

Abstract

An activist future is my focus, this future is the planned Lammas ecovillage, whose planning application was recently rejected (September 2008), one in a long series of rejections of this application by their local planning authority, despite the introduction of a low-impact policy to the county. It is therefore still an uncertain future and one in-process. Despite its uncertain nature it has a presence in the everyday practices of those seeking to create it. These presences take the form of utopian and dystopian futures that the prospective residents of the ecovillage imagine and enact. It is these manifestations, of the Lammas futures in the present, which I have sort to unearth, using a traditional group of research method which some have argued are inappropriate to such unusual and indefinite subject matter (e.g. Law, 2004). While I contradict Law in this sense I also seek to shed light on his states of 'dazzle' and 'silence' in relation to my research, which Law argues are characteristic of the research process. I will argue that conventional methods can be used to research the unusual and indefinite such as the ways in which the future manifests itself in the present. But that perhaps there are other futures which were not and could not be revealed by the methods I utilised, this is therefore a space which future research could explore. I also argue that to truly change the way we do methods, which Law argues for, we must further unpick and unravel the research process including exploring the states of 'dazzle' and 'silence'.

Camping in Utopia

Dazzle, Silence and Activist Futures



Charlotte Lee

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Introduction

Underneath the grass,
the ecovillage!

Introduction

Underneath the grass, the ecovillage!



Figure 1: One of the fields which will become the ecovillage
(Author's photograph)

The statement at the top of this page refers to the photograph above (Figure 1), and is inspired by the situationist's graffiti slogan "underneath the pavement, the beach!" (Pinder, 2005: 238). I have used it to refer to the hidden potentialities and possibilities beneath the surface of our everyday lives and spaces, of which this space; the site of a planned ecovillage is demonstrative. The development of a particular future is my focus, an activist future to be precise. This future is the Lammas ecovillage which is currently going through the planning system; it "combines the traditional smallholding model with the latest innovations in environmental design, green technology and permaculture." (quoted from the Lammas website). My particular

interest in this future is in relation to the utopian and dystopian futures that the prospective residents of the ecovillage imagine and enact.

The Lammas group, of which the ecovillage is its focus, was formed not only to establish the ecovillage but also to inform and encourage others on the subject of low-impact¹ living. The ecovillage itself plans to be built on Pont y Gafel Farm, near the village of Glandwr, in North Pembrokeshire, Wales, and has spent the last couple of years awaiting planning permission. They were initially refused based on a lack of information, despite the application totalling 5000 pages, rather a large amount for a site planned to house only nine families. The catalyst for the ecovillage was the introduction of a low-impact development policy to the county; policy 52, the first of its kind, but nothing has yet been granted permission through this policy. The founder of Lammas refers to the ecovillage as simply an “idea which he ran with”: “I talked about it with friends, and it’s an idea that I just kind of ran with, I couldn’t claim it was my idea, and I guess the initial idea was getting an ecovillage through the planning system to create a precedence.” (Appendix C, p95) The county in which the ecovillage site is situated has a strong low-impact culture with already established settlements such as Brithdir Mawr, home to the famous (within low-impact living) Tony Wrench and his roundhouse (Wrench, 2000).

Ecovillages; “a greening of the model of the intentional community” (Miles, 2008: 119), are said to have their roots in the environmentalist movement which emerged from the 1960s and 70s. Lammas; the name given to the group, is indicative of older roots at least to this ecovillage project, as this originally referred to a pagan festival:

Lammas: August 1st. A Pagan festival celebrating the coming harvest.
(from the ‘Occult dictionary’)

¹ Low-impact is described by the founder of Lammas as follows: So what is this thing called low-impact, what does that mean. Well, I guess to me low-impact means to live truly sustainably so that your lifestyle can be maintained over generations, so that instead of using, or consuming the Earth’s resources you’re actually adding to the Earth’s resources in terms of biodiversity and soil fertility and so on. (quoted from *Living in the Future*, episode 1)

The project could therefore be said to have much older influences than the typical ‘hippy’ associations of a green settlement. The Lammas founder below states that the definition and aims of ecovillages has changed and evolved in recent years:

I see that there’s a changing definition in this term of ecovillage, for the last... well since the whole concept of the ecovillages began, in the 60s and 70s. The original concept up until a very few years ago was that of creating a completely alternative culture. The ecovillages lived outside mainstream society, they educated their kids differently, they dressed differently, they thought differently, and now that’s changed, it’s no longer appropriate. What with the recent leaps in understanding that mainstream culture has gone through in the last five years, lots of things that underpinned the ecovillage, ecovillages are now shared by mainstream society, you know...living sustainably, err... peak oil, um...emotional intelligence are all err...well accepted philosophies within the ecovillage project and now accepted mainstream. And so I see the role of ecovillages now as being something different, I see the role of ecovillages as something much more integrated with mainstream, and particularly the next ten to twenty years the role of ecovillages will be as kind of pioneer models for research and err dissemination of err material and knowledge and wisdom about returning to a more land based lifestyle. (Appendix C, p96-97)

This change in the purpose of ecovillages applies as the extract above suggests to the Lammas ecovillage. Before ‘discovering’ the Lammas project I had previously known of only one green ‘alternative settlement’; Findhorn ecovillage in Scotland. It soon became clear through my research and websites such as *Diggers and Dreamers: a guide to communal living in Britain* or the *Global Ecovillage Network* that there were far more than I had first imagined, networks of alternative settlements; a whole world out there to which I was unaware: “there are thousands of alternative settlements today where people from diverse backgrounds have built a new society- in intentional communities, ecovillages, permaculture settlements, urban communes, rural religious and secular retreats, co-housing projects and activist squats.” (Miles, 2008: 1).

As I stated in the first paragraph, the Lammas ecovillage is an activist future, not in the sense of placards waving, though placards have been waved; by the opposition to the ecovillage. It is activist for the way it seeks to *act* for change, to ‘make a difference’. We have in recent times started to conceive of activism more broadly e.g. online activism, yet when we hear the word activism the same images still spring to mind; mobs of angry faces waving words and images. We must think, rather than more broadly more fundamentally, as to what activism is, and tries to do, as Jordan writes: “To fully grasp the meaning of activism!, we have to look for what activists might all, in their different, often contradictory, ways, be fighting for” (Jordan, 2002: 138). In the simplest terms activism is the discontent with a certain element of the now, a dystopian present, or fear of an impending dystopian future; if the now causing it is not changed. It is therefore conversely striving for a better future, perhaps we might say even a utopian one. Activism is therefore about creation and destruction; destruction of that which is wrong, or that which is wrong and impending, for the creation of something right, something better.

Jordan writes of activism’s relation to the future, he states that we can think of “the past, the present and the powerful” (Jordan, 2002: 154) as opponents to activism, and that although the future cannot be predicted with any certainty; “We can however, see a possible future. We can understand a different ethical basis for human societies. We can sometimes clearly and sometimes vaguely discern the structures of a different definition of a just way of living.” (Jordan, 2002: 154). The importance of the future in activism, as Jordan writes poses difficulties for activists:

[protestors] derive their activism from a leap in the dark, from the unknowable, they transgress the present in the name of the future... In deriving their ethics from the future, activists both rely on the unknown and begin to generate the known. There is a pressure within activism! as it continues to be seduced by what it can’t quite articulate.

(Jordan, 2002:137-8)

Within research on activism there is a tendency to focus on the spectacular rather than the mundane, on those moments and acts which can be explicitly labelled as ‘activism’. Referring to the struggles of being an academic-activist Pickerill writes, “The notion of what constituted “activism” had become fixed, bound up in radical environmental rhetoric that direct action was not just the best tactic but a life choice.”

(Pickerill, 2008: 484). Jordan also recognises this prioritizing of the spectacular over the mundane in defining activism, he writes: “Being an activist! in such a society can mean many things and need not mean being someone who chains themselves to bulldozers, hacks websites or attends endless meetings” (Jordan, 2002: 154).

This trend seems to overlook the fact that mundane or everyday actions such as recycling a bottle, or switching off a light, could be considered activism in themselves. It also seems to overlook the fact that for some, their whole lifestyle could be considered an activism. Such lifestyles are made up of both that which could be considered spectacular and mundane forms of activism.

As I suggested above; utopian and dystopian futures are central to activism, they are therefore also central to this research into the activist nature of the Lammas ecovillage. According to the original use of the word, that is its “literal meaning”, utopia “combines *eu* (good), *ou* (non) and *topos* (place)” (Sargisson, 2007: 2). Utopia is therefore in this double definition always a good or perfect no-place, never realised, always in the future as an ideal or aim. The unachievable state of utopia in this definition does not mean that it is pointless as a pursuit, as Lefebvre writes: “Utopia is never realised and yet is indispensable to stimulate change.” (Henri Lefebvre, quoted in Pinder, 2005: 1). Utopia, like activism, is often associated with the spectacular as opposed to the mundane. Kraftl argues for a reconsidering of utopia to include the banal: “utopia should be extended to encompass that which is simultaneously banal, ephemeral and unsettling” (Kraftl, 2006: 35), he continues; “not only must one work to obtain utopia (whether one knows that this is what one is doing), but work might itself be utopian. The most banal, mundane, laborious tasks might – perhaps retrospectively – become utopian” (*ibid*: 39).

In a similar vein we can think of the research process in general to entail both moments of the spectacular and the mundane. Spectacular here implies moments during research when there seems to be too much going on to contemplate or articulate. This includes times in which the researcher feels overwhelmed; either by their own thoughts and ideas or by the research space itself, or more likely both. Mundane goings-on in research could be in the sense of that which is seen to be irrelevant to the research, even if the research involves the study of the everyday or banal/mundane. By this I mean other mundane activities which are seen to not fit into the research, or even those which could normally be considered spectacularly appear mundane in the sense of their irrelevance. We could also conceive mundane moments

in research to be those in which the researcher is lacking in ideas and inspiration, when the research space seems still or silent.

