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Lectures „Tyme Passeth and Speketh not“
 Nov. 15 – Dec. 6, 2000

Time in Other Cultures (Dec. 6)

The most valuable of all reflexions we may have about foreign countries and times may come to us when we leave momentarily the boundaries of our time culture and normality and realise our own habits and limitations. The nice thing about it is that, if everything goes right, we are then able to gain a bit more freedom in order to reflect our own way of dealing with time and to shape our unique and limited time more consciously. For „our time is our life“. (R. Levine, A Geograpy of Time)

I would like this motto to stand above our heads and remind us of our reasons for looking at the time of „others“, from other cultures.

Every culture has its own time rules and structures. Even if they are written nowhere, it doesn't make them less forcible. Indeed, cultures reveal their very character in the way they deal with time, in their understanding of time, in the different time patterns f.i. between a rural area and a big city or in such various countries as India or Brasil or Japan.

„All our perceptions of ourselves and of the world are mediated through how we imagine time, how we explain it, use and fill it.“ (J. Rifkin, Time Wars, 1987).

„Tell me what to think of time and I shall know what to think of you.“ (J. T. Fraser, Internat. Soc. For the Study of Time, 4 vil. 1969-79)

Time structures give its character to a place. They are fundaments of social life. When we ask about the experience of time, we ask how the people live. And it is when we have to adapt to the time rules of a foreign country, that we realise how we in our own culture have been dealing with time and how we have been experiencing it.

„Time is not the main thing. It is the only one.“ (Miles Davis in: Levine, 291)

For many people on this planet, time goes by in another pace than for us, industrialised countries. The rhythm of their days is slower and they have another relationship to time.

1. Time consciousness in the developing countries

Time consciousness in the so called development countries can be looked at from 2 different perspectives. One can analyse it from the outside, from our standpoint as Westerners, whose way of living is shaped by clock time, rationality and the logics of production. Or one can try and understand it from the inside, to feel one's way through the reports of travellers, through the stories and poems of the natives about their experience of time – one can ask oneself: How would I feel and react under these circumstances?

Surely, to look at the situation of the developed countries from one's own point of view comes to one most „naturally“. This kind of analysis is full of negations, of stories of shocks and frustrations. Comparisons often end up in counting lacks and faults (They don't have this, don't understand that, are not able to do this etc.). The testimonies abound of attempts however well intended gone astray, and of bad misunderstandings. I would say, this is the normal, first reaction of anyone exposed to a foreign culture such as say in black Africa. This is why I would like to look at these ethnocentric kind of reactions first.

What do a great number of experts have to tell us about time consciousness in developing countries? Five main differences are often mentioned.

- 1) There is no measuring of time. Deadlines and duration don't mean much to the people, they have no strict or accurate relationship to them. Their religion has basically no interest in quantified time. This is true mostly of self sufficient rural areas which live on their own, don't know the division of labour and don't need to coordinate their activities with the outside. As soon as the people live in big cities or in industrialised areas they learn to measure time and take deadlines more seriously.
- 2) Using time for any purpose doesn't make much sense. The limitation and unicity of time is no big issue. For this reason there is no time pressure and also no interest for time planning or for a division of time according to a clock. On the contrary: what strikes is rather a chronometric anarchy and

that the people seem to swim in an ocean of unstructured, overly abundant time.

- 3) The time horizon of the people is limited, their relationship to the future tenuous. This can be observed on all levels: The individual expectations are generally short termed, the economic planning of companies and institutions extends to limited periods of time, historical records are kept on a minimal basis (in o.w. collective memory is relatively short), and the cosmic evolution is not a matter of interest to them. The people in India will say to Europeans: „You live too much in projects.“ Much more relevant to them are the present and the traditional past.
- 4) There are no representations of a linear time, a time which would be irreversible and continuous (our view of time!). There is also no causal thinking, since causality can only be stated through changes in space within a given time (the observation of a change between before and after results in a connection between a cause and an effect). And the future, being not precisely measurable starting from the present, is rather diffuse and vague – this not only in private life but in the economy and politics as well. One could say that the people live in „shortsightedness“.
- 5) A phenomenon which will gain in importance in the future is a bizarre patchwork of different forms of time consciousness. Depending on their roles and the social strata, people will tune in different time patterns alternatively, a traditional and a modern one. They will conform to western time standards when engaged in modern activities with modern devices, , f.i. as workers on a rationalised basis in the industry or for an agricultural plant, or as inhabitants of large cities, as users of public transportation or as consumers of mass media. Otherwise, in their natives villages, within the family and the clan, in festivities or religious ceremonies etc. they will hold on to the slow, extensible time pattern of tradition where certain events, and not the clock, make out the texture of time. This double life according to a double standard brings with it a great amount of disorientation and insecurity. The people have to invent their own arrangement with these ill-matched time systems. The anxiety and inner conflicts brought about by these arrangements weigh heavily on parts of the population f.i. in black Africa, but they might also serve to warn them against falling head first in the pitfalls of the late capitalism.

