

Green Futures for Wales

Barbara Adam

Science Shop Wales Conference

A Prosperous Way Down? Exploring Green Economic Futures for Wales

28 January 2008, City Hall Cardiff

Abstract

The brief for this presentation was to provide reflections on the day's proceedings from a temporal, ethical and spiritual perspective. My contribution was to step back from the green and ecological economics presentations of the day and locate the debates in a wider socio-ecological theory framework. To this end I created a series of short poetic theoretical pieces with a primary focus on approaches to the future.

The first piece *Futures* depicts current approaches to the future associated with the industrial way of life. It shows in stark terms the irresponsibility embedded in contemporary future making. The second piece *Green Futures* suggests how future making might have to change to earn its green and sustainable credentials. This transformation is not easily achieved, however, as it requires a range of changes at the level of implicit assumptions and knowledge practice. Examples of these include understanding systems, metaphors and identity. Thus, the third piece looks at *Nature*, *Money* and *Society* from a temporal systems perspective and identifies continuities, discontinuities and incompatibilities. The fourth piece explores some metaphors that are utilised for efforts to deal with the earth wisely. Examples used are *Spaceship Earth*, *Garden Earth* and *Earth Guardian*. The fifth piece considers *Identities* from an ecological perspective and the last piece, *Being Future*, places all of the above in a wider socio-ecological, ethical and spiritual context.

Biographical Details

Barbara Adam, PhD, DScEcon is Professor of Sociology at Cardiff University. She has gained both her doctorates in the field of time studies for which she has been setting the global academic agenda since the late 1980s. Her main research interests are time, the environment and the production of the future. The issue of responsibility is a guiding thread that weaves through the entirety of her work. Her acclaimed writings encompass 5 monographs on time, 5 edited books and more than 100+ articles. Two of her monographs have been awarded book prizes.

Much of her recent work is accessible through her Cardiff University websites
<http://www.cf.ac.uk/socsi/contactsandpeople/academicstaff/A-B/professor-barbara-adam-overview.html>
<http://www.cf.ac.uk/socsi/futures>

FUTURES

We *tell* futures
Druids & wizards
Oracles & prophets
Astrologers & palmists
Scientists and soothsayers
All but different means & modes

We *know* futures
From past experiences
Forecasts & forebodings
By prevision & premonitions
Through clairvoyance & intuition
To indeterminate degrees of certainty

We *create* futures
Through technology
Science & economics
For ourselves and others
Here and in distant locations
With no responsibility for effects

We *colonise* futures
With clock time values
And unintended outcomes
With econo-political impacts
And techno-scientific innovations
With impunity & freedom from redress

We *eliminate* futures
Our own & successors'
Through present-orientation
In politics, science and business
With the help of economic discounting
And no guardians to safeguard environments

We *risk others'* futures
Trading opportunity costs
For personal & political gain
Without being held to account
For potential harm to those affected
With no laws to protect future generations

GREEN FUTURES

We plan futures
With compassion
For all fellow beings
Recognizing our impacts
Knowing everything matters
Aware of footprints & timeprints

We create futures
Through technology
Science & economics
For ourselves and others
Here and in distant locations
With care & forethought of effects

We know futures
As invisible processes
Deeds & actions in progress
Immanent and latent but very real
Layers upon layers of past & present
Futures of predecessors & contemporaries

We infuse futures
With hope & visions
Of what is right and good
Knowing of our connections
Impacts rippling through matter
Affecting the entirety of space & time

We imbue futures
With virtue and care
Using lightness of touch
Earth guardians & gardeners
Taking on responsibility for effects
Accompanying actions to their destination

We right futures
Of past colonisation
Turning resource into gift
Forgiving & asking forgiveness:
Predecessors for their transgressions
Successors for inevitable unintended impacts

NATURE

is contextual
is interdependent
is being and becoming
is duration, succession & cycle
is birth and death, growth and ageing
is all of past & future gathered up in the present
is rhythmic repetition with variation: invariability is death
is re/production, regeneration and repair/healing
is temporality, timing, tempo, intensity
is internalised memory & history
is finite & transcendent
is multi-layered
is creative
is life

MONEY

is an artefact
is linear-spatial
is infinitely divisible
is quantified and measured
is empty, neutral, decontextualised
is counting time units represented by number
is repetition of the same irrespective of when and where
is invariable units discounted against future
is creation of time to human design
is naturalised as time *per se*
is imposed circularity
is externalised
is lifeless
fiction

SOCIETY

is life & fiction
is performed & produced
is repetition with/without variation
is reproduced, regenerated and regulated
is all of past and future gathered up in the present
is structure and development, interpreted and interpreting
is history and biography, memory and anticipation
is irreversible, (de)contextual and abstract
is measured product and process
is finite and transcendent
is exchange value
is negotiated
change

***Spaceship
Earth***

is finite
is bounded
is encased/sealed
is man-made & fixable
is quantifiable and predictable
is controlled/controllable
is known/knowable
is a machine
is dead

Earth

is open
is temporal
is in/determinate
is rhythmically pulsating
is tied to solar system & universe
is interdependent exchange
is partly knowable
is changing
is alive

***Garden
Earth***

is cared for
is pulsing in cycles
is using waste as life source
is life and death, growth and decay
is integrating earth, water, wind and fire
is home to bacteria, plants & animals
is demanding great forethought
is feeding body & soul
is sustaining
is life

***Earth
Guardian***

is caring
is responsible
is providing guidance
is seeking to prevent harm
is creating nurturing environment
is acting in context of unknown future
is mindful of potential outcomes
is at ease with lack of control
is leading by example
is precautionous
is love

IDENTITIES

We are nature
We live nature
We produce nature
We understand nature

We are living
Breathing, growing
Not just matter in space
We are seething temporality
Process giving rise to phenomena

We are embodied
Mindful earth dwellers
Whose deeds make a difference
Contributing to the eternal braid of being
Leaving irreversible records that greatly outlast us
Yet lack laws that hold us responsible for impacts caused

We are spirit and soul
Imbued with morality and care
Responsible for our actions in the here-now
Guardians of future human beings and fellow species
Connecting to the opaque world of future presents of our making
Seeking ameliorative action in response to growing environmental crises
With visions of right & wrong, no maps or blueprints, only Tao to guide our steps

**Being
Future**

I

Self

Identity

Body & role

Boundaries imposed

Chain of being

Star matter

Living

Now

As

Actor

Participator

Making a difference

Here, now and for all of time

Braid of dependence, care & obligation

Without external vantage point

Ineradicably implicated

Webs of becoming

Affecting

All

Being

Responsible

For all my (in)actions

As private citizen & professional

Requiring forgiveness from successors

Non-knowledge no valid grounds for excuse

Morals, values & justice needed instead

Responsibility the antidote to fear

Hope and virtue our guide

To effects emerging

Some time

then

Futures

In progress

Planned & projected

Silent, latent, and invisible

Lived & living, effecting & effusive

Real and material processes on the way

Memory, perception, anticipation

No counting or measurement

Only Tao, hope & care

Immateriality an

Illusion

All

Beings

Star matter

Chain of being

Boundaries imposed

Body and spirit

Mindful self

System

We