These dualities, that of the spectacular or overwhelming and the mundane or silent, which although could be said to apply to all types of research, are something to which researchers, with the exception of Law (2004), are strangely silent about. The spectacular and the mundane can be thought of in several phrasings:

<u>Spectacular</u>	<u>Mundane</u>
Everything	Nothing
Dazzle	Silence
Confusion	Emptiness
Noise	Silence
Dazzling	Blank
Enchantment	Disenchantment

(Some of the above are taken from or inspired by:
Anderson, 2004; Bennett, 2001; Kraftl, 2006; Law, 2004)

Only in the case of Law's (2004) 'dazzle' and 'silence' have the above been explicitly used to refer to the research process. With the exception of 'confusion', the 'spectacular' list suggests positive while the 'mundane' implies negative moments of research. Though to be overwhelmed or dazzled is not always a welcomed experience in research, due to the confusion it can entail. Similarly the silent or still moments of research are not necessarily negative. For example if we think of the silence of meditation, in which the meditator must clear their mind for reasons of relaxation and clarity; in this silence we may realise what is most important to our research or that which we have overlooked comes into focus. As part of my methodological approach I will be exploring Law's (2004) states of 'dazzle' and 'silence', namely how they emerge, are experienced and their effect on the research process, and also whether we might consider them as a characteristic of knowledge production more broadly i.e. are these two states experienced by the future residents of the ecovillage. I will discuss this in more detail in the following chapter.

This leads me on to the main methodological dilemma of my research into the Lammas ecovillage; the problem of researching the future. My academic interest in activism and the importance of the future in relation to this drew me to the Lammas ecovillage. I viewed it as an *activism* (i.e. activism conceived in a broad sense, as

action towards change), though of a less confrontation and less conventional sense, for the way it was seeking a more environmentally sustainable lifestyle. The fact that the 'future' was such an integral part made it an excellent case study through which to explore the relation of the future to *activism* and: "the methodological dilemmas that arise with the investigation of social futures" (Adam, 2005a: 5). I will discuss the methodological dilemmas which 'the future' presents in more detail in the following chapter, which is centred on my methodology.

In chapters 2 and 3, using my empirical work from the participant observation, interviews and textual analysis I undertook, I will attempt to address the following methodological questions: what futures are present and what form do these futures take? Referring to Law's 'dazzle' and 'silence'; how do these states emerge in relation to the Lammas ecovillage and what are their effects? Can these states be applied to knowledge production more broadly? Finally, are the conventional methods I have chosen adequate in researching these futures and exploring 'dazzle' and 'silence'?

In addition to opening up my own mind to an unknown world, there are various bodies of literature which I aim to build on through my research. Firstly the well-established and wide-ranging literature on activism both within human geography (e.g. Anderson, 2004a and b; Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006; Routledge 1997 and 2005) and further afield (e.g. Jordan, 1998 and 2002; McKay, 1996 and 1998; Melucci, 1989; Miles, 2008; Milton, 2002). As well as articles such as Krupar (2007) *Where eagles dare*, which I consider to be an activism in-itself, and which in part inspired my urge for a broadening of what we consider activism. The second area in which I aim to add is the equally broad and perhaps even more intimating literature on 'utopia'; from Levitas' (1990) redefining of utopia as 'better' as opposed to 'perfect', to Anderson (2006) and Sargisson's (2007) view of utopia as process, to Kraftl's (2006) non-representational everyday experiences of utopia, and Tower Sargent's (2007) "utopian energy". These are but a few examples of the utopian literature, but it is these that I drew on specifically in my research.

Thirdly, as well as activism literature more broadly I aim to build on the existing and rather small amount of literature on activism and emotions/affects. Within which there has been more attention paid to social activism as opposed to environmental, though this focus is understandable given the more obvious emotional implications of social or human activism. This emerging literature includes the

forthcoming issue of *Emotion, Space and Society* on ‘Activism and Emotional Sustainability’, a number of articles (e.g. Jasper, 1998; Aminzade and McAdam, 2002; King, 2004) and books (e.g. Goodwin *et al*, 2001; Cvetkovich, 2003; Flam and King, 2005). Finally I also wish to built on a gap identified by Kraftl in the utopia literature; that of empirical work concerning emotion and utopia: “aside from largely theoretical discussions of hope drawing on Bloch (cf. Levitas 1990), there has been little consideration – and particularly empirical consideration – of the place of emotion in utopia.” (Kraftl, 2006: 39).

The ecovillage, just as the activism to which Miles below refers, offers us glimpses of the ‘new’ and possible:

Activism offers a moment of an emergent new society. By a moment I mean, from Henri Lefebvre, a fracture in the dulling time of routine when a pervasive clarity or sudden realization occurs. I think this moment of a new awareness constitutes a new kind of knowledge produced in activism - a glimpse of a new society implicit in an awareness that takes place among others while experienced personally (Miles, 2008: 111)

During *actions* towards the creation of the ecovillage, moments occur which create fractures in the present and offer glimpses to utopian futures. However, the futures glimpsed are not always positive; conversely fractures can appear in the present offering us a view into dystopian and apocalyptic futures. Through my research I wish to uncover these glimpses or fractures revealing such futures; both utopian and dystopian. In the next chapter I will be discussing the methodological approach I have chosen to tackle this, the problem of researching the future; this future of the Lammas ecovillage, and additionally taking into account the research states of ‘dazzle’ and ‘silence’ mentioned above.

Chapter 1

Methodology

Methodology

The aim of the following methodology is to unearth the utopian and dystopian futures present in the Lammas ecovillage, in doing so I also wish to demonstrate the *activist* nature of the project; and thus suggest a more fundamental definition or process of defining what we consider to be activism. In this chapter I will be discussing the two methodological themes of my research, and how I propose to address these. Firstly, I will begin by reflecting on the problem of researching ‘the future’, something which is typically othered and silenced in research, and is key to my research interests more broadly; activism, and my case study Lammas ecovillage as this is a ‘future’. After which I will describe the methods I have used to address this problem. Secondly, I will discuss the states of ‘dazzle’ and ‘silence’, which Law (2004) suggest are a core characteristic of research in all its forms. I also wish to explore, in the following empirical chapters whether we might consider these two states as an issue for knowledge production more broadly, e.g. knowledge production about the Lammas ecovillage by the future residents.

(1.1) Researching ‘The Future’

As I outlined in the introduction, the creation of a better future is a core concern and driver of activism, in all forms. Lammas, which I have argued is an activism of a form, is no exception. Aside from the fact that it is in-itself a future which is being strived for, it is also founded on the view that the future should take a more central role in our concerns and actions.

Research, I once believed should be a kind of activism, in that it should seek to make a difference, or even change the world in some, even a very small way. This view seems to place too much power in the hands of the researcher, as if they were to possess abilities far and beyond the ‘average’ person; it overlooks the power and ability of the ‘average’ person to change theirs and others worlds.

The same privileging of intellectualism over the ‘ordinary’ person in changing the world, and in particular creating a ‘better’ one, exists in ideas around utopia. Referring to nineteenth century utopian theory Miles (2008) states that the: “desire to create a better world is central to Western Modernism, though in that case it is

contradicted by a privileging of design and professional expertise over the tacit, experimental knowledge of those who live in alternative settlements” (*ibid*: 1). As I mentioned in the introduction with reference to Sargisson (2007), utopia is typically defined as simultaneously no-place and a good place, it is therefore always in the future as an ideal never realised. Literary utopias, as well as other utopian style plans and ideas, can be thought of as simply alternatives which address that which is seen to be wrong or missing from the world, as opposed to perfect futures: “utopian designs reflect perceived injustices in the conditions in which they were produced.” (Miles, 2008:1).

The future in general terms like ‘perfect futures’ can be a daunting prospect. When I first began this dissertation, the blank page on which my future; my dissertation would unfold, I found to be very daunting, as with any blank page there is so much possibility, so many choices, and so much room for error. ‘The future’ is daunting for the same reasons; the future is open-ended, it is the space of endless possibility, so many choices mean that it is easy for the wrong ones to be made.

The future is also daunting for research. Within social inquiry there is a dominance of the past over the present; the everyday, and the future. The reason for the future’s exclusion is obvious, its very nature means that it is ‘not-yet’, intangible, and unknowable: “We can predict, forecast and project to our heart’s content, but if one thing is certain, the future is uncertain.” (Lertzman, 2006: 3-4). The past however is seen as tangible and knowable, so therefore provides us with solid evidence relating to our particular area of enquiry. Raymond Williams noticed this dominance of the past:

“If the social is always past, in the sense that it is always formed, we have indeed to find other terms for the undeniable experience of the present” (Williams, 1977, p128)... Structure, the social, institutions and formations have been in Williams’ view, located in the past and seen as finished and coherent - static – while present experience, the lived, the here and now are seen as fleeting and subjective. (Cresswell, 2003: 270)

Such realisations have led to a growing body of work on the present. For example, recent years have seen an increasing amount of interest paid to present states such as ‘practices’, ‘affects’ (e.g. Thrift, 1996; 2007), and ‘performance’ as

“fleetingly alive and present” (Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000: 420), though the future still seems to exist in a marginal space. Contradictions lie in the noble cause of including the present, the “lived, the here and now”, once such presents are written up, and indeed during, they become ‘the past’. Investigations of the future share similar contradictions as that of the present, as Adam (2005a) writes with reference to Max Weber:

Weber explicitly acknowledged the methodological dilemmas that arise with the investigation of social futures where the subject matter and the scientists investigating are future oriented and future bound whilst the logic of the method is firmly past- and present oriented. (Adam, 2005a: 5)

In line with this increasing body of work on the present and everyday, this is also an attempt to uncover a present, but more specifically the presence of the future within such a present. Tuan refers to the future as a central component of everyday life: “Life is lived in the future – close as the next meal and distant as the next stage of a career.” (Tuan, 1978: 9). The centrality of the future to ‘life’ suggested here by Tuan 30 years ago, makes it seem strange that there is so little work within human geography that deals explicitly with the future.

