this class of cyclic activity, whether subsistence or domestic, would fall under the lesser heading of ‘labour’, the realm of necessity. Unlike the durable, crafted artefacts that civilised humans produce and surround themselves with through their *work*, or the self-realisation and public recognition they can achieve through *action* in the public sphere, the fruits of *labour* are simply a fleeting means to an end, consumed almost as soon as they are produced and in need of constant, reiterative replenishment (Arendt, 1958). However, feminists have criticised the privileging of linear ‘production’ over cyclical ‘reproduction’ which Arendt shares with Marx. Ariel Salleh, for example, drawing on Gurvitch’s (1964) notion of enduring time, values restorative labour as ‘enduring work’, citing the way its cycles of care and subsistence mesh with larger cycles of nature and of generational continuity (Salleh, 1997, pp. 133–147).

A second class of cyclic actions are those that might be termed *ritual*.³ With the restorative actions discussed earlier, the repetitive structure of the activities is imposed on them as it were from the outside, by external processes, such as the accumulation of dust and dirt in a room, or the migration and germination of unwanted plants in a garden. For ritual actions, by contrast—whether taking place in the context of

religion *per se* or in that of familial or community life—repetitiveness is gratuitous, driven not by external necessity but by the internal symbolic logic of the action itself. Repetition here, thus, belongs not to the instrumental dimension of human action, but to its expressive, symbolic side (Leach, 1964). Indeed, it is by its very gratuitousness that the repetitiveness of a ritual is able to signify, to be read as bearing meaning rather than simply being expedient to an external goal.

For our purposes, it is useful to divide ritual actions themselves into two subspecies. The first consists of the high feast days of social life—auratic, often annual, ceremonials, whether familial, local or national, which are marked out as special events, distinct from the flow of everyday life.⁴ In the context of these events, the ritualisation of behaviour, such as through formalisation or regularisation, serves to mark them out as culturally significant to participants and observers, as binding communities and selectively affirming certain values and ideals (Bell, 1992). David Reiss distinguishes these auratically charged ceremonials from a second class of rituals, the unremarked “pattern regulators” that structure the vernacular, mundane cycles of everyday life (Reiss, 1981; cf. Crow and Allan, 1995, p. 158, p. 159). Such domestic routines, often interlaced with those of the mass media, fleetingly synchronise family members with each other and with wider society (Silverstone, 1993, 1994).

So, I have discussed two forms of linear temporality in human action—the time-bounded, teleological act of *production* and the ongoing, autotelic⁵ process of *development*—and two forms of cyclical temporality need-driven, expedient processes of *restoration* and gratuitous, symbolic acts of *ritual*. Of course, these categories are abstractions from the complexity of human life. In reality, they are frequently hybridised in various combinations, or nest within each other at different time-scales (with linear, productive episodes to be found within larger restorative cycles,

³ It might be argued that not all of those actions that we might want to call ‘ritual’ are repeated actions, nevertheless, the term is perhaps close enough to the meaning intended here to warrant its use.

⁴ Of course, these ceremonials can be seen as doing their own reproductive labour, as serving to maintain relationships and communities over time (Goffman, 1971, p. 100). However, in so far as they do, they do so not through direct material causality but mediated through meaning—as a possible perlocutionary effect of the illocutionary act of the collective affirmation of social relations (Austin, 1975).

⁵ Literally, ‘self-goaled’—performed for its own sake.

for example). But how do environmental actions and lifestyles fit within this set of distinctions?

Let us first consider environmental protests and campaigns. With their overwhelming orientation to the achievement of desired outcomes, these seem at first sight clearly to manifest the temporality of production (Zald and McCarthy, 1987). Ever since the Protestant reformation, politics has been understood not just as the cyclic maintenance of the “health of the body politics”, but also as involving the purposive, methodical pursuit of objectives by specific groups within society (Walzer, 1968, p. 182), and environmental politics is no exception. Not all environmental politics takes the form of goal-directed, bounded episodes, but much does. However, on closer inspection there are multiple, overlaid temporalities sustaining protest activities and protest cultures.

