

Barbara Adam (1998). Timescapes of modernity: the environment & invisible hazards.

'Put at its simplest, the argument of this book is as follows: steeped in the thought traditions of the industrialised West, we learn about and relate knowledgeable to a multidimensional space, but our understanding of the temporal dimension of socio-environmental life is pretty much exhausted with knowledge about the time of calendars and clocks.' (Adam 1998, p. 9). Politics, neoclassical economics and Newtonian science have led us to think in an erroneous way that the time of nature is disconnected from industrial time, argues the author. This modern malaise is unpacked in the first two chapters, where the reader is also introduced to the terms *Wirkwelt* and *Merkwelt*, which could be roughly translated to be the process of reproduction of nature, invisible to the eye and the actual outcome, visible. Finally, in the remaining five chapters Barbara Adam explores modern environmental issues (current political system, food and farm industry, mad cow disease in the UK, Chernobyl, genotechnologies) paying attention to their intrinsic temporality, their timescape. Timescape is the centrepiece of the book and aspires to be its main contribution. It is a conceptual tool of analysis which highlights the time, rhythms and temporality of events, usually invisible and neglected by us, in a hope that such understanding would create a sustainable future and bring a better knowledge of environmental issues. An example of this would be the unpacking of the use of chemicals in modern farming techniques; the visible outcome is a ripe and wonderful product, however, the invisible is the process of genetical change and how the chemical travels to other domains, influencing them.

However, at the end of the book, I asked myself, is the concept of timescape and the analysis provided ground-breaking, especially for anthropologists? I argue not. Nothing new, already E.P. Thompson in 1967 provided an analysis of how the combination of schooling, Puritanism and the adoption of clock in the capitalist industry created industrial time, regulated by seconds, minutes and hours, and no more by the chanting of an Ave Maria, or the time required to milk a cow. As clear in Thompson, anthropologists already grappled with different concepts of time and understood the timescape of other and our society. What is probably more interesting, for an anthropologist reading this book, is chapter 5 on *Mediated Knowledge*. If anthropology might not have much to learn from the cumbersome terms that are *Wirk/Merkwelt*, or timescape perspective, it certainly is exposed to the same critiques moved in this chapter towards media and their failure to report on the commonly called mad cow crisis. Media failed to bring to the public an accurate and accessible report of the crisis, which would feature its temporality, historical context, and nuances, due to its concern only with hard news that sell. However, the challenge to report on this kind of environmental issues, to connect with the public and give it access to mediated knowledge has not been taken up by any of the social sciences, as the author shows. Anthropology, I argue, in the wake of the authors call for social analysis, could fulfil this role and gain new recognition as a righteous academic subject. Even Latour in his keynote address to the American Anthropological Association hopes for a revival of anthropology in a similar role and highlights how the newly born concept of the Anthropocene could provide the battered subject some new life (Latour 2014).

It is by looking at the new literature and field of the Anthropocene studies that the book gains more merit. It could be seen as a precursor of Anthropocene scholarship and addressing the same the difficulties that sweep this subject. The book's merit, then, is in the coupling of time, environment and invisible hazards. It can be seen as one of the first examples of looking at the environmental crisis through a time perspective. In the same way, the Anthropocene joins together: globalization, the environmental crisis and the multiple scales on which humans operate, which have time in common. Even the unnecessarily complicate theorization of *Wirkwelt/Merkwelt* it could be said to have been reproduced in Anthropocene studies, although in a better form. Historian Chakrabarty points out that

one of the main problems of the Anthropocene is how to make sense and address human, global, planetary timescales, all at once. The book in itself provides a solution, but Chakrabarty goes a step further, theorizing *Wirkwelt* and *Merkwelt* as rifts 'gaps or openings in the landscape of our thoughts [...] like fault lines on a seemingly continuous surface; we have to keep crossing or straddling them as we think or speak of climate change. They inject a certain degree of contradictoriness in our thinking, for we are being asked to think about different scales simultaneously' (Chakrabarty 2014, p. 3).

Finally, the book also fails to provide original or new solutions to the problem of environmental hazards. It argues sporadically for new institutions, or a better understanding of the timescape of problems, but remains steeped in the *status quo*. If as the author argues the problem is a disconnection between the time of nature and the time of human, then the solution will not be an institution for the protection of time, but a focus on relations, as envisioned by Zylinska (2018) and her feminist counterapocalypse. Zylinska argues that history is 'an unfinished stream of apocalyptic finalities' (p. 2), and the book seems to go along the same tropes of a gloomy future, where genes are on the loose, and everything is doomed. However, this sort of vision, she argues, is counterproductive and not useful. A feminist counterapocalypse on the other hand provides an interesting and pungent solution; it is not new institutions, or politics or the idea of an otherworldly solution, be it either an escape towards another planet or the descent of a new technology. Only the embracing of relations and vulnerability can solve the disconnection of human and nature.

In conclusion, the book offers a useful reminder of timescapes and their importance in the modern world and the need to always take into account time, temporality and historical context in order to address current environmental issues and invisible hazards. Nonetheless, it has the fault of being inaccessible to the wider public, even if it criticizes media to not have provided useful and truthful account of environmental crisis. The book does not go further than being that useful reminder, and maybe a wakeup call for other social sciences and between them anthropology. In fact, other authors made the same job in a better way. Thompson before had already traced in a clearer manner the connection between capitalism, time and industry; whilst, later scholarships are doing a great job at unpacking the conflictual notions of human time and natural time (Chakrabarty) and providing new solutions (Zylinska).

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