We tend to think of the future as a blank canvas, open wide to possibility and potential; anything is therefore possible in ‘the future’. The past in contrast is a finished picture, which may need some touching up; as new historical knowledge is uncovered. But we could argue that in fact the past is no more fixed and certain than the future; Dewsbury *et al* argue for “a serial logic of the unfinished” (*ibid*, 2002: 438) for considering the world. Our knowledge of the past constantly evolves, and it is difficult to know what of our knowledge is finished and ‘true’, whether there are not still stories and voices left to be unearthed. Our clear cut lines between past, present and future are problematic; Madder and Adey write that “there is neither a beginning nor an end to history” and that events of the past “continue to reverberate in and around places long after they have occurred so that time is rendered ‘out of joint.’” (*ibid*, 2008: 291). Just as traces of the past remain in the present, traces of the not-yet, the becoming, and the future possibilities can be found in the present. The future does not suddenly come into being the moment after the present; structures are not immediately erected, as if by magic, or as in a pop-up book. So rather than blank,

the canvas of the future has already been doodled on, there are faint outlines, pencil marks. Our present actions, which we think of as maintaining our 'present', are also constructing our future. Plans, dreams and hopes for the future, all contribute to its materiality (Anderson, 2002, 2006; Gunder and Hillier, 2007; Kraftl, 2006; 2007). Utopia, as a good or perfect future also has a presence in the everyday, and these present actions contribute to its construction, in Kraftl words "utopianism can be thought, practiced and felt in a surprising diversity of forms." (*ibid*, 2006: 35).

We also tend to think of the future as a particular space or place, distant from our 'now'. As Adam writes: "We treat the future as if it was space and/or matter. As a result a range of paradoxical effects arise." (*ibid*, 2006: 2). If we always imagine the future to exist in a space beyond now, our research of such a space seems impossible and pointless. We cannot know for certain how the future, or this future i.e. the Lammas ecovillage will be, we can 'know' and research the possible futures and glimmers of the future which we find in our presents. There is no clear cut line between where the present ends and the future begins, instead there is more a fuzzy space where the two overlap and intertwine. Deleuze goes further and argues that during the state of 'becoming' lines between the past and the future blur:

the simultaneity of a becoming whose characteristic is to elude the present. Insofar as it eludes the present, becoming does not tolerate the separation or distinction of before and after, or of past and future. It pertains to the essence of becoming to move and to pull in both directions at once. (Deleuze, 2004: 3)

The Lammas project could be said to be in state of becoming. Although the future as it will *definitely* be is impossible to know as Lertzman (2006) above argues, we can know these 'becomings' (Grosz, 1999a), these possible futures which manifest themselves during our planning, talking about and hoping for the future. We could even argue that these traces of the future are *the* future, or rather a form of the future, if we broaden out or break down our definition of 'the future'; as not only something off there in the distance, something never reachable in the same way as utopia is argued to be 'no place' i.e. unattainable, but also something which is present in traces and various manifestations, in becomings and possibilities.

In light of these reflections on the future, my methods must therefore address the questions of what futures are present within the Lammas ecovillage project, and

what form do these futures take? Despite the unusual nature of my subject matter; i.e. the, or a future I would like to use this piece to explore the use of conventional methods to address the research theme I have outlined above. The first 'conventional' method I used was participant observation, in order to unearth the embodied and practiced futures within the presents of the ecovillagers. The first part of my participant observation was undertaken during a gathering of the ecovillagers at the proposed site for the village, which is currently farm land. It involved camping overnight at the site, attending general meetings about the projects progress and talking to prospective residents. My contact obtained approval from the other ecovillagers for my attendance, and introduced me as a researcher to the group.

The second part of my participant observation took place at *Celtic Blue Rock Community Arts Festival*; a not-for-profit festival held annually near the proposed site of the ecovillage, it showcases local bands and local arts and eco groups. Lammas was holding a stall in the 'Green Futures' tent to increase support for the project, I attended to help the ecovillagers and to undertake interviews, though ethically it did not seem like an equal exchange with me often feeling more like a burden than a help and worrying that it appeared as if I was only helping in exchange for research material. The aim of the interviews was to explore the narrated futures present through the ecovillager's conversations. I interviewed four of the prospective residents, all of which were quite happy to help me and gave permission for me to record. All the interview data was made anonymous in the hope that this would enable them to speak more freely. The settings and tone of the interviews was informal, something which was unavoidable given the nature of the space, one being undertaken while some residents had lunch in the yurt, another while they watched their children in the sand pit of the kids zone, and the third after the stall had been packed up in the green futures tent. The style of the interviews was semi-structured, so I could include questions which sprung to mind at the time but I also had a set of questions pre-prepared, this helped me overcome my shyness and removed the fear of not knowing what to ask which my original idea of an improvisational approach would have produced.

The interview questions were structured firstly around the future ecovillager's motivations, and attractions to ecovillage life both in terms of the opportunity to in theory live with more like minded people, and being cut off from 'dystopian' parts of society. Secondly, how the ecovillage would contrast to their current lifestyle i.e. did

the project offer them a utopian future in exchange for a dystopian present. Thirdly, futures both in terms of their future in the ecovillage; how they imagined living there to be, and society more generally; whether they thought more people in the future would be living in such a way; a low-impact lifestyle. Finally, whether they experienced the states of ‘dazzle’ and ‘silence’ during the progression of the Lammas project. This question initially confused many of the interviewees due to my poor explanation of the states; as is evident from my interview transcripts (see Appendix A, B, and C), I will provide a better explanation in the following section below.

The final method I utilized was textual analysis, allowing me to uncover the represented forms of the future present within the Lammas project. This was with respect to the Lammas highly informative website which included planning documents relating to every aspect of the ecovillage, and general descriptions of the ecovillage’s aims and purpose. The website also contained visual material, photographs, and a documentary based around the development of the Lammas project and ecovillages more generally entitled *Living in the Future*. The three methods I chose allow for the researching of different futures present; embodied futures through participant observation, narrated futures during the interviews, while textual analysis reveals represented futures.

While I am frequently presented with arguments away from conventional methods such as these; for example Pelias (2004) argues for *a methodology of the heart*, and Sparkes (2007) adoption of a literary writing style in order to express his disillusionment with academia. My experience of such methods i.e. conventional ones, is still very limited and so to discard them now would be based on others critiques and observations rather than my own. Law (2004) however states that “the problem is not so much the standard research methods in themselves, but the normativities that are attached to them in discourse around method” (*ibid*: 4). One such assumption or normativity, which Law himself reinforces is that conventional methods are “badly adapted to the study of ephemeral, the indefinite and the irregular” (*ibid*). The future could be described as one such indefinite, which accounts for its apparent absence from empirical work; the academic work I encountered around ‘the future’ seemed to be predominately theoretical and philosophical (e.g. Adam, 2004; 2005a; 2005b; 2005c, and 2006; Carlstein *et al*, 1978; Deleuze, 1994, 1995; 2004; Grosz, 1999). Therefore adopting Law’s argument that it is not so much the methods themselves but rather the assumptions we attach to them, I wish to

explore whether the future might be one such ‘indefinite’ that can be researched using conventional approaches, and perhaps contradicting Law whether such methods are adequate to the investigation of the messy and the momentary.

Across all three of the methods I utilised the problem of ‘dazzle’ and ‘silence’ (Law, 2004) emerges. We can think of moments of dazzle and silence as those in which the space between an object and its depth becomes blocked off or is opened up too much, as if filters or a wall were to exist between the two. During textual analysis ‘silence’ could occur when an image or text may appear two-dimensional, and ‘dazzle’ when filters or blocks seem to have been removed resulting in a overwhelming flow of association. ‘Silence’ during interviews may occur when there appears to be nothing between or behind the words of the interviewer and or interviewee, and ‘dazzle’ when every gesture, word, tone and mode of expression brings with it a whole breath of meaning. Participant observation ‘silences’ and ‘dazzles’ spring from our very experiences and the spaces in which we are situated; actions and places may appear empty and yet bursting with life at different moments. We could argue that these moments occur because we are not using the traditional method assemblages in which we ‘other’ that which is not relevant. Dazzle and silence could therefore be most associated with stages in research when ideas and aims are not yet fully formed and refined. I will discuss these two states and the concept of ‘method assemblages’ in more detail in the section below.

(1.2) ‘Dazzle’ and ‘Silence’

The first methodological issue, as outlined above is that of how to research ‘the future’, the second which I will discuss here is that of ‘dazzle’ and ‘silence’ in research.

As ‘researchers’ we have to make decisions, sometimes thought through, sometimes impulsive, we weave through moments of disillusionment and confusion, to clarity and inspiration, to boredom and emptiness. Such contradictory states of being seem to occur at every aspect or level of research; during reflection, reading, writing, and of course ‘in the field’. As Law (2004) writes:

This is the paradoxical experience that, on the one hand, and at least some of the time, reality seems to be overwhelming and quite dazzling. And then, on the other hand, the contrary experience that there is not much of interest going on: that somehow or other at some stages in research, the world is silent. (*ibid*, p104-5)

These contrasting experiences seem, in my experience to be dependent or at least affected by the researcher's mood/emotion/affect at the time. Though it is of course difficult to determine whether this is in-fact the reverse, e.g. the 'silence' of the world producing disillusionment and apathy, while the 'dazzle' may produces a flurry of ideas and optimism in the researcher.

Traditionally, research data is found in the space between these two extremes; everything (or 'dazzle') and nothing ('silence'). Both states are according to Law (2004): "a key to the character of the method assemblage and the metaphysics in which it is situated" (*ibid*, p105). By 'method assemblages' Law means:

Method assemblage: generally, the process of crafting and enacting the necessary boundaries between presence, manifest absence and Otherness. Method assemblage is generative or performative, producing absence and presence. More specifically, it is the crafting or bundling of relations in three parts: (a) whatever is in-here or present (for instance a representation or an object); (b) whatever is absent but also manifest (that is, it can be seen, is described, is manifestly relevant to presence); and (c) whatever is absent but is Other because, while necessary to presence, it is also hidden, repressed or uninteresting. (*ibid*, p161)

This ordering and classifying of reality prevents the researcher from becoming 'overwhelmed'. The problem of method assemblage is that it seems to assume that we as the mighty researchers have the authority, knowledge and experience to decide and decipher what needs to be silenced and what needs to be illuminated or amplified. It would be easy to suggest that I, as a researcher with very little experience am not as equipped for such deciphering as a more experienced researcher, perhaps in fact my own lack of experience rather than inhibiting me allows more freedom with less methodological baggage. Law argues that: "The disciplines that are currently pressed

upon us tend to make the wrong kinds of silences. They tend to remake the silences of the Euro-American metaphysics. But it is time for these to be questioned. This is why method is, or should not be limited to representation. Why it is better thought of as crafting, allegory, or gathering.” (*ibid*, p118). Here Law seems to be alluding to a non-representational approach to methods. Similarly Kraftl refers to utopian states as non or ‘more-than-representational’ (Lorimer, 2005): “Utopia is, beyond the (inescapable) bounds of representation, a way of feeling about the world and one’s active place therein.” (Kraftl, 2006: 35-35).