First, individual protest episodes are likely to be elements within a movement’s larger ‘project’ temporality, whose goals are more ambitious and less immediately obtainable. This larger project makes biographical sense of past events in terms of a desired future (Jasper, 1997, p. 219, p. 220; Castells, 1997, pp. 356–358). It binds together communities around shared expectations (Crow and Allan, 1995, p. 158). Furthermore, it overcomes the self-destroying character of the production temporality—as one goal is achieved or otherwise timed-out, another one comes forward to replace it, so that the project which binds the movement together is not exhausted (Mafessoli, 1996, p. 97, p. 98). Secondly, protest cultures are sustained by various kinds of cyclic pattern. Even the regular weekly or monthly meetings of local ‘banal associations’ in the environmental field, despite their obvious genealogy in rationalised bureaucratic practice, involve other temporalities such as that of the ‘maintenance ritual’, sustaining a sense of enduring common purpose. At a larger temporal scale, anniversaries of past events such as Chernobyl, or manufactured anniversaries such as annual ‘days of action’ or ‘awareness days’, serve to invoke a sense of communion with non-present others. Thirdly, at the level of the individual, individual protest and campaigning activities are embedded in a longer process of personal development. For individuals the active political life can at best involve the learning of skills, a heightened sense of individual empowerment, the opportunity for the virtuosic performance of skilled activity, and the

intrinsic satisfactions offered by a craft well done and progressively perfected (Jasper, 1997, pp. 217–222).

Outside the public sphere, the cyclic form is even more dominant in green action. As Bente Halkier points out, in the everyday domestic sphere habit and routine predominate; indeed, they are constitutive of its character as a haven of normality. The majority of consumption activity takes this form, of routines more remembered by the body rather than actively chosen by the conscious mind. Shopping for ‘basics’, gardening, waste disposal, hygiene, health care—all have a predominantly restorative character, and tend to be highly routinised. Against this background, the demand in green and ethical consumption to examine and alter one’s restorative practices in a continuous, developmental process of reflexivity—what Giddens calls ‘life politics’ (Giddens, 1991, pp. 214–226)—can only ever partially be met. The call to reflexive and responsible consumption may be ‘drowned out’ by the pressures of routinisation in everyday life; consumption activities may be transformed reflexively, but then become reroutinised and habitual in their new, green form; or middle positions can emerge, with green reflexivity being fusing with everyday routines in new, creolised forms (Halkier, 1998).

However, sometimes the cycles of green lifestyles can have as much a *ritual* as a *restorative* character in the sense that their reiterative form may be as much symbolic as expedient. The routines of green consumerism can be seen as expressive as much as instrumental, as serving to affirm the identity of the individual, and their social likeness with known and imagined others. To purchase green alternatives, to recycle glass and paper, is at once to assert the *kind* of person one is, and to stop doing so would be to jeopardise that self-identity. Maintaining the rituals of green consumerism is, thus, to bind the individual in a ‘communion’—in relationships of moral solidarity with an imagined community of like-minded others.

2.2. Plot and segmentation

In Section 4, I have suggested that the distinctive temporality of different forms of human action differ not just in their outward form—for example, whether they are linear or cyclic—but also in their qualitative meanings, both for the actor and for observers of the action. Actions can be performed for the sake of an

external goal, or for their own sake; they can be done pragmatically, or symbolically. But such interpretations can rarely be read off from an action considered in isolation. The meanings of individual actions are contextual, not just spatially, in terms of *where* they are performed, but also temporally, in terms of *when* they are performed. As Zerubavel puts it, “the normalcy of our everyday life world is temporally situated” (Zerubavel, 1981, p. 20). I want to explore two dimensions of this temporal contextuality in this section—plot and segmentation.

In his writings on narration, the philosopher Paul Ricoeur distinguishes between its episodic and configurative dimensions (Ricoeur, 1984; cf. Vanhoozer, 1990, p. 93, p. 94). The former refers to the individual events or occurrences that make up the narrative; the latter—mythos or plot—is the intelligible whole that is made out of these events. To “follow” a plot is thus not simply to observe the flow of events from which it is built, but also to understand it as an unfolding whole. This understanding is not simply built up from the understanding of the discrete events that occur during the plot, but has to be grasped as a *gestalt*. Indeed, within this narrative mode of understanding, individual events themselves can only fully be understood according to their place in the overarching plot.

For Ricoeur, this narrative understanding is not just something we use to understand works of literature or drama, but is a fundamental feature of the way human beings inhabit and understand the world. Such an approach would sanction the examination of other areas of social life for their ‘emplotment’. Civil society, for example, can be said to have its own set of common narrative frameworks, its own stock of plots and characters, all organised into a ‘genre’ that we have to learn how to ‘read’ and to participate in (Alexander and Jacobs, 1998). At times of high-profile ‘media events’, certain plots typically come to the fore, whether ones of contest, conquest, coronation or excommunication (Dayan and Katz, 1992; Carey, 1998). Victor Turner’s notion of “social drama” would suggest that such dramas are organised around the interplay between structure and anti-structure within a society, and serve to reveal and dramatise its deepest shared values (Turner, 1974). Protests too, as discussed earlier, are not simply a chronological sequence of events; they have a plot (Benford and Hunt, 1992). In Turner’s terms, the typical protest is a social

drama with a standard narrative form—that of breach, crisis, redress then reintegration. Of course, different protests can follow different plots; the changing form of protest over recent decades—from the orderly, linear CND march to the riotous carnivals of reclaim the Streets or Seattle in 1999—can themselves reveal much about the nature of the societies that generated them (Kershaw, 1997; Szerszynski, 1999).