2. The event time

Let us switch now to the other way of looking at other time habits and rhythms. This kind of analysis is less based on the wish to explain the facts and trace them back to their origins – and then more often than not reduce them to incapacities and simplemindedness - as to *understand* them from within, by this trying to leave one's own cultural point of view and adopt the others' views on things, therefore using primarily empathy rather than analytic power as an instrument of research. Scholars such as the American social psychologist Robert Levine have contributed a lot to a better understanding of and even inspiration by other views on time. Robert Levine has lived in many countries, as different as Brasil and Japan f.i. and has reported in his book *A Geography of Time* (published in 1997) his difficulties in adapting to a slower pace and in making out what the time rules of a given culture are at all, since these are unspoken rules acquired through socialisation and thus never needing justifications.

He makes the distinction between „our“ time and „their“ time. Their time he calls „event time“ in comparison to our „clock time“. He has observed that daily activities in developing countries are not ruled by the clock, but that it is the other way round: What is being done indicates the time of day.

Robert Lauer tells of the Nuers from the Sudan, whose calendars are based on the seasonal changes in their environment. They construct their fishing dams and cattle camps, for ex., in the month of *kur*. How do they know when it is *kur*? It's *kur* when they are building their dams and camps. They break camp and return to their villages in the month of *dwat*. When is it *dwat*? When people are on the move. There is an old joke about an American on a whirlwind tour of Europe who is asked where he is. „If it's Tuesday“ he responds, „this must be Belgium.“ If Nuers were asked the same question they might answer: „If it's Belgium, this must be Tuesday.“ (Levine, 92)

„Their“ time, the event time, is far richer and more lively than the mechanical clock time. Its pace, which is extremely flexible and considerably slower, results from the texture of social life, from the social, economic and climatic conditions of living and also from the religious values. Truly: There are worlds between clock time and event time.

Social relationships are highly valued in these slower societies, much more so than in western societies where punctuality, precision and trustworthiness rank very high, higher than such social duties as the obligations towards friends, relatives and neighbours, or the support of the bereaved at times of mourning or the help due to a person in need. To be friendly and ready to help is a social must in Brasil, may it happen at the cost of punctuality or truthfulness. So if I ask someone in Brasil whether the bus, which hasn't turned up today, will come on the next day, I may get the answer „Oh yes, it will be here no doubt“. And so I may very well end up waiting in vain, for the person I had asked would rather make me happy and say something untrue than say something disappointing or unfriendly.

Social contacts are a most important matter and to be ready for them at any time is an obligation. Any other obligation has a lesser priority and will have to wait. So if someone happens to meet an acquaintance on the way to work, the 2 of them will have to have a good chat before they can get on – and the work will wait. Haste isn't just strange, it is bad. The Kabyles in Algeria regard haste as a lack of consideration and the clocks were long considered as the „mills of the devil“ before they were used as status symbols. In the same sense hurry is for the peasants in Egypt a sign of bad manners, and ambition is as evil as the devil.

A researcher relates his adventures in Marocco:

Many years ago I was talking to a sheik in a small duar in Marocco. He had suggested: „Let's meet in my house and eat. You are my guest. Then you can ask everything you want to know.“ „Good, thank you, I'll be glad to come. What time would be right?“ I asked. „Well, tonight.“ „Great, at what time?“ „Well in the evening, I mean whenever you like. I'll see you tonight!“ The Sheik leaves a bit irritated and I myself am at a loss. No time said. How can I be on time? Aziz (my Maroccan assistant) laughed when I told him about it. „You see, in the evening means when one has stopped working. As soon as night falls. A decent man is busy at day time; without haste but busy. And if one keeps working at night then there is something wrong with him. At night one is with the family or with friends. Anyway, you know, there are no fixed times for eating; and so you cannot be on time for eating. The cooking starts only when the guests have arrived.“ And so it was and almost always is. If one is invited to dinner, one has to have time. And if one comes from far away, the host will expect one to stay over night. So there is no need to hurry. One who is not willing to take time may well be looked at as impolite. (Bertram Turner in: Clewing, 48-49)

The contrast between the time cultures is especially striking on the north American continent. Stepping over the Mexican border in the southern part of the States means switching worlds. The „other“ world makes a sharp distinction between „hora mexicana“ and „hora inglesa“.

The Mexican psychologist Vincente Lopez has spent 5 years commuting between Tijuana (Mexico) and San Diego (California). He talks about how each time he crossed the border it felt like a button was pushed inside him. When entering the United States, he would feel his whole being switch to rapid clock-time mode: he would walk faster, drive faster, talk faster, meet deadlines. When returning home, his body would relax and slow into event time the moment he saw the Mexican customs agent. „There is a large group of people like me who move back and forth between the times,“ Lopez observes. Many, he believes, insist on keeping their homes on the Mexican side precisely because of its slower pace of life. „In Mexico, we are inside the time. We don't control time. We live *with* the time. (Levine, 190)

A Mexican writer explains to the frustrated American businessmen who complain that the Mexicans, as they say, are *plagued* by a lack of attachment to time:

„They are simply different...It is more important to see a friend of the family than to keep an appointment or to make it to work, especially when work consists of hawking wares on street corners ... (And) since most people are paid little for what they do, the prize for punctuality and formality can be meaningless: time is often not money in Mexico.“ And he concludes: „Time divides our 2 countries as much as any other single factor.“ (Jorge Castaneda in: Levine, 91)

Rural communities in the 3rd world seem to have an intense, religious relationship to the rhythms of daily life. The present gets its meaning out of the quality that has been ascribed by tradition to the particular day and period of the day. Quiché Indians in Guatemala f.i. have inherited their calendar from the Mayas. It consists of an endless cycle of 260 days. Their year is different from the official year and doesn't have 365 but 260 days. Each of these 260 days has a name and belongs to a godhead, each one has its particular face. There are calendar priests whose duty is to watch over the days and to predict how their fellowmen ought to experience every moment. The Quiché Indians don't learn, as we do, to make the best use of every hour but to live every moment in the right way.