I have even found that the contradictory states of ‘dazzle’ and ‘silence’ can occur, quite illogically, simultaneously. That there is too much to say and yet at the same time there is nothing to say. As Davies and Dwyer write with reference to similar states of being: “it is not a matter of either/or, for processes of alienation and enchantment often run in concert” (Davies and Dwyer, 2007: 263). This seems to suggest that the two are connected, and that perhaps we need to find ways of including silence and dazzle, that perhaps this ‘mess’ is relevant.

Dazzle can be seen to produce moments of creativity and originality for the researcher, as Clark writes “in practice, originality or inventiveness is linked to a certain openness or willingness to be ‘called upon’ or ‘overwhelmed’” (Clark, 2003: 34). Ideas both creative and original can also spring from the states of clarity or concentration, which Metcalf and Game describe as moments of emptiness, or we could argue ‘silence’: “Concentration is a clear and empty way of being that arises at what feels like the still centre of the universe. As ordinary and everyday as it is, it is a mystical condition without which some of the simplest tasks couldn’t easily be accomplished.” (*ibid*, 2002: 5). According to Metcalfe and Game (2002) both moments of concentration, and moments of “inspiration, passion and enthusiasm”; which we generally consider to be “experiences of intensified self”, are instead “mystical experiences”: “moments of intensified *life*, and of *diminished* self, where secular boundaries between internal and external no longer apply” (*ibid*, 8, emphasis in original). Metcalfe and Game’s idea of ‘mystery’ could be argued to be similar to Bennett’s ‘enchantment’; “to be enchanted is to be struck and shaken by the extraordinary that lives amid the familiar and the everyday” (Bennett, 2001: 4). Dazzle and silence can also produce more negatively associated feelings, for example confusion and “disenchantment” (Bennett, 2001).

In the introduction I presented a list of what I saw as different ways of phrasing the dualism of dazzle and silence, they are repeated below:

<u>Spectacular</u>	<u>Mundane</u>
Everything	Nothing
Dazzle	Silence
Confusion	Emptiness
Noise	Silence
Dazzling	Blank
Enchantment	Disenchantment

Despite being presented with these alternatives I decided to keep ‘dazzle’ and ‘silence’ as terms of reference to the general states, as they seem to embody a neutral stance. The other ‘silence’ words seem to allude to it being a negative and unwanted state, which I do not think is necessarily the case, in moments of stillness and silence we often find the clarity which we have been pursuing, as Metcalfe and Game (2002) above suggest. In the same way the ‘dazzle’ words, with the exception of confusion and possibly noise, i.e. unwanted or disruptive noise, seem to denote a positive and much needed state of being, the need to be dazzled and enchanted by the world. So despite their slight incompatibility as opposing states, dazzling implying a visual, and silence implying an audio experience, their neutrality in my mind makes them the best terms to use. The words this way also retain their connection to Law (2004).

In the following chapters, using my empirical work from my participant observation, interviews and textual analysis, I will attempt to address the methodological issues I have outlined in this chapter; what futures are present in Lammas project and what form do these futures take? Sticking to Law’s ‘dazzle’ and ‘silence’; how do these states emerge in relation my research and what are their effects? Can these states be applied to knowledge production more broadly; i.e. the future residents creation of knowledge in relation to the ecovillage? Finally, are the traditional methods I have chosen suitable for researching these futures and exploring ‘dazzle’ and ‘silence’? I have divided the Lammas futures and the empirical chapters into dystopian and utopian; I will begin by exploring the former in the chapter which follows.

Chapter 2

Dystopian Futures

Dystopian Futures

The focus of this chapter is dystopian futures, or more specifically the manifestations of dystopian futures in the ecovillager's presents. If we consider the Lammas ecovillage to be a "utopian experiment", something to which Sargisson categorises green communities as, then as such it is "inspired by discontent with the now" (Sargisson, 2007: 3). Some writers have argued that now, more than ever, it could be said that we are living in dystopian times. Baeten (2002b) writes that we live in an age in which dystopian ideas as opposed to utopian have "come to dominate":

While utopia, both as a political project and literary genre, has been particularly influential throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it is generally agreed that the dystopian moment has come to dominate Western thinking about society during the later half of the twentieth century, up until today. (Baeten, 2002b: 141)

Dystopian futures manifest themselves not only in relation to perspectives on society in general but also in the bumps and compromises along the way of the ecovillage's development, as I will discuss in this chapter using empirical work from my participant observation, interviews and textual analysis. The chapter will begin with the most obvious dystopian future in relation to an environmentalist project such as an ecovillage; environmental destruction. Secondly, in line with other forms of activism the perspective of society as dystopian, particularly in relation to capitalism. Finally, I will discuss community, something which is seen to be absent from modern, especially urban life. I hope to demonstrate the ways in which the future is present within the Lammas project in various dystopian forms. Alongside dystopian futures the states of 'dazzle' and 'silence' emerge, as I aim to show in this chapter.

(2.1) Environmental Destruction

We seem to be living in a time of multiple crises, both environmental and economic in their implications; climate change, peak oil, rising fuel prices, rising food prices, all of which are undoubtedly connected in various ways. Such crises can lead to a feeling of being overwhelmed or 'dazzled' by potential futures, as Hopkins below states:

We live in momentous times: times when change is accelerating, and when the horror of what could happen if we do nothing and the brilliance of what we could achieve if we act can both, at times, be overwhelming.

(Hopkins, 2008: 17)

A reaction to such overwhelming or dazzling futures is to form workable solutions, something to which Lammas ecovillage could be described as i.e. a solution to such crises. Envisaged environmental crises are obviously at the core of the development of a green community such as this ecovillage, Sargisson argues that such communities are “profoundly utopian” and that the people within them share similar dystopian beliefs about society; “they seek a better alternative to the now” (Sargisson, 2007: 2).

This state of crisis, namely environmental, was something which figured strongly in my conversations with the ecovillagers. They wanted to do their bit to reduce such pressures on the environment and its resources, and in doing so hopefully lead the way in which others can follow. There are strong environmental dystopian elements in the below interview extracts, Daniel for example states in relation to fossil fuels: “we’ll stop using them if we’re not going to destroy the climate, which we may already have done”. In this statement I sensed some anger, presumably over the general in-action towards the issue of fossil fuel use and climate change. Eric openly recognised the apocalyptic/dystopian nature of his perspective: “Um, so either things will change this way nicely or something will happen to society and we’ll be forced to live this way. That’s how I view things, but then again that’s a bit pessimistic, sort of bomb shelter building mentality”. I have positioned the below extracts side by side to demonstrate the parallels between them.

Eric: if society stays more or less as it is at the moment um then there are lots of people out there that would love to live this way but can't afford to buy the land that you're allowed to do it on. So if it's changed so that you can do it on land that people can afford to buy then more people will start living this way. If peak oil you know happens and we start to have to revalue our resources significantly, um then we going to want to contemplate being as self-sufficient as possible, as a nation and therefore it would make more sense for more people to live in the countryside than the towns because it uses less fuel, uses less infrastructure set up to feed people if, you're connected to your food supply. Um, so either things will change this way nicely or something will happen to society and we'll be forced to live this way. That's how I view things, but then again that's a bit pessimistic, sort of bomb shelter building mentality.
(Appendix A, p86)

Daniel: Um, in the future... we are currently running out of fossil fuels and we'll stop using them if we're not going to destroy the climate, which we may already have done. Um if we're going to do that we've got no real option apart from...to increase the productivity of our land massively. In order to increase the productivity of our land it's going to require more people living on it. So I think there's going to be a lot of people going back to a rural living, and I don't think we're really going to have much choice about the way we live. I think people are going to inherently be more ecological, in another two years people aren't going to install oil heating in they're houses, they're going to install wood burners...unless someone invents the fuel for the future, which might happen but you know it's not happening at the moment.
(Appendix B, p91)

Both the dystopias visions above are based around the depletion of fossil fuels, or more specifically peak oil; after which gradually less and less oil is being extracted and it becomes increasingly harder to extract (Hopkins, 2008). The interviewees not only suggest that change is needed for practical reasons due to decreasing resources especially in relation to fossil fuels, but also environmental. This is in relation to visions of environmental apocalypse either as a result of climate change or our general destruction of the environment. Though in neither case will the environment be literally destroyed but rather no longer accommodating of our current lifestyle or inhabitable to humans. The apocalypse envisioned is therefore very much a human one i.e. one in which the human world is destroyed or severely altered, as opposed to the 'environment' or the Earth. For example Daniel states "if we're not going to destroy the climate"; climate change does not lead to the 'destruction' of the climate but rather the serve alteration of it possibly to the point of it becoming unsuitable for human existence. Such perspectives present the environment as highly fragile, and I would argue overlook the power of nature. The power of nature is something which we have come to fear in recent years in the form of climate change.

Climate change, as well as key in Lammas establishment and development, is also central to the documentary *Living in the Future*: "The climate footprint of a

typical western family has more than tripled in four hundred years, which means we need to find two more planets or start living more lightly” (quoted from *Living in the Future*, episode 2). ‘Living lightly’ was a phase which I frequently came across in my research, in the ecovillagers conversations; “the part that attracts me to living in an ecovillage is living in a culture in which living lightly on the earth is natural” (Appendix C, p95), on the Lammas website; “To live a low-impact lifestyle is to live lightly on the earth”. There was also a flag stating ‘live lightly’ at the festival, near the ‘Green Futures’ tent which housed the Lammas stall among other green stalls; alternative energy, or activist related (*Friends of the Earth* and *Transition Towns Movement*).