Although narrative and plot can serve to expand the scale of attention away from individual events to the larger story of which they are a part, at other times they can function to *contract* scale. For example, the deliberate, strategic dramatisation of environmental issues is one way that environmental groups can accommodate the media’s emphasis on the here-and-now (Gordon, 1996). The glacial temporalities of long-term environmental problems prevent them from being “newsworthy”; they have to be made so if they are to enter into the system of mass communications. This can be done in the form of “pegs” (Friedman, 1983, p. 26, p. 27; Gamson and Modigliani, 1987, p. 151), or “event summaries” (Funkhouser, 1973, p. 73)—existing events in the political sphere such as decisions or conferences that can be used in order to provide a dramatic punctuation of an issue’s development. Alternatively, groups can engineer the creation of “artificial news”, or “pseudo-events” (Boorstin, 1962), such as dramatic protests staged simply for the media attention they can generate, which can then be turned onto a specific issue.

The second aspect of the time-contextuality of human action I want to draw attention to here is *segmentation*, the marking out of periods of time as having particular qualities or characters. Zerubavel (1981, p. 19, p. 20) borrows from gestalt psychology the notion that the human perception of objects involves the separation of a “figure” from a “ground” to argue that “time constitutes one of the major parameters of any ground against which figures are perceived”. Whether an occurrence is seen as ‘normal’ or not depends on the temporal ground against which we perceive it. This observation applies to ‘plot’ as articulated above: if an expected sequential structure is breached, so that events—however, ordinary in themselves—occur in the ‘wrong’ order, the situation is felt as abnormal. But, whereas offences against plot tend to be ones of ordering, those against segmentation are ones of placement—playing loud music at night, or

rising at the usual work-day hour while on holiday, for example.

A few examples might usefully illustrate the importance of time segmentation in the ordering of environmental practices and values. Firstly, the direct experience of nature as valued beyond its mere utility typically take place in particular segmented time periods. Specifically, the demarcation of certain times in modern life as being ‘leisure time’ has played an important role in non-utilitarian constructions of nature. The marking out of a leisure time that is characterised by non-instrumentally-rational behaviour can be seen as an “escape attempt” from the strictures of both paid and domestic labour (Taylor and Cohen, 1992). Whether through the tactile engagement with nature in gardening, or the visual consumption of nature through excursive walking, the segmented leisure time allows an experience of nature insulated from the demands of utility that dominate the rest of life (Macnaghten and Urry, 1997, p. 200, p. 211).

Secondly, time segmentation is evident in the marking out of times for the differential performance of values and memberships. In modern societies, individuals are typically divided between distinct roles and obligations that they inhabit in a number of different spheres—work, family, leisure, and so on. This segmentation has a spatial but also a temporal dimension (Zerubavel, 1981, Chapter 5). As a mode of belonging, the association follows the conventional division of modern society into the public and private spheres, demarcating ‘on’ time and ‘off’ time. During ‘on’ time, when members engage in voluntary activities for the association, such as meetings and campaigning, their actions are what Weber called ‘value-rational’, in that they are oriented towards the furthering of particular values and ethical judgements. During ‘off’ time, by contrast, group membership is backgrounded and there is no expectation for actions to be value-rational in the same way or to the same degree; at these times the association, as simply the sum of its constituent members with their own private interests and identities, endures solely in an abstract legal sense. Associational ‘off’ time, thus, exhibits what Zerubavel (1981, p. 143) calls the socio-fugal character of private time—its tendency to separate people from the bonds and obligations that bind them to others. Neo-tribal direct action subcultures, by contrast, are highly *de-segmented*, making little distinction between pri-

vate time and public time, and are thus more total in their demands of commitment and action. Unlike the more anonymised dress of associational culture, neo-tribes operate through culturally thick symbols of membership (dress, speech, body comportment) which allow recognition of membership even in ‘off’ time.