3. Living with Time

Expressions like Living with Time or Sinking in Time, or Swimming in an Ocean of Abundant Time help, better than any sociological analysis of correlations between cultural values, sense this other time quality. They help envision a meaning for just being, without doing anything, something like a primary feeling for life which must have whispered the following saying to the people in Haiti. It says: „You have the clocks, we have time.“

Here we, median neurotics of the Western hemisphere who hardly manage to come to terms with the present, heavily burdened as we are with past wounds and great expectations at the future, we can't help feeling envious of this amazing capacity to give oneself completely to the present moment. We have great difficulties to free ourselves of the pressure to achieve. But then: We need also a long time to de-program and learn not to drown hopelessly in the unstructured time but on the contrary to keep alert and open for what every moment may bring.

Neil Altman, a psychoanalyst from N.Y., spent several years in South India as a Peace Corps volunteer. For a good year he couldn't get used to the slow pace of life there. He recalls:

At first it was very stressful, because you're in an unfamiliar situation that makes you feel insecure. It took a year for me to shed my American, culturally based feeling that I had to make something happen. The first year in India, I joined the ranks of „mad dogs and Englishmen“ who are the only ones outdoors in midday sun, as I rode my bicycle in determined search of work to do while everyone else slept. Being an American, and a relatively obsessional American, my first strategy was to find security through getting something done, through feeling worthwhile accomplishing something. My time was something that had to be filled up with progress toward that goal. But it's very anxiety-provoking to encounter people who are in a different sort of time than you are. You say, for ex. „So, when can I meet you in your field, to talk about planting vegetables?“ And they say, „Four o'clock.“ And then you go there at four o'clock and they aren't there, because they didn't take the appointment literally. And then you get very anxious, because you're trying to get something done and they're not cooperating.(...)

By the 2nd year, I relaxed and fully caught on to how one has to live in an Indian village. Since there were no telephones, I would often get up in the morning and ride my bicycle five miles, say, to meet a particular farmer. Arriving there, it was usual to find out that he was

away or expected back soon, which might well mean the next day. By the 2nd year, this type of event had stopped feeling like a disappointment, because I no longer really expected to accomplish anything in the first place. In fact, it seemed almost humorous to think that you could truly accomplish what you had set out to accomplish. Instead, I would go and sit in the local tea shop and meet some new people or simply stare at the animals, children, and other assorted passersby. Then, maybe, something else other than what I'd planned to do would happen. Or maybe it wouldn't. Whatever work was going to get done would come to me. By the 2nd year Indian time had gotten inside me. (Levine, 204-205)

We are prone to clichés and can hardly imagine that to live *with* time doesn't necessarily mean to hang around and lie in the sun. How can doing nothing feel anything else than empty and boring, even agonizing? For most of us doing nothing might be all right during the holidays, but in the long run – it is actually not far from a horror vision. And quite a few people cannot stand unstructured time, and fall into depressive or anxious moods on an idle Sunday morning or holidays,

There is what I would call a contemplative way of doing nothing.

A poem by Roberto Juarroz with the title „13th Vertical Poem“:

Today I have done nothing.
But many things happened in me.

Birds, which do not exist,
found their nests.
Shadows, which may be here,
reached their bodies.
Words which exist
Got their quietness back.

To do nothing
saves sometimes the balance of the world
by achieving that something weighs
on the empty pan of the scale.
(Marino, 1)

4. Waiting

Something we Westerners have most difficulties with is waiting. To us, waiting means so much as wasting one's time. And this is a great sin in

our achievement oriented culture. A great number of cultures understand inactivity in another way.

Eva Hoffman, a woman writer originally from Poland and raised in Canada, describes how during a trip through East Europe she learned to appreciate the readiness of the people to accept waiting in silence.

„Now again we wait, facing each other silently. Balkan time. We sit, the way Zen masters sit. There’s no awkwardness in it, no frantic noddings of the head or reassuring smiles. I’m beginning to find it strangely relaxing. I’m shifting to another sense of events, in which you don’t insist on fulfilling a plan but wait for what happens next., Then she found that to accept to wait in silence taught her to trust the world and the others:

„Something always happens next: the principle I’ve been slowly soaking in. The world doesn’t run out, and neither do human beings, who for the most part are a source of help rather than threat.“

(Levine, 42)

The Japanese find an interruption in the activities as important as the activities themselves. They believe that the stops along the way are as meaningful as the eventual destination, and the arrangement of spaces around the objects as important as the objects. „The traditional Japanese garden, for ex., is designed with stepping stones that require the observer to stop and look down and then up again; as a result, every step offers a different perspective.“ (Levine, 197-8) .