Climate change has also become a key activist issue in recent years, with the development of activist projects such as *The Student Climate Project* and *Climate Camp*. As Kevin Mason below stated on the critical and radical geography forum: “Climate Actions are to the Noughties what Road Protests were to the Eighties” (posted on 28/02/08). We could argue that Lammas too is a form of climate change activism for the way in which it seeks to counter fears of environmental destruction and the environmental dystopian futures or apocalypse visions produced by climate change. However it is quite different in its approach compared to other forms of climate change activism. As an ex-activist commented at the festival, he considered Lammas to be a “non-confrontational” approach. As I discussed in my introduction, I consider the Lammas ecovillage to be an activism of a form, for the way it acts for change; an *activism*. That change being a better future primarily in terms of the environment, i.e. a future in which environmental ‘destruction’ or ‘degradation’ is absent. This common cause between different forms of climate change activism; that is from less confrontational approaches such as Lammas to more confrontational direct action was quite empowering for one ecovillager, giving a feeling of connection and “kinship” between different activism and activists:

Daniel: I just went to conference on direct action on climate change at Manchester uni, doing that really reminded that everything that you do is political... there I got quite a lot of kinship feeling of the relation, a good feeling of the relation between the direct action community, and, or like transition town groups and the project that we’re doing, it means it puts all those on a continuous spectrum of having an impact on that, so that’s good.

(Appendix B, p91)

Not all of the ecovillagers identified or associated themselves with environmental activism, one interviewee referred to a couple who he saw as being the most conservative of the group as having “done their recycling and are now ready for the next bit”. One interviewee disliked the way in which as a prospective ecovillager she was stereotyped as a ‘hippie’: “I guess I am a bit of a tree hugger (laughter) sometimes...I actually don’t like being categorised as eco-hippy as lots of people would categorise, I don’t think that has anything to do with eco, but I guess I am still” (Appendix A, p88).

Both contemporary direct action activism and ecovillages share a genealogy; that is a connection to 1960s and 70s environmentalism (Miles, 2008: 110). We could go further and argue that they are part of the same genealogy; activism and ecovillages. Quite a few of those involved or connected to ecovillages/low-impact communities in the UK, especially in their set up, participated in or were influenced by the anti-road movement of the 1980s and 90s. For example a member of *Landmatters Co-operative*, a low-impact community in Somerset, states that: “my life sort of turned around really when I went to Newbury, to the road protest at Newbury and was there for like a year and a half, and just totally fell in love with...living on the earth” (quoted from *Living in the Future*, episode 11). An ex-activist I met at the Festival, who was friends with some of the Lammas people, had been at the Newbury road protests, he stated that there was a lot of “burnout” at Newbury, but it also “felt like a victory, because it stopped a lot of road building at the time”. The temporary low-impact shelters built by road protestors to protect specific environments have translated into the development of long-term settlements to counter environmental destruction generally and in more global terms; e.g. climate change. So while, as Jacoby (1999)² and Thrift (2007)³ suggest, some have become apathetic to the political, perhaps as a result of ‘failures’ of activism, i.e. not achieving the better

² “We are increasingly asked to choose between the status quo or something worse. Other alternatives do not seem to exist...we build our lives, families and careers with little expectation the future will diverge from the present. To put this another way: A utopian spirit – a sense that the future could transcend the present – has vanished.” (Jacoby, 1999; pxi)

³ “it seems to me that we are living in a time of greater and greater authoritarianism. But this is an authoritarian capitalism which relies on sentiment, media, and lack of attention and/or engagement to most political issues to hold sway.” (Thrift, 2007: p222)

society it had been striving for, or by a belief in the insignificance of individuals actions. Others have taken this disillusionment with the political system and channelled it. Rather than waiting for and trying to persuade authorities to make changes, they have taken the future into their own hands.

Glimmers of dystopian environment futures can be found in the solidarity experienced between one ecovillager and other activist groups by fighting a common ill or dystopia; namely the dystopian or apocalyptic (for human society) environmental future envisioned by climate change. These dystopian futures are also present in the ecovillagers conversations, and served as a motivation rather than producing the 'apathy' (Jacoby, 1999; Thrift, 2007) which seems to have become wide spread in this age of multiple crises. Dazzle is produced by the presence of such dystopian environmental futures through the sense of there being too much needing to be done in order to prevent such an apocalypse; one in which the environment is 'destroyed'. In the next section I will discuss the anti-capitalist nature of the Lammas project and the ways in which capitalist society is viewed as dystopian by the ecovillagers.

(2.2) Anti-Capitalism/Dystopian Society

“the ideal of contemporary radical campaigning is the end of capitalism”

(Miles, 2008: 100).

Lammas could be referred to as a form of radical campaigning, though perhaps not in the way in which it is traditional considered i.e. demonstrations/protests, the end of capitalism is not however it's aim. It could be considered anti-capitalist in the sense that it seems to involve the removal from traditional capitalist systems; waged labour, being a part of national resources systems which provide such things as electricity and water in exchange for capital, as well as capitalist consumer systems. But it is instead against the way in which capitalism or society more generally is currently organised and structured, and this is what it seeks to change by working with authority systems rather than against them.

The Lammas project is “the UK's first planned ecovillage” (*Living in the Future*, episode 1). Previously ecovillages or low-impact communities in the UK have

been set up either without land ownership or planning permission, or in many case without either, and have had to fight battles with authorities following their establishment as a result. Some have acquired permission after long struggles; others are still on-going, Miles states that “the system generally prevents building even low-impact and sustainable dwellings on agricultural land” (Miles, 2008: 123-4). Tipi Valley is one example, an ex-activist I met at the festival explained to me as we visited the Tipi field of the festival (Figure 2), which consisted of residents of Tipi Valley and visitors who had hired Tipies made by the residents, that the community had been threatened by the local authorities, their case was taken to an EU court which ruled that they could stay based on their human rights.



Figure 2: The Tipi Field at Celtic Blue Rock Festival (Author’s photograph)

While some activists may campaign against the exploitation of distant unknown people/others, the ecovillage fights against the exploitation of the self through waged labour. Eric, one prospective resident of the ecovillage I interviewed viewed waged labour as a pointless and empty cycle:

Um I’ve always dreamed of living that sort of lifestyle, um where I can be sort of self sufficient in many ways. I hadn’t actually dreamed about totally self

sufficient, I wanted to provide myself with fuel so that I don't have to earn money to buy it, I wanted to provide myself with, you know all the vegetables I know are easy to grow, simply because they taste so much better than what I could afford to buy...all the things that mainstream people do in their lives, you know having to earn vast amount of money to pay for vast amounts of money to allow for very basic things to happen, don't seem to make any sense to me. (Appendix A, p83-84).

There seems to be a sense, amongst my research participants, that current conventional/mainstream lifestyles are trapping; feeling trapped in a job to maintain a lifestyle, tied to a house by a mortgage etc. This follows earlier debates within geography which argue that 'mainstream' society encourages stability rather than mobility (Sibley, 1994; Cresswell, 1996; Halfacree, 1996). Lammas' transgression however rather than being mobility, is its removal from capitalist systems of consumerism and waged labour. One ecovillager stated: "you want to be there now don't you, rather than you know, sort of carrying on the sort of rat race, which is really really hard because it feels totally opposed to where I want to be really" (quoted from *Living in the Future*, episode 13).

In the above interview extract there appears to be an othering of 'mainstream people' as mindless workers. A DIY (Do-it-Yourself) culture reminiscent of 90s activism (McKay, 1998) seems to run through Lammas and other low-impact settlements. Eric's argument above seems to be why work for someone else to earn money, to pay another person for something which you could *do yourself*. Lammas is also DIY in the sense of designing and building their own homes, and thus countering the commercial building business: "Natural building...has been linked to opposition to the dominant society's political and economic structures, not just to sustainability" (Miles, 2008: 125-6)

The ecovillage is also of course, countering the exploitation of the environment, as I discussed in the previous section. Though indirectly, it also in a way counters 'others' exploitation by not being a part of systems of unfair/free trade. Although the ecovillagers were not explicitly 'anti-capitalist', indeed some referred to capital as a flow of energy which could have either positive or negative associations (depending on its source). Yet capitalism was still something which would be

countered, even through the simple act of exchanging goods between ecovillagers, as Eric below mentions:

that's what I'm expecting from the village aspect of it, as well as the ability to buy or trade for the things that other people are doing that we're not, so that we don't have to take on board everything to be self-sufficient, so if someone is brilliant at cider making and I'm not then it doesn't make sense for me to be drinking not quite so good cider, I may as well drink his cider, if someone else is a brilliant cheese maker I might as well use their cheese, I'm sure we could trade for it, and I think that having a community around you we're just expanding the possibilities of what we can do. (Appendix A, p90)

As well as countering dominant society i.e. capitalism in various ways, the ecovillage also seeks to escape or rather remove itself from other dystopian elements of society. The ecovillage is therefore a future built on a disenchantment with society, as the below interview extract from Eric demonstrates. He refers to the way in which the binge drinking and clubbing culture "sickens" him:

Whenever I go into town, I'm thinking about Swansea at the moment, if I'm in Swansea on a Friday and I see what people are doing with their lives, it does sort of almost sicken me, um and the idea that you go to work to earn the money, to pay the rent, so that you've got somewhere to live when you go to work, and you get paid on a Friday and you go out with your mates and you spend most of it, you do the same on Saturday, so that on Sunday you have no money to do anything and you have no mind to think, so on Monday morning you've got to go back to work to earn to pay the rent so that you've got somewhere that you can go to work from. That side of things, people shopping and just wasting money on crap for no apparent reason, you know because it's fashionable to do this, this or that, um and disposable society actually annoys me, and I'd quite happily either change it so that all of society works in the way that I appreciate, which isn't going to happen, or not have to look at it. So I think for me being slightly isolated from whatever's going to go on around here that doesn't involve or interest me might be a good thing.