Thirdly, protest events have their own segmentation dynamics. Segmentation might occur within a particular protest event, as it passes through different distinct phases, but can also be seen as framing or bracketing the whole protest drama. Turner describes the duration of a social drama as a *limen* or threshold, a passage between two states of stability and quiescence. For our purposes, we might say that the whole protest drama itself takes place in an intercalary segment of time, where the usual social rules have been suspended and others are performed into being (Zolberg, 1972; Barker, 1997). Before the protest starts is the routine of everyday life as usual; then the breach, instigating the more linear narrative of the protest; then after the close of the event, the resumption of routine once more (Szerszynski, 1999).

3. Orientation and synchronisation

As Barbara Adam points out, there is a tendency in societies dominated by chronological time to see time as having value—and usually monetary value (Adam, 1990, Chapter 5, 1995, Chapter 4, 1998, Chapter 2). From the perspective of kairological time, by contrast, we might say that *value has time*. Ethical languages use our timesense in order to ‘orient’ values and decisions. Using the past, present and future tenses that order both our languages and our temporal experience, institutions—whether informal ones such as families and subcultures or formal ones such as organisations—use such *orientation* to organise and render temporally meaningful its present activities (Reiss, 1981).

Traditional societies typically favour a ‘past’ orientation; talk of earlier times is used aetiologically, to explain and justify present social arrangements, and actions carried out in the present are understood as mimetically recapitulating paradigmatic events that occurred in mythic time (Eliade, 1954). Contemporary society has its own manifestation of such a past orientation in the imperative to preserve natural and

cultural objects that are seen as ‘heavy’ with this glacial or enduring time (Urry, 2000, pp. 157–160).

A ‘future’ orientation, by contrast, renders present action temporally meaningful by relating it to events that have not as yet happened. Two variants of a future orientation are of particular relevance in the environmental domain. The first is a consequentialist orientation, closely related to the productivist temporality discussed above, which organises present activity around the intention of influencing the future. This might be predicated on a sense of productive agency—on the potentiality of individuals and groups to make a difference in the world—or it might be more associated with a sense of a lack of control, and with uncertainty about the future, and thus be more concerned with the relative avoidance of risks or ‘bads’ rather than the more positive securing of individual or collective ‘goods’ (Beck, 1992). A second kind of future orientation is based less on an attitude of *control*, or of *expectation*, and more on one of *hope*. This is a politics of prefiguration, anticipating in the here-and-now a different and better world, through utopian moments which stand as partial glimpses of another way of being (Kershaw, 1997, p. 264, p. 265). Unlike traditional societies, this future orientation sees actions in the present not as mimetically repeating a mythic past but as prefiguring a future utopia.

By contrast again, a ‘present’ orientation focuses on the here-and-now. Again, two variants are of interest here. The first is the spontaneist emphasis on the feelings of the moment characteristic of what Mannheim calls the ‘chiliastic’ utopia (Mannheim, 1954). This kind of orientation is usually associated with a period of segmented, liminal time—the experience of ‘flow’ as one loses oneself in the moment during a leisure or recreational activity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), or the collective, antinomian time set aside for excess, the time of party, carnival, riot (Callois, 1959). But a rather different present orientation is one where the demands of timeless moral laws are felt as pressing in on the present, demanding a specific moral response. This is the kind of temporality implied by Kant’s Second Critique, with its injunction to submit to binding moral laws. Here the present is not self-sufficient as a guide to action, as with the chiliastic orientation; the eternal invades the present, imposing its own moral demands in it. Vegetarianism typically has this kind of temporal

orientation, referring and deferring neither to the past (‘we have always eaten meat’) nor to the future (‘it will do no harm to eat it—it’s dead already’) but to the present (‘it’s just wrong to eat meat’; cf. Twigg, 1983).

The final term that I want to introduce to the paper is that of *synchronisation*, the meshing together of multiple temporalities. Any example of synchronisation must involve at least two different times (the ones that come together) plus one more (the moment or period of their coming together). The introduction of this term thus further complexifies the discussion of time above, by suggesting that certain moments or periods in human, lived experience have to be understood as the merging of more than one kind of temporality. Indeed, it might be argued that this is the rule rather than the exception—that human time is characteristically multi-temporal. However, I want to suggest that this is more centrally true of some times than of others.