The Chinese are said to be masters in waiting. They consider waiting as a necessary preparation, a period of alert passivity until the right moment comes about. They believe that doing nothing with the right attitude is highly creative and contributes to the coming of the right moment where doing is then fruitful and the pace can accelerate again.

5. Mythical Time

Is one ready to let go and open up to the experience of doing nothing and waiting, one can sense how time extends to amazing dimensions. This wonderfully extended time comes about f. ex. when fairy tales and legends are being told and the „other“ time, also called the „old“ time or mythical time, is being brought back into the present. These are moments of rapture where our clock time goes forgotten and an ocean of richly abundant time surrounds one.

Amelie Schenk, a Swiss ethnologist who spends every year a few months in Mongolia, writes about her experiences as she was travelling in the company of a shaman called Dordsh, of the old Dashzeren and other Mongolians:

Fogwater, as the nomades call it here, had sunk into the land and engrossed the air. The sky had cried all its tears recklessly and my heart, and not only mine, felt heavy. The steppe had turned into a swamp, the wet coolness had wrapped itself around our bones. I was becoming a docile something, unable to move but awake. Every single event meant me and with every little thing that happened my Ego was gone. I was hanging on to Dordsh, as if moored to his side. He was telling of bygone days, where the early shamans still could fly, of the terrible years of socialism with the persecutions and the arrests of shamans and all other believers, of his life and all sorts of things one might call miraculous. These hours seemed to be made for story telling, they were suspended as in a dream although the outside world, hostile and earthbound, weighed heavily on everyone of us: the rainy hours, the days and nights, the numb closeness, the alltoo plentiful vodka – and I was hiding the tears I couldn't help shedding for I felt dizzily happy to be ravished in the middle of Nomadic life.

One thing I remember particularly from these days is what happens when a story is being told. I didn't just grasp it, I lived the story, absorbed every single word said, and as I breathed them out, images would come to life. It would smell of rotten meat as soon as something was told about a corpse; the wind of the steppe would blow as the story went of a storm in a winter night; fire would spurt, crackle and blaze when the shaman teacher of my story teller would set out to work after midnight. The words would flow and rush and the story would go on and on. Finally it was as though I saw flying objects in the sky, or even heard them. (...)

I sensed the breath of the spirits, their cool gliding by, the quiet crackling of their presence, I dreamed of them but wouldn't tell anyone. To talk about this would have meant to let it come close to my life and feed it with the seeds of my own thoughts. I saw the black soul in front of me. (The shaman said:) „We call (the black soul) by its name. It keeps jumping here and there. It looks like a skull whose underjaws clatter endlessly up and down. It is the black soul which watches over the corpse, the shaman works with it.“

The rain kept pounding over the roof of tarred cardboard. It had bound us together in the shaman's workroom and asked from us that we share everything together. We had become the prisoners of

time und were banished on the island of eternity. No story that once was told and none that would once be told seemed to matter anymore. Even things happened long ago belonged here and now. Yes, the story telling shaman is an enchanter, his words take any shape, they change constantly, and he lets the river flow which tears everything away with it...

Nomades are superstitious and naive, they even believe in miracles – had they not warned me? And now? It was as though I had been infected. Let's get away from the cavern of fairy tales! Some distance would do me good. But I can't let go of the stories yet. Or do their images run after me? Do I trail them along out of yesterday and the day before into the present day and push them into the day to come? I mumble to myself: „They say he keeps human meat in his wooden chest.“ „So what, there are many like him, what's wrong with it?“ says the old Dashzeren drily, „If he really wants to call on the spirit of Dshingis Khan, he will need something like this for a sacrifice!“ I don't know, I don't know, and yet: it keeps wandering about in my head and my body. (Amelie Schenk in: Clewing, 112-114)

It is not that we Westerners would have no idea of this quality of time. But what we urgently need is to grow a better awareness of other qualities of time - and this is true of all „other“ time patterns, other than the ticking of our clocks - so that they might be actively protected. For our clock time, domineering and constraining as it is for all of us, is a jealous time and tends to eliminate all others if we don't beware.

Quite a few psychologists and physicians recognize the value of other time patterns, they observe their unique creative potential and their lasting positive effects on body and soul. Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi calls the the sense for this extended time „flow“. He even locates in it the source of the feeling for happiness. To this „flow“ belongs another kind of thinking, he says, a thinking free of time. One's Ego is gone as well, as though the habitual Ego had immersed in this ocean of time we were mentioning before. You might say that one is „beside oneself“, in another space and another time. Csikszentmihalyi has observed the „flow“ in playing or music making. One might want to enlarge the list and include painting, all imaginative processes, writing, free or ritual dancing, even trekking – and of course meditating. But then: Such moments where one feels literally ravished from normal reality can happen uncalled for to just about anyone, f.i. in front of a landscape, in the mountains, at the seaside, or listening to a piece of music.