(Appendix A, p87-88)

He expresses a kind of disbelief at “what people are doing with their lives”, to him such a lifestyle is a meaningless cycle. His disgust and irritation at this side of society; “disposable society actually annoys me”, were indicative that this was a part of society which he wanted to escape and to “not have to look at”. We could describe his experience as a heightened moment of dystopia. Such dystopian states though hidden from view in the ecovillage, would not be absent from his future, though his hope I believe was that a project such as the ecovillage would lead society in a path away from such activities. But for the time being, these dystopian presents will also exist in his utopian future.

The uncertainty over Lammas’ future; their utopian future, meant that some of the ecovillagers were had to alter their lifestyles to a more conventional or ‘mainstream’ form. They were settling for what to them was a rather dystopian present, in that it went against their principles and beliefs, in order to pursue a utopian future. Daniel below was one example of this, he had previous lived a very low-impact lifestyle in a woodland house he built himself, he was now however having to live in a rented conventional house “because of the uncertainty of the timing”:

CL: So how does the ecovillage sort of contrast to how you live now?

Daniel: Well I think it’s quite similar to how we’ve lived in the past, because we’ve been doing the planning application and because of the uncertainty of the timing we’ve ended up in a rented house for the moment, which in contrast to that... gives us a lot less time really, because if we continue to try and live a roughly ecologically life it means we’ve got less time to spend on the family and on making good food and things like that because we’ve working to pay the rent, to pay for our oil to be drilled in places like the occupation of Iraq.
(Appendix B, p91)

This lifestyle has meant not only going against his political principles, which clearly angered him: “we’re working to pay the rent, to pay for our oil to be drilled in places like the occupation of Iraq”, but also meant that they had to compromise on their environmental values to allow for adequate family time: “if we continue to try and live a roughly ecologically life it means we’ve got less time to spend on the

family and on making good food”. This compromising of the present for the future was also shared by John; who stated that his current lifestyle is “probably the most conventional it’s ever been”:

well my lifestyle at the moment, is probably the most conventional it’s ever been, um, I use mains electricity, I use mains water, um I go out to work in a car. I think Lammas for me will be a return to living lightly on the earth, I have lived in my past lightly on the earth, and there’s a return to that. When I lived at Brithdir Mawr I reckon I lived as light as you can get while still having a foot in the society, so I’m not going to go to that extreme again, I mean before I shopped by horseback, I grew all my own food. Whereas Lammas is a kind of, is a... an acceptable compromise on that because it needs to appeal to the mainstream, we don’t want it to be so hardcore that it appeals to just a small minority. It’s going to incorporate mainstream elements like washing machines, and cars, and computers.

(Appendix C, p95-96)

This compromise was not so much of an issue for John, he saw compromise as necessary to the establishment of Lammas and to its potential influence and impact: “Lammas is a kind of, is a... an acceptable compromise...because it needs to appeal to the mainstream, we don’t want it to be so hardcore that it appeals to just a small minority”.

Despite the way in which as John above describes, Lammas incorporates modern and “mainstream elements like washing machines, and cars, and computers”, to some outsiders, low-impact living seems to be an attempt to turn back time, and live in ways of the past (e.g. Duffy, 2001). Such an approach seems to go against the modernist view of progress. A sign outside of a roundhouse⁴ shown in the *Living in the Future* documentary states: “Roundhouses aren’t just history. They are people’s homes.” (*ibid*, episode 2), suggesting that there have been people implying that their homes were of the past. This is also implied by a local resident to the ecovillage site, who states: “The first concern shared by many of the local community is a failure to understand what Lammas hope to achieve by seeming to put the clock back five

⁴ a form of low-impact architecture

hundred years, as a solution to a 21st century global energy resource problem” (Ewan Wilson, Glandwr resident, quoted from *Living in the Future*, episode 2). This viewpoint overlooks the fact that while low-impact living draws on methods of the past, it also draws on modern environmental technology, practices, and building techniques, such as renewable energy i.e. solar panels and hydropower; though hydropower could be argued to be a past technology in its origins, permaculture, solar heating through the use of large south facing windows, and thickly insulated walls. The use of past methods through this perspective is also suggestive of a certain level of nostalgia in low-impact living; wanting to go back to ‘better times’. It could however be argued that their use of past methods has more to do with their environmental nature; allowing for them to live more sustainably or lightly.

The architectures of Lammas and other low-impact settlements in the UK seem to possess something otherworldly about them, almost fantasy or fairytale like. For example, at a recent Transition Durham meeting at which a presentation was given by a Lammas member on the planned ecovillage, one member referred to the low-impact houses as “hobbit living”. This otherworldliness is also suggestive of the future; such architectures offer us a glimpse into the future. Kraftl states with reference to Kumar (1991) that “architecture is perhaps the most utopian of the arts, with its inherent futurity and (Modern) utopian heritage” (Kraftl, 2006: 35). The below image (Figure 3) of the Terrace building in the ecovillage which will be occupied by four families, has I believe an especially futuristic nature about it. It is futuristic for its unfamiliarity, its difference from previous architectural designs, essentially its newness.



Figure 3: The Terrace building of Lammas (source: Lammas website)

It seems almost paradoxical that a site currently occupied by a heavily subsidised tenant sheep farmer is now home to a potential future so strikingly different and opposed. Strange how such eerily empty fields inhabited by neglected and dead animals could become the site of such hope and optimism for the future. We could argue that the ecovillage site is currently a dystopian space in the view of anti-capitalist/globalisation/free-trade and environmental politics; high subsidies are seen as a problem and aggravator of global trade inequalities, they also lead to complacency in the case of this tenant farmer.

From an environmental/sustainable perspective we could also argue that this land is not being used to its full potential, one ecovillager stated that the environmental future (peak oil and climate change) means that “we’ve got no real option apart from...to increase the productivity of our land massively” (Appendix B, p92). The image below (Figure 4) displays this increased productivity of the land in the ecovillage:



Figure 4: more lively land: an example of one of the 9 plots; plot 7
(source: Lammas website)

This dystopian space is therefore being transformed into one of solutions and hope for the future; a utopian space. Lammas could be said to be breathing life back into dead empty fields. This redefining of and renewing of space is something we see occurring in activism more broadly, such as direct action (Starhawk, 2002: 151). Direct action usually refers to protests and demonstrations, it is strangely categorised as 'direct action', how indeed is Lammas any less *direct* and *active*. It is perhaps more conventional in its process i.e. going through the planning system and thus seeking to obtain official approval, though we live in a time in which protests near parliament require planning permission of a form. But it is also of course unconventional in the way that it contrasts to the majorities lifestyles.

While the majorities or 'mainstream' lifestyles were a dystopian present for many they also had the potential to become a dystopian future if the ecovillage was to not succeed in gaining planning permission; this was therefore a fear which manifest itself in the ecovillager's presents as well as being a future present in-itself. The realisation of this fear would also result in the site or space itself, of the ecovillage retaining its 'dystopian' status as representative of the wrongs of capitalism. In the next section I will discuss community in relation to the dystopian elements of the Lammas ecovillage project.

(2.3) Community

Just as the ecovillagers were seeking to escape or counter elements of capitalist society they viewed to be dystopian, they also seek to counter a trend which some argue characterises modern life; the disintegration of community. Community is seen by some as something of the past, as demonstrated by the below quote from *Living in the Future*:

Less than four hundred years ago, most people in Britain grew their own food, and built their own houses. But parliament wanted money to go to war and mono-culture offered a quick return. The enclosures Act of 1750 separated people from their land and workers from their families, most people now lived in cities. What happened to community? I wanted it back and I was not alone. (quoted from *Living in the Future*, episode 1)

There are obviously some problematic elements to this statement; firstly that it implies 'community' is dead, and was killed by capitalism or more specifically monoculture. It also implies that community is only possible in rural or self-sufficient lifestyles, as opposed to urban. However Jones' (2007) *Utopian Dreams* contradicts this view, in which he discusses various utopian/alternative communities around the world which he visited, the final chapter consists of his reflections on returning and the discovery of an array of communities on his doorstep, the very urban Bristol.

The view of community as 'dead' in part springs from the paradox of modern urban life in that we can simultaneously be surrounded by crowds of people and yet be completely isolated. Tuan (1986) writes that "a common view of society is that it consists of strangers and acquaintances who touch one another, if at all, only at the surface, like hard billiard balls." (ibid, 112) There seems to be a rather rose tinted view of the community of the past in which all neighbours are close friends, but a community serves a more basic purpose of offering support and a helping hand when needed, we no longer feel that we can ask for a help from our neighbours or community, this is even true in rural areas, as one ecovillagers anecdote below demonstrates:

Eric: a while ago in my village I looked out my window from where I was working on the computer and across my next door neighbours field into the garden next door I saw our 6 foot 7, 4 foot wide next door neighbour sheep farmer chasing a tiny little lamb around a trailer in his field in the rain, and he wanted the lamb to go into the trailer, and she was just walking in circles around the trailer, anyway really funny and I laughed for a little while then I put my waterproofs on and put my boots on and I you know walked across our garden, across the field next door and across to his and helped him put the lamb into the trailer, and wondered why he didn't think about asking one of his neighbours to do that at the beginning, rather than struggling, and I had no idea how long he was there for but I saw him doing it and it was funny enough for me to watch him for a good little while before I went to help, and I would like it if in the future stuff like that isn't necessary because someone will just make a phone call to say can you just pop up this afternoon because I've got to do this, and in an emergency I'd happily come running you know if

there was a need for it, and that's what I'm expecting from the village aspect of it.

(Appendix A, p89-90)

The struggle to become a part of the Lammas community and to make that community a reality caused both feelings of 'silence' and 'dazzle'. Some of the future residents seemed to experience a kind of 'silence', in their involvement in the project, or we could say in their construction of knowledge about the ecovillage. This silence took the form of the future of the ecovillage falling silent, seeming to cease to exist for a moment or while. This was often as a result of feelings of disillusionment or disenchantment:

Ruth: um there's has been lots of moments when lots of Lammas people have sort of lost their faith and become desperate that it's just not going to happen, and things are going on so slowly.