One form of synchronisation is what Reiss (1981) calls ‘clocking’ and Zerubavel the ‘schedule’—the periodic synchronisation of the activities of different people. The fact that we sometimes do things at the same time as other people are doing them sometimes has direct practical justification, but at others seems more important as a way to strengthen social solidarity, whether at the familial or societal level. This is more clearly so in situations of what Durkheim calls mechanical solidarity—when people are united more by the similarities than by the complementarities that lie between them, and synchronisation of activity is driven more by a ritual need to affirm in-group ties than by any practical necessity (Zerubavel, 1981, pp. 64–69). In modern societies too, the synchronisation of activity—such as in the regular meetings of the rational association—can help maintain a sense of ‘we’. In the case of neo-tribal collectivities, organised not around schedules, meetings and agendas but around camps, proximity and synchronisation takes a form which is less like the meshing of mechanical gears and more akin to an organic resonance, a dialogical tuning of experience and response that Schutz (1971) calls ‘syntony’.

But the kind of synchronisation that occurs in the more diffuse form of belonging I have called ‘communion’ is rather different again, in that it is less concerned with the actual meshing of activities

between two or more people than with a heightened awareness of another temporality within present activities. In the synchronisation of communion, temporalities of different scales and forms fleetingly mesh and exchange meanings. Thus, the ‘pattern regulators’ of the mass media suffuse the time of the family with that of the nation, and national ceremonies temporarily merge the ‘is’ of everyday life with the ‘ought’ of how society should be (Geertz, 1973, p. 112; Alexander and Jacobs, 1998, p. 28). There is space for only a few environmental examples here. In the mind of the green or ethical consumer the restorative cycles of shopping and waste disposal become overlaid with other temporalities at moments of choice and decision. The daily and weekly cycles of the consumer are thus felt profoundly to mesh with other temporalities—with the linear, bounded ones of the life course of individual products across the globe, perhaps, or with the cyclical subsistence activities of distant farmers. Usually these latter temporalities seem abstract and distant, but at moments of decision they are felt to arc close, meshing with present, local actions in ways that transform the latter into moments of moral significance. Similarly in the moment of protest, the time of concrete human actions can be felt to be linked with the sacred, abstract time of “world-historical transformation” (Jasper, 1997, p. 22).

4. Conclusion

In this paper, I have been exploring what might be termed the ‘domestication’ of environmental time—how environmental experience, awareness and concern are rendered humanly meaningful in the lived temporalities of social existence. During this exploration, I have introduced a number of concepts—chronological and kairological time; linear and cyclic time; segmentation and plot; orientation and synchronisation—which, I have suggested, are useful in understanding these temporalities. Whereas the environment as described by the natural sciences is one dominated by an assumption of chronological, linear time, human time is also kairological, suffused with meaning and intention. The varieties of human action also produce their own distinctive temporalities—some linear, some cyclic, some oriented to external

goals, some self-sufficient. The logic of kairological time also requires that we understand individual events and actions as ‘figures’ against a temporal ‘ground’—one that is characteristically organised into an overarching narrative, or broken up into time segments, each with a distinctive character. Finally, human experience is not just situated in time, but orients itself within time—it faces ‘backwards’ into the past, ‘forwards’ into the future, or commits itself to the present; lived time is also sometimes synchronised with other times—with the lived time of others with which we share our lives and commitments, with that of distant others towards whom we take up an attitude of responsibility, or with the historical narrative of progress or decline which is the ultimate temporal ‘ground’ against which we understand our actions.

However, this would be misleading if it were taken as implying that in order to be humanly meaningful a wild ‘natural’ time—the quantitative time of natural science—has to be rendered tame by its translation into a ‘social’ time—the qualitative time of human experience. The understanding of nature as proceeding in linear, clockwork fashion through the endless regular succession of time intervals is a specific cultural achievement of modern society. Scientific framings of nature as operating in quantitative clock time is a human—yet admittedly powerful—construction of nature, originating in the schedules of monastic discipline, disseminated throughout society through the disciplines of capitalist calculation, and given cosmological sanction through the objectivist languages of modern, Galilean science (Thompson, 1967; Thrift, 1990). Viewed through other lenses time in the non-human world as much as the human world can be seen as displaying multiple, overlaid temporalities, and qualitative characteristics, such as those of intention and anticipation (Adam, 1990, 1995, 1998). Such accounts render problematic any simple distinction as that made above between the wild and the domestic. Making the environment temporally meaningful in the ways explored below could even perhaps be seen as restoring rather than imposing a qualitative dimension to time, and thus as at one and the same time *taming* time—making it socially meaningful—and *setting it free*—releasing it from the strictures of quantitative clock time that have been imposed on it by the discourses of modern science.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Yrjö Haila, James Meadowcroft, Dave Horton and Ariel Salleh, comments from and conversations with whom have greatly helped in the writing of this paper.

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