The extended time has been familiar to many artists and poets of course. Michael Ende calls it the „time of the heart“, a „big but very common secret“. Erika Burkart, a German poet who lives in Switzerland, expresses it in a poem:

Data, in my life,
Does not tell much.
Long
The hours,
The minutes longer,
Yet a few seconds
Endless.

C.G. Jung who owes his psychic health for a good part to those hours, where he would idly play with stones at the lake and let go of all rational concerns, saw in them a vitally important opportunity for a positive regression to happen - a regression to a not directed, an associative thinking which dwells at the edge of our consciousness. Visions, sounds, holistic perceptions and intuitions, hardly expressible at all, come forcibly to mind. Such a regression can serve the individuation process, is as a matter of fact essential, Jung believes. It can also however have a negative effect when the Ariadne thread to reality gets out of hand and the return to reality and to the world time is endangered.

Other psychoanalysts call this thinking pre-logical and speak of primary processes in opposition to the secondary, the logical thinking processes. The American psychoanalyst Karl Stern stresses its subjective aspect: the approach of the rational mind, he says, seeks the objectivity, it looks at the world as if from the outside and questions it in order to grasp it. Associative or primary process thinking sinks *in* reality, makes no distinction between inside and outside, or between subject and object. What is sought after is a momentary identification, others would speak of empathy, with reality. This thinking, Stern believes, has its origins in the early mother-child attachment:

All knowing through unifying, all knowing through absorbing...all knowing coming about through love has its natural ground in our original attachment to the mother. (Karl Stern, 76 (d))

Stern concludes that this kind of approach, which consists more of understanding than of explaining, has to do with wisdom, rather than with knowledge. Just as Jung did, Stern also chooses as an allegory for this wisdom the image of Sophia, in whom spirit and matter are unified.

6. Future and Continuity

What is to hold of the view of other cultures about the future? This issue has proved to be a milestone in the interactions between cultures and many a businessman, engineer and missionary from the West broke his teeth on it.

Let's not be too exacting and start first with reports and analyses from the Western point of view. As Westerners, we have been socialized on the basis of the enlightenment. We all have some kind of a life plan or life script in mind, and our ideal Ego contains autonomy as a necessary ingredient as well as willpower so as to enable us to reach our objectives in life. All this is a matter of evidence for us. Not for all though.

Let us have a look at a few Islamic countries f.i. The future, in the eyes of the Moslems, is known only to God, for the humans it can only be empty and misleading. Moslems are generally unsure and sceptical about the future – an attitude exactly at the opposite of ours, where, as we have seen, optimism and the love of risks („No risk, no fun“ has long been the motto for our economy) have predominated for the last 350 years. No one, according to the Koran, should ever speak of what he or she *wants* to do, for things happen solely after God's will. Says a European to a Moroccan „I'll come, for sure.“, the answer will hastily come „Don't say this, it is not up to us to speak of the future. You may come if God allows it. Only Allah knows about the future.“ (Bertram Turner in: Clewing)

The same rules are true of human deeds and activities and of natural processes in the agriculture. Just as the harvest ripens at certain times of the year, whatever is planned can only begin when the time is „ripe“ for it. Creation is basically no continuous, ever lasting process. It consists of constantly repeated acts of creation by God, it is nothing but a divine habit. The time horizon in agriculture, the planning doesn't usually extend beyond a yearly cycle. Within this cycle, the dates will be determined by the religious authorities for the periods of work, the fairs and the feasts. Thinking about the future is a mostly collective issue, private plans and expectations have very little room, most of one's life will be dictated by tradition.

Local time (in Marocco) is bound to a community and a place. Moussem is the annual feast of the local holyman or Marabout. Only the main holidays such as Ashura, Id el Fitr and Id el Kbir are fixed after the islamic calendar, for all at the same time. For this reason, it is up to the authorities, to the Fkir and the religious specialists to decide about the dates, as well as about the beginning and the end of Ramadan, about the month of fasting and the time of Haij, the pilgrimage to Mecca. Very few people know

their way about in the islamic calendar and can calculate the proper dates. The calendar makes a shift of 11 days every year, that makes a cycle of 36 years. And although it would be of the utmost importance for most peasants in the country to know when and at what time the main feasts take place, no one ever calculates them in advance, starting from the present year for the year to come and the next for i. All other feasts have their place in the local time cycle of the community, and this cycle depends on the cycle of the vegetation. (Bertram Turner in: Clewing, 51)

As time is only at the disposal of God, no one may use it to his or her own purpose and want to have a profit by it. Just as in the Middle Ages in the West, interests on loans and ensurances are officially forbidden. The consequence is that the average people have no incentive to save money and that capitalism has a very hard stand.

Quite naturally, examining these different facts, the absurdity of many of these beliefs and customs strike us and, typically for this kind of investigation, we cannot help concluding to a negation, a „lack of“ much of our sophisticated way of thinking. I.o.w. we find them, politically correct or not, simpleminded and naive. Only understanding from within can remedy this. A German Egyptologist, Jan Assmann, can help us here. His studies of the ancient egyptian high culture stress another aspect of their understanding of time. He observes their strong belief in continuity and permanence, ever present in their art and their religion, and asks himself how it came that thinking about the future and visions of the future were practically nonexistent. Just as in the Middle Ages in the Western cultures, but with even more consequence, ancient Egypt forbade any novelties in the art (in temples and graves). Culture ought to stand still, to be timeless. The pyramids were conceived to exist over the milleniums and the art, as far as we can observe, has been repeating itself for 2'000 years, so much so that certain works can only be estimated with an accuracy of plus minus 2'000 years!! The technics of the graves and the mummy making was thought to last for eternity. In this sense art ought not to tell of myths, os stories with a beginning and an end, but had to remain time independent.