(Appendix A, p88)

As well as the fragility and uncertainty of the ecovillage's future producing a feeling of disenchantment, some were also disenchanted and overwhelmed by the paper work and planning involved in making Lammas a reality; this included applying to be part of the Lammas, as Eric below describes:

when we were at the initial stages of applying to be allocated a plot in the first place, because we were all selected, there were a couple of times when it thought, when I thought well surely there's going to be better people out there, that know more about this that are going to be selected so is there any point in us bothering...Um and when we were writing the application, Ruth was in ———, um and I was in Swansea and we were sort of sitting on a computer with Skype open, um talking to each other by horrible delayed feedback, um and trying to work out designs and ideas together. It took twice as long as it should have, um and it was kind of horrible, and those have been the worst times I think, for me, um we're now in a waiting game, all the work has been done, we're just waiting for the planning system to do its thing.

(Appendix A, p88, line indicates word removed to preserve anonymity)

This feeling of being overwhelmed and, or disenchanted was also experienced as a result of the planning application, John below comments that “there were times when it felt almost crazy”:

there were times when it felt almost crazy, and you know three years of paper work is just a stupid amount of paper work, if you had told me that at the beginning I wouldn't have thought that I could have done it, I wouldn't have thought that it was possible to see that through, and there are times when it has felt overwhelming- when we were rewriting the application...

(Appendix C, p97)

John is overwhelmed by the planning application even on reflection: “if you had told me that at the beginning I wouldn't have thought that I could have done it, I wouldn't have thought that it was possible”. Daniel's sense of being overwhelmed was not so much with the size of the application, but rather the bureaucracy, and produced feelings of “frustration” and also I would argue powerlessness:

the difficulty and the frustration is making it work at the bureaucratic level ...in some ways there are so many different things that we could try and do err because you know I could try and get in with some member of the council and try and find out who has influence here and who has influence here, things like that, ...so that's a bit overwhelming

(Appendix B, p93)

Dazzle or the feeling of being overwhelmed can therefore be disenchanting just as it can be enchanting. We can think of these moments of ‘silence’ or loss of faith in the ecovillage's future as moments in which dystopian futures creep back into the ecovillagers' presents and take over. The bureaucrats referred to in the final interview extract not only have the power to make the Lammas dream a reality, they also have the power to create or destroy the Lammas community which is already forming. An example of a very physical manifestation of the community is shown below (Figure 5) by a photograph taken during the gathering at the ecovillage site which shows the remains of the previous day's campfire.



Figure 5: Lammas campfire at the ecovillage site (Author's photograph)

Community is therefore one obvious way in which the future of the ecovillage can be seen developing in the present. Referring to the first AGM camp on the site of the ecovillage, which drew together people from all over the UK who were interested in living at the ecovillage, the founder of Lammas states: “the most surprising thing to come from this is the sense of community that’s just kind of spring from nowhere” (quoted from *Living in the Future*, episode 2). This contrast to the views of the local community, one resident stated his disapproval of Lammas: “the size of the thing is all wrong, it’s wrong for the area, definitely wrong for the area” (*Living in the Future*, episode 2); the ecovillage was originally imagined to consist of thirty households, so the current plans are a compromise on the original ‘dream’:

John: I mean Lammas in itself is a compromise on that dream and ambition because it’s an attempt to bridge the boundary as far as it’s realistically possible at this moment in time in this society

CL: so how could it go further?

John: Well I would like to see it liberated up a lot more, you know the, I think the most challenging thing that Lammas is going to face is this obligation to meet 75 per cent of its household needs from the site on an annual basis, people are going to get old, people get ill, people's life circumstances change and so I think I would see something with a lot more flexibility um and on a lot bigger scale as well, you know 9 households, 76 acres, in my mind is very small, possibly too small but its all we can get away with, its what's appropriate for us to do now

CL: do you think it would work as a bigger set up?

John: yeah, definitely. I mean interestingly when we first got together we looked at various models, I think the optimum model size we came up with was between 23 and 30 households, that seems to be a natural size for a cluster. We looked at models like Holtsfield, Valley Lay...Tipi valley, about 25 to 30 households is similar to the traditional village size as well, that seems to be a natural cluster size.

(Appendix C, p95)

As John states above, the project was originally planned to be much larger, based around the size of other low-impact settlements and traditional villages. This size of between 25 and 30 he refers to as a more "natural size", the implication being that a larger or smaller settlement is essentially unnatural. The small size in his eyes limits the flexibility and adaptability of the community. This compromise is he argues "what's appropriate for us to do now" and "an attempt to bridge the boundary as far as it's realistically possible at this moment in time in this society". Sargisson writes that compromise is a characteristic of many newer green communities:

Newer green communities all face this tension between the desire for best practice and the need to attract members. Most respond pragmatically, developing a way of life that is better (more environmentalist) than life outside, but accepting compromises along the way.

(Sargisson, 2007: 10)

The future community is made present not only through the compromises that have had to be made; which will as Sargisson above suggest be an on going part of the ecovillages development i.e. a part of their future as well as their present. But also through the current communities which the ecovillagers inhabit, these have the potential to become dystopian futures if the ecovillage does not succeed in obtaining planning permission. They are viewed as dystopian primarily for their isolation; the way in which members of the communities are isolated from each other, afraid to ask for help from neighbours when needed, as one interviewee demonstrated with his anecdote. The future community also manifests itself in more physical ways, for example by the construction of a campfire and through socialising between ecovillagers leading to a sense of community spirit; as one ecovillager states above “the sense of community that’s just kind of spring from nowhere”.

Dazzle and silence emerge in these future glimpses. Feelings of disillusionment with Lammas’ future created a temporary state of silence for some ecovillagers; the ecovillage future seemed to fall silent for a moment. Dazzle occurred in relation to the applications both to be part of the ecovillage and to the planning authority; this was in the form of the work needed or the complications of the task feeling overwhelming.

Dystopia, which has been the focus of this chapter, is often assumed to be the enemy of utopia; dystopias are seen as something which must be destroyed if they exist or before they come to pass. But through my reflections on utopia and dystopian states I have come to realise the essential nature of both to each other. As Baeten below articulates, with reference to Schaer (2000) and Kumar (2000):

Dystopia cannot survive without its counterpart, utopia, while utopia ‘thrives on the violent destruction of dystopias’ (Schaer, 2000b, p.278). Ultimately, utopia and dystopia are two sides of the same coin: what reads as a utopia for some, be it socialism, modernism or fascism, is decidedly dystopian for others... ‘Both deal in perfected societies, the only difference being whether they attach a plus or a minus sign’ (Kumar, 2000, p. 253).
(Baeten, 2002b: 150-51)

Utopian is not the absence or destruction of dystopia; utopia requires dystopia in order to exist, in order to consider it self utopian. The utopian city plans of the nineteenth and twentieth century, to which Pinder (2005) refers are demonstrative of the human characteristic nature of dystopian fears and utopian solutions. Lammas, like any other utopia or attempt at a better future is born out of discontent with the state of the present, both its environmental destructive nature, capitalist processes, and what is seen to be the lack of a community spirit. In the next chapter I will be discussing what I conceive to be the utopian elements of the Lammas ecovillage.

Chapter 3

Utopian Futures

Utopian Futures

Utopian futures are the theme of this chapter, as the title suggests. Levitas (1990) offers us a new definition of utopia, away from previous visions of utopia as an “impossible dream” (ibid: 1). Rather than a ‘perfect’ future, she imagines utopian to be instead a ‘better’ one, and one which evolves and changes over time. These better futures manifest themselves in three ways in respect to the Lammas ecovillage, which I will demonstrate using my empirical material from the participant observation I undertook at the ecovillage site and Celtic Blue Rock Festival, the interviews I carried out while at the festival and my textual analysis of the various representations on the Lammas website. Firstly I will explore the better environmental futures present, in which the nature or the environment is enhanced and ‘preserved’ as opposed to ‘destroyed’. Secondly through particular ways of being, as Levitas argues “utopia is the expression of the desire for a better way of *being*” (ibid: 8, my emphasis), these better ‘beings’ take several forms, as I will discuss. Finally I will discuss better futures in relation to belonging, both in terms of the Lammas community itself and place; the ecovillage site. I aim to show that these better or utopian futures reveal themselves in the presents of the ecovillagers. I will also explore the ways in which dazzle and silence emerge during these utopian presents, both with respect to my own experiences and the ecovillagers.

(3.1) Environmental Futures

The environment or more specifically the preservation of it in its current state is obviously a core motivation of green communities such as ecovillages. This motivation, as I discussed in the previous chapter springs from contemporary degradation of the environment and dystopian visions of environmental ‘destruction’. These dystopian environmental futures therefore, while presenting the possibility of futures worse than the present i.e. dystopian, also serve as a catalyst for change, and for the creation of a *better* future. Hopkins writes that peak oil rather than creating dystopian futures could instead mean a future more “preferable to the present, if we plan sufficiently in advance with imagination and creativity” (Hopkins, 2008: 17).

As I mentioned at the beginning of the previous chapter, we seem to be living in a time of multiple crises, both environmental and social; e.g. climate change and peak oil. A project such as the Lammas ecovillage, though concerned with environmental degradation more generally, emerges at this time of crises as a light in the dark⁵. Light as symbolic and suggestive, appears several times in my research (Figure 6 and 7), all in the form of natural light, take for example the Lammas logo below which shows a sunrise:

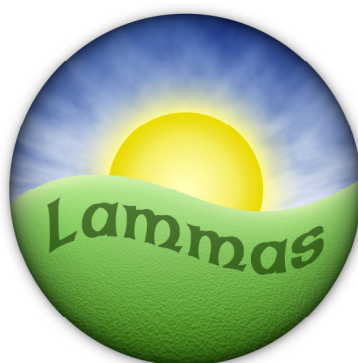


Figure 6: Lammas Logo (source: Lammas website)

This image seems to be suggestive of hope for the future, optimism and perhaps the dawn of a new age; in which low-impact living becomes more widespread. Referring to a recent exhibition at the National Gallery in London entitled *Radical Light: Italy's Divisionist Painters*, Penny Cole writes that in this work: “Light was for them a symbol of hope and change” (Cole, 2008). I think these associations could be applied more generally. Take for example religious figures such as Jesus and Buddha are often depicted with hallos of light around their heads. Light is often associated with the future, and darkness with the past, as Tuan writes: “Living is a perpetual stepping forward into light and an abandonment of what is behind one’s back, cannot be seen, is dark and is one’s past” (Tuan, 1978: 9).

