

TIME, SPACE & MONEY

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The clock is probably as much to blame for the current state of world affairs as the burning of fossil fuel, though less easy to pin down. It wreaks its havoc nonetheless, spreading destruction and fear, glaring down upon us, constantly demanding that we speed up.

The rhythm of the clock is the rhythm of the machine - explosive and intense, a consequence of igniting the pent-up energy contained within fossil fuels. Formed over millions of years but released instantly, this explosive force lays down a beat to which everyone must march. It is the role of the clock to broadcast this rhythm which it does with robotic efficiency, policing our days and our nights.

Natural rhythm has a different tempo - days, months, seasons and years. The sense of timelessness which this engenders accords with our body rhythms and allows us to harmonise with the pace of the natural world.

The present role of the clock as an arbiter of time dates back to the Industrial Revolution when 'national' timekeeping was developed to co-ordinate day-to-day activity. This displaced 'local' time which was based on the position of the sun in the sky. The introduction of the clock into daily life also provided a means of timekeeping for the new work ethos that developed with industrialisation.

The modern perception of time is largely shaped by the fact that people have sold their time by taking up paid employment. Where traditional survival mechanisms were based on people producing their own food and shelter in their own time, the modern survival mechanism is based on people taking up paid employment and paying for their food and shelter from the resultant income. This selling of time has had a major effect on how people live. Essentially people have had to forego a sustainable way of life because they are too busy working!

UN Local Agenda 21 encourages us to change our lifestyles in order to protect the choice mechanism of future generations. This quest for a sustainable life is not an easy one however.

When a worker sells his or her time, it is given a monetary value - hence the expression: Time Is Money. The perceived need for economic growth requires that the value of an employee's time be constantly enhanced to keep pace with this growth. However, because time itself cannot be expanded, it is necessary to squeeze more and more activity into a given unit of time. Such 'productivity' forces people to work at an unnatural pace warping their sense of time. Everything appears to speed up to the point where people think there is not enough time for everything they want to do. This in part is caused by regular contact with machines which are used help to boost productivity.

Apart from the demands to be increasingly productive, workers carry an additional burden insofar as they must borrow money to purchase their homes. Such 'mortgaging' plays a vital role in the world economy as witnessed by the recent sub-prime crisis in the United States.

Mortgages act as the feeder system for the fresh capital which modern economies must receive if they are to continue to grow. Where the security of a person's home is linked to this system, they become tied to the success of the global economy - even if they can see that this is causing global warming! This is the modern dilemma and it is precipitated by the fact that people have sold their time and as a consequence have become wholly reliant upon others to produce food and create shelter for them.

While shelters' role in providing for our physical needs is well understood, its role in providing emotional sustenance is less clear. This role derives from the fact that buildings are like ourselves, insofar as they have a physical exterior and an abstract inner quality. This inner quality is the repository of our emotional selves. Such inner space is where we live our emotional lives, sheltered from the outer world by the physical fabric of the building.

When we create shelter we do not actually make space but merely hive off a portion of pre-existing

TIME, SPACE & MONEY 2

space by forming boundaries with floors, walls and roofs. The resulting 'inner' space existed before the building was made and continues to exist after the building has disappeared. This mysterious quality of architecture is often overlooked – largely because space is invisible and is therefore very hard to see! As a result undue emphasis is usually placed on the parts of buildings that are easy to see - the building fabric. This way of looking at buildings is so common that people believe that this is what architecture is. However such physical fabric merely forms the boundaries of the space that is enclosed – very similar to how our bodies enclose the inner world of our emotions. As a result, when we create shelter we not only enclose space but also create an image of our selves.

When we explore the nature of universal space we discover it to be inseparable from time. Speculation as to the nature of this space-time continuum forms the basis of myth, religion and philosophic discourse. It is by such means that we can orient ourselves within the infinite universe and acknowledge the intangible qualities of life. It is these emotional engagements which gives meaning to our lives and allow us discover who we are and the purpose of our existence.

Because space and time are interlinked when we sell our time we also relinquish our space and our ability to engage emotionally with the natural world. The substitution of time for money is the cause of such disconnection. Money creates the illusion that everything is within our reach. However, where the acquisition of physical goods leaves us emotionally unsatisfied, rationale seeks to define the world in purely logical terms. Such a worldview encourages people to value their homes in purely monetary terms rather than in terms of how well they meet their emotional needs or facilitate their living a fulfilling and sustainable life.

It is critical that we acknowledge the vital role which shelter plays in meeting our emotional needs if we are to achieve true sustainability. This process begins by acknowledging the role which mortgaged shelter plays in the global economy and by acknowledging the negative effects of selling one's time. Such a perspective invites us to alter our consciousness and as a result, our entire way of life.

The dynamics of such a consciousness shift are as much cultural as they are personal allowing us to embark on a process of renewal. This forging of a new cultural paradigm must acknowledge the unknown and intangible qualities of life. Such a re-attunement to natural time allows us to connect to the mystery of the universe and the wonder of our individual lives. From this perspective we can see how the selling of time and its calibration against the clock has brought us out of step with nature and with our deeper selves. From here we can begin to recapture the sheltermaking imperative, re-occupying our time and our space, reforming our homes and our selves.

More than anything, the clock symbolises the disconnection from the natural world which the selling of our time and the relinquishment of our space has engendered. It is this distance which must be closed if we are to live our lives according to our own deep nature achieving in the process a truly sustainable way of life.