Why this strong emphasis on continuity? Because every day, every sunrise was regarded as a new creation issued of the united powers of Osiris, the god of the dead, and Re, the sun god. Only through the continuous rituals of the priests following the course of the sun from morning to dusk could the earthly conditions remain bound to the endless time of the cosmos. The ancient texts abound warning that the world would cease to exist, were these rituals to stop. They describe in

all colors how the earth would dry up, the sun would not rise any longer, the moon would not show either, the ocean would sway, the land would turn and the river cease to flow. So every new day meant that the catastrophe had been once more avoided and a possible desolation passed. This being so, it is only understandable, says Assmann, that every new day would be seen not so much as a further progress but rather as a persisting, a prolonging of life, and that there would be no expectation of a future salvation. What predominates in the religious thinking is an acute awareness of the limitation and the high value set on the life time. One is being constantly reminded to use time in a meaningful way and – interesting for us! – not to bother too much about the future. So that it is the present time, and not the future, which asks for the constant attention and respect of humankind, since every day has to be hauled anew from the source of endless, cosmic time.

India is another example of a high culture which bothers little about an accurate division of time and a planning of the future. The world for the the Hindus, just as in ancient Egypt, has no beginning and no end. Time flows endlessly, has always been and will always be. India had until 1953 30 different calendars. And inspite of their excellent knowledge in astronomy and mathematics, they didn't care to invent clocks. Why? Because there was no need for a precise structuring of time. The pace of life is casual and the bureaucracy keeps to its rigid, circumspect, not-to-be-hurried procedures. The authorizations for starting a new company f.i. may well last at least 2 years. So far for the so called objective, negative analysis.

The expert in Hindu mythology and great poet Heinrich Zimmer has immersed in their understand of time and come out with precious information for lay people. With the help of his profound understanding, we will be able to have some insight in the breath taking dimensions of time and the meaning given to the present by the Hindus.

Zimmer tells the myth of the parade of the ants. An unknown youth has visited the great king and god Indra. The boy ends up teaching the great king about the meaning of life compared to the many different forms taken by Indra – of which the great king is but one! - and the eons before and after him:

The life and kingship of an Indra endure 71 eons, and when 28 Indras have expired, one Day and Night of Brahma has elapsed. But the existence of one Brahma, measured in such Brahma Days and Nights, is only 108 years. Brahma follows Brahma; one sinks,

the next arises; the endless series cannot be told. There is no end to the number of those Brahmas – to say nothing of Indras. But the universes side by side at any given moment, each harboring a Brahma and an Indra: who will estimate the number of these? Beyond the farthest vision, crowding outer space, the universes come and go, an innumerable host. Like delicate boats they float on the fathomless, pure waters that form the body of Vishnu. Out of every hair-pore of that body a universe bubbles and breaks. Will you presume to count them? Will you number the gods in all those worlds – the worlds present and the worlds past? A procession of ants had made its appearance in the hall during the discourse of the boy. The boy noted them, paused, and stared, then suddenly laughed with an astonishing peal, but immediately subsided into a profoundly indrawn and thoughtful silence.

„Why do you laugh?“ stammered Indra „Who are you, mysterious being, under this deceiving guise of a boy?“ The proud king’s throat and lips had gone dry and his voice continually broke.(...)

(After some pressing requests by the king, the boy finally answers:)

„I saw the ants, o Indra, filing in long parade. Each was once an Indra. Like you, each by virtue of pious deeds once ascended to the rank of king of gods. But now, through many rebirths, each has become again an ant. This army is an army of former Indras.(...)

This is the whole substance of the secret. This wisdom is the ferry to beatitude across the ocean of hell.

Life in the cycle of the countless rebirths is like a vision in a dream. The gods on high, the mute trees and the stones, are alike apparitions in this phantasy. But Death administers the lay of time. Ordained by time, Death is the master of all. Perishable as bubbles are the good and the evil of the beings of the dream. In unending cycles the good and the evil alternate. Hence, the wise are attached to neither, neither the evil nor the good. The wise are not attached to anything at all. (...)

After some time the boy disappears and Indra realises he had been visited by Vishnu, the greatest of all gods.

„Indra pondered; and the events seemed to him to have been a dream. But he no longer felt any desire to magnify his heavenly splendor or to go on with the construction of his palace. He summoned Vishvakarman. Graciously greeting the craftsman with honeyed words, he heaped on him jewels and precious gifts, then with a sumptuous celebration sent him home.

The king Indra now desired redemption. He had acquired wisdom, and wished only to be free. He entrusted the pomp and burden of his office to his son, and prepared to retire to the hermit life of the

wilderness. Whereupon his beautiful and passionate queen, Shachi, was overcome with grief.

Weeping, in sorrow and utter despair, Shachi resorted to Indra's ingenious house-priest and spiritual advisor, the Lord of Magic Wisdom, Brihaspati. Bowing at his feet, she implored him to divert her husband's mind from its stern resolve. The resourceful counselor of the gods (...) listened thoughtfully to the complaint of the voluptuous, disconsolate goddess, and knowingly nodded assent. With a wizard's smile, he took her hand and conducted her to the presence of her spouse. In the role then of spiritual teacher, he discoursed sagely on the virtues of the spiritual life, but on the virtues also, of the secular. He gave to each its due. Very skillfully he developed his theme. The royal pupil was persuaded to relent in his extreme resolve. The queen was restored to radiant joy. (...) (Zimmer, 6-10)

Zimmer explains how this tale doesn't stop at the infinity of space and time, which would indeed reduce a life time to nothing, but gives its meaning to the limited life-time as well.

„Between this boundless, breath-taking vision (of infinite time and space) and the opposite problem of the limited role of the short-lived individual, this myth effected the re-establishment of a balance. Brihaspati, the high priest and spiritual guide of the gods, teaches Indra – which means everyone of us – how to grant to each sphere its due. We are taught to recognize the divine, the impersonal sphere of eternity, revolving ever and agelessly through time. But we are also taught to esteem the transient sphere of the duties and pleasures of individual existence, which is as real and as vital to the living man, as a dream to the sleeping soul. (Zimmer, 22)

7. Time Conflicts and Multiple Time Consciousness

Developing countries are under a considerable pressure to adapt to our time rules. As a consequence of the demographic explosions and the economic evolution, large cities have rapidly grown to huge urban agglomerations. Public life in such vast concentrations of population needs some kind of network between the different institutions, and a coordination in time as well (deadlines, planning, etc.). A modern state needs a given time order valid for all if the different components of public life, the industry, the administration, the traffic and the economy in general, want to work together. Not to forget the relations to the international market and to other states which also require a unified time order.

On the other hand, the traditional time patterns still remain. And the phenomenon of a coexistence of different understand of time has been widely observed. Depending on the place and the time of day, the people switch from one time consciousness to another. African industrial workers f.i. live during the week after the clock time and they switch to the time of the clan as they go back to their villages for the weekend.

The Swiss ethnologist Andreas Obrecht tells of the resistences and avoidance strategies of the inhabitants of Papua Newguinea in Melanesia towards to new time rules imposed on them.

Their culture is a typical for a so called „segmentary society“. The people live isolated in small, economically independent units. These units themselves are not organised in hierarchies but in clans. There are no dynasties of leaders, only temporary, local leaders. They live of hunting, collecting and a bit of agriculture. A look at their traditional time structures will give us an idea of the enormous cultural jump the adoption of the clock time represents to them.

Their time is organic, structured after the activities of everyone. The daily rhythm is not institutionalised, no eating time, no sleeping time, so that everyone gets on freely with his daily occupations as he or she pleases. In the daytime as well as at night there is a constant harmonious disorder, one might call it a peaceful untimeliness.

Here a quick look at the time structure of a clan house of the Mianmin in the highland of Papua Guinea at night:

Sleeping time is not separated from eating time and talking time, from housekeeping, from cooking etc. (...) During the whole night things are going on in the house. Occupations and movements which neither run against each other nor are perceived as disturbing by the others. While some members of the big family sleep, others are busy talking, smoking, going out of the house, gathering wood, playing with the children or weaving; quite often some of them wake up after a short time and resume the conversation right away where they had left it before going to sleep. It is the individual tiredness which determines the rhythm of sleep, and not a socially imposed pattern of wake and sleep periods. (Andreas Obrecht in: Rusterholz, 10-11)

The passages in the life cycle, such as initiation, marriage, manliness, menstruation, but also illness, bewitching, conflicts, war, fire or accidents, all of these rituals take place on a flexible time scale, when it is time for them. There life time and world time are one. And the file time is bound to the mythical time in a relation of trust.. The rules for solidarity and the distribution of goods in the clan are given. The elders have the

authority. The people live separated by sex. The most important thing is the well-being of the community. Everyone can count on the solidarity in the group for his or her survival. Whatever serves the well-being of all will be rewarded and valued. The cosmos is defined by the ethnical group. The image of the world is magical, there is nothing like chance, so every single event is given a meaning and integrated in the magical reality of the ethnical group. Magics also represents a set of norms and has certain means at its disposal to influence the material world. The traditional Melanesian way of life is often described as casual and peaceful, since the elementary needs are being cared for by the clan, and as socially oriented.

Important changes are now taking place. Along with the coming of the Western economy and the rapid growth of large cities, a strong pressure is being exerted on the people to adapt to Western structures in urban and semi-urban areas. Promises are being made of good income, education, material goods and life style, of individual freedom and equality. Confronted as they are with the Western time rules, with a precise division of the day, a separation of work and free time, a fixed pattern of wake and sleep periods, and then with demands for continuity and punctuality, the people have to bridge a considerable cultural gap if they want to adapt. Now world time and life time drift away from each other and the responsibility for the harmony between two radically different attitudes towards time lies by every individual.

The critics from the point of view of the Western production logics are not new. The reproaches to the Melanasiens are: lack of will power, lack of flexibility, laziness, lack of discipline, simplemindedness, inconsequence and lack of efficiency. This sounds like a litany of racial bias, a well known reaction by projection, the cultural differences being interpreted as bad manners and shortcomings.

As for the Melanesians, they develop strategies of avoidance. They escape from the time control by staying away from work, some even leave the town for good and go back to their villages.

One of these socalled re-migrants says: „I like to stay at home – in the village -, because there is no time limit, whereas in town, there are certain times when you get up and sleep and all you do has to be on time. But out in the village, it is just free; all you do is just make your own garden...You will say we are very lazy people. If you don't like work, you just sit there, that's all, and then get something to eat. But in town, you go by the time. Plenty of people

say time is money, which is true in towns, but out in the village it is not..." (A. Obrecht in: Rusterholz, 13-14)

Cultural resistance is strong and inventive. New magical explanations and practices are being developed to bridge the gap between the 2 worlds and times. Here a few examples of the inventiveness of new magical practices, devised to compose with the requirements of the new time and the economy:

A man who has become wealthy in the city but won't redistribute his money to his clan in the village will get bewitched; Western goods will be looked at as presents of the ancestors to the workers (which means free to be disposed of without any harm!); a businessman will wish to get a powerful amulet from a fetishman before a meeting; feminine magics, such as love or damage enchantment, exclusion from menstruation or healing practices, will be organised to remedy the deteriorating situation of women in the urban migration; magical judgement and sanctions will be spoken to counter the official jurisdiction; Jesus Christ will be converted into an animistic cultural hero, a father and protector of generations of ancestors and possibly a provider of better material conditions; violent demonstrations and strikes against the neo-colonial exploitation will claim to be inspired and guided by a long dead, and now returned prophet. (A. Obrecht in: Rusterholz, 15).

8. Time of Mothers

A number of scholars have been concentrating their attention on the factor time and have not only studied its effects on live organisms and nature in general, they have also been searching for possible ways out of the seemingly unalterable, constraining acceleration and rigidity of modern time in the industrial world. I have mentioned a few names as I was brooding over the history of our time consciousness and how it had all begun.

I'll just recall one of them who in my eyes has proved particularly prophetic. In his book, *Time Wars*, published 1987, he claims that our planet will only survive if humankind manages to inscribe the time of the humans within the natural rhythms of the environment, which means among other thing to slacken our pace of life. And to this purpose, he notices, our attitude will have to change, as it is already changing within the many environmental movements, from wanting to manipulate and control the world to opening up and understanding it from within. Experienced within, nature can no longer be looked at as a resource of

raw material ready for use, but represents a life force and a source of wisdom.

From him I would like to make the connection to a figure we have already mentioned, to Sophia, and so close on a somewhat hopeful note. You notice that Rifkin's visions of a new wisdom are inspired by feminine archetypal values: organic rhythms, nature, life, accepting, caring, empathy. There he tries to find an attitude embracing the needs of both - just as in the figure of Sophia – those of matter and those of the spirit and the mind.

Might well be that the mothers all over the world have a unique insight in this wisdom for, to be good enough mothers, they have to make use of all their resources, of their bodies, their hearts, their minds and their spirit. If they are to take good care of their children, esp. of their babies, they have to learn to sense the rhythms of the needs of the little ones by sensing them in their own bodies and hearts, and then, if they want to support them in their development, they have to adapt to their rapidly changing paces by understanding and guiding them, a task involving the whole of the mothers' personalities.

So let us listen for a conclusion to the comments of an African mother, an Atsholi woman from Uganda, to modern time. This is an extract from a poem by Okot P'Bitek, Uganda.

My husband reproaches me
with being useless
and losing my time;
he scolds me
because I am not punctual.
He himself, he says,
may lose no time
And he explains to me
That time - is money.

Otshol never chats with me any more
And makes no jokes any more,
for he supposedly has no time
to squat at the fire at night.

Sometimes my husband reads a new book,
or he sits on the sofa
and hides his face behind the big newspaper;
then he is terribly quiet

and looks like a corpse,
 a lonely corpse in the grave!
 You might almost think
 His mouth will rot!
 Time subdues my husband.
 It is a tyrant to my husband.
 My husband runs
 From one place to another,
 like a boy,
 without any manly pride.
 If guests come along,
 his face darkens;
 he does not bid them welcome
 and instead of greeting them correctly
 he just says:
 „What can I do to your service?“

The time of the whites
 I cannot hold on to.
 My mother taught me
 The Atsholi way, and you should not be shouted at
 For respecting your people's ways.
 When a baby cries
 Take it to your breast,
 there is no set time
 to feed an infant.

In our house
 The children do not sleep
 At fixed times.
 Sleep sneaks
 Into their heads
 And they fall to sleep;
 Sleep leaves them again –
 And they wake up.
 You wash a child
 When he is dirty –
 You do not first
 look at the position of the sun!
 (Okot P'Bitek, Song of Lawino, in: Clewing, 18-19)