The fact that all the light we see on the Lammas website (e.g. Figure 2), either on the web-pages themselves or the planning documents, is only in the form of natural light I believe is significant. It is suggestive I would argue of the opening up to a more natural future, and that such a future; one void of environmental degradation, is

⁵ Drawing on the title of Rebecca Solnit’s book *Hope In The Dark: The Untold History of People Power* (2005).

possible. One light image that features frequently, shown as the centre image in Figure 2, is a rainbow, which is a typical western symbol of hope, leading back to the story of Noah in the Old Testament. The other images show sunlight lighting up darkened places. This use of light is I would argue the presence of a utopian future, in a representational form.



Figure 7: Light in Lammas (source: Lammas website)

Such environmental and resource crises, referred to above, can lead to the creation of “ecotopia, or green utopia” (Miles, 2008: 91) visions, something to which the Lammas project could be referred to as. If we imagine utopia to mean a better or closer to ‘perfect’ world, green utopias or ecotopias are primarily environmental in their utopianism i.e. living a life which is closer and works with nature as opposed to that which is damaging to the environment. Such ecotopias encourage and develop ‘green knowledges’ (Miles, 2008: 91). Miles refers to such knowledges as related to our perceptions of nature/the environment, but I believe such phrasing could be used to refer to very practical and particular knowledges, knowledges which have become or are scarce in the modern world. Examples of such knowledges include from the perhaps the not so scarce i.e. growing our own food and rearing animals, to the more scarce; using the materials around us to building our own homes, providing our own fuel and power, permaculture⁶ methods which work with the cycles of nature. All of these ‘green knowledges’ both scarce and not are involved in the Lammas ecovillage.

⁶ “Permaculture is not a set of rules; it is a process of design based around principles found in the natural world, of co-operation and mutually beneficial relationships, and translating these principles

The intricate planning involved in one such ‘green knowledge’; permaculture could be said to be reminiscent of utopian city plans (Pinder, 2005). Essentially these ‘green knowledges’ mean being able to look after ourselves, without the need for outside services and systems; doing things for ourselves. A member of *Landmatters Co-operative*, a low-impact community in Somerset states that “we want to live as sustainably and well as possible, and learn the skills that we feel will be vitally important in the future when we can’t rely on oil” (quoted from *Living in the Future*, episode 11). Green knowledges which are used by Lammas as well permaculture methods include those necessary to the construction of their low-impact architecture.⁷

These green knowledges have also been published, in an attempt to encourage others to live more greenly. Miles writes that this publication of green knowledge is increasing and is indicative of “a growth in do-it-yourself environmentalism” (Miles, 2008, 105). The aims of ecotopias, or more broadly environmentalist have worked their way into the mainstream and consumerism; e.g. renewable energy, recycling/reusing, green party voting, local and organic food, this something to which the guides such as those mentioned above have played a role in and are part of.

Better environmental futures are made present not only through the utilising of ‘green knowledges’ and green practices such as those mentioned above, but also in the representations of nature found on the Lammas website and planning documents. This takes the form of light (as referred to above) i.e. sunlight, sunrises and rainbows, as well as other equally cheery and colourful forms (Figure 8), and picturesque landscapes (Figure 9):

into actions”. The problems of modern agriculture and the environmental degradation involved are seen as a result of a lack of planning and design: “The problem from a permaculture perspective has been a lack of design” (both quotes are taken from the British Permaculture Association’s website)

⁷ “Low-impact architecture uses a combination of recycled and natural materials. The project is essentially a self-build affair. The first phase will see the construction of five detached dwellings and one terrace of four dwellings. There will be a combination of building styles including straw bale, earth sheltered, timber frame and cob. The houses will feature the latest environmental technologies and design techniques. The dwellings will blend into the landscape. Indeed they will be largely made from elements of the landscape (for example turf roofs, cob walls, timber cladding).” (quoted from the Lammas website)



Figure 8: colourful nature (source: Lammas website)



Figure 9: nature as landscape (source: Lammas website)

Nature in this form is aesthetically pleasing. Either in the form of landscape (Figure 9) or landscape enhancement (Figure 8), they have the ability to affect us deeply or enhance our mood i.e. picturesque, or awe inspiring/breath-taking landscapes. This is also the case in nature as a resource (Figure 10); while working with and using nature we can also be deeply affected by it as one resident of the Findhorn ecovillage in Scotland demonstrates: “originally I came to improve my English, to live in Scotland because I love this country and hiking in here and to live in an international community, and I’ve worked as a garden for many years here now so I’ve grown totally attached to the land, and just, it gives me deep joy, and there are so many things in place here, how we are with one another, the inner circle, making decision together, that I feel very touched.”(quoted from *Living in the Future*, episode 7).



Figure 10: nature as resource (source: Lammas website)

Living a greener lifestyle also has spiritual connotations as John below describes, though this is of course not the case for all the ecovillagers or environmentalists more generally as he points out:

CL: Um, does the low-impact lifestyle kind of have spiritual angle for you?

John: Um, well I can only answer that question when you say how's that in-terms for you, because its such a personal thing and I believe it is the root of, for me the root of low-impact living is to do with our relationship to um spirit, to the mother earth, to the great spirit, to god, and that for me I think of as a motivation to low-impact development, sustainability, ecovillages, that wholly underpins it for me, now whether that's true for other people or not I don't know, I think you'd probably get a mixed reaction, if I think about the people who are in Lammas I think some people yes and some people no.

(Appendix C, p97)

Daniel below refers to nature as the 'real world', which made me recognise the assumption that had been present in my question; that the urban, and the human is the world, and to leave this is to leave the 'real world', to escape or retreat from it.

CL: Is part of the attraction for you sort of being quite cut-off from the world?

Daniel: As I see it... most of our society is a living a life which is quite cut-off from the real world and I like to live a life which is more in touch with the real world

CL: you mean like the natural world?

Daniel: yeah, to me the real world is water, is earth, is living systems, is plants, is forests, yeah I like to be living closer to that,
(Appendix B, 92)

Miles writes, with reference to Jackson (2000a), that connection with nature is a “basic human need”: “people’s wish to produce their own food springs from a basic human need to connect with nature, to provide for oneself, and to play an active, responsible role in one’s natural environment.” (Jackson, 2000a: 31, quoted in Miles, 2008: 122-3). The desire to connect with nature, but more particularly to live a low-impact lifestyle was the main motivation of all the ecovillagers I spoke to. As demonstrated below by an interview extract from Daniel:

CL: What was it that attracted you [to the ecovillage]?

Daniel: It was the fact that there was a planning policy which was exactly for what we were doing, which is for want of a better wording, low-impact development, and we were committed to doing that anyway, we were going to do it on a piece of land without planning permission, but the fact that there was a policy where you could do it and have security, at that time what seemed like more security, so that was very appealing.
(Appendix B, p91)

Similarly John was attracted to the ecovillage as it would enable him to live “in a culture in which living lightly on the earth is natural” (Appendix C, p95). Ironically, due to the flimsy structures which spring to mind from the phrase “low-impact”, the ecovillage meant that Daniel could live the kind of lifestyle he wanted more safely and securely, as he states in the extract above.

The environmental crises to which I referred to at the beginning of this section, and to which low-impact living is brought forward as a solution to, also meant that the ecovillagers envisaged a future in which more people would be living low-impact lifestyles. As John states: “The future that I see involves the majority, an increasing number of people on the earth moving back to a much more rural, land based existence with nature yes, that’s the future that I see.” (Appendix C, p96).

The future, or more specifically planning for the future, plays a vital role in environmentalist lifestyles, and this will be especially the case in the ecovillage. Consideration of the future will most likely be taken daily in relation not only to the environmental future of the site but also the ecovillager’s lives. Planning for the future will be for Eric an important part of everyday life:

I like planning stuff, I love the idea of um planning for the future in terms of planting ash and um dealing with the present by planting willow... I’d happily spent most of my life just doing the things that need to be done, if that means that you know the tomatoes need to be reduced and bottled, you know or reduced and frozen, if that’s the job we’re going to be doing for the next couple of days, with everything being planned for the future. Just being able to make decisions and get on with things and organise your life so that you’ve got the important facilities around you, which most people don’t have, you know most people don’t have huge pantries filled with jars with food preserved in them, um, and that’s what I’m expecting from the set up. Um, interesting they say that if you spent more than 10 percent of your income on fuel your in fuel poverty, and I was just thinking, well 10 percent of my income, if you equate it to um daily, a day of your time being 10 per cent of your income, if I’m spending one day in ten managing our straw coppice ...sawing fire wood, I wouldn’t regard that as difficult , I imaging that we’ll be spending a lot more than that dealing with our fuel. (Appendix A, p84-85)

Eric’s argument here seems to be that although a low-impact lifestyle may require more forethought, planning and hard labour, it is worth it for the benefits it reaps; both environmentally and in terms of independence. We could describe the practices above as forms of ‘green knowledges’ such as those I referred to at the beginning of this section. These knowledges which the ecovillagers currently possess

and will utilize to create and maintain the ecovillage could be described as one way in which their future; a *better* environmental future, is present. Such knowledges, articulated through my conversations with the ecovillagers and the planning documentation on their website I found to be rather ‘dazzling’. I was quite overwhelmed by the knowledge and skills⁸ they possessed. Without such knowledges and skills the future of the ecovillage would be a very silent one. Better environmental futures also manifested themselves in other, less dazzling ways to me, in the form of representations of nature on the Lammas website as brighter (Figure 9); more beautiful, preserved and protected landscapes (Figure 10); and as nature appreciated and harnessed more fully (Figure 11). These better futures are also narrated by the ecovillagers in their desires to live closer to nature and more ‘lightly’ i.e. in a low-impact way. In the next section I will be exploring and reflecting on various utopian states of ‘being’ which I encountered in my research.

(3.2) Being

While ‘better’ environmental futures are a core motivation of ecovillage living i.e. by choosing a more environmentally conscious way of living, there are also other elements of their lifestyle which they seek to improve. Namely ways of ‘being’ which ecovillage life is seen to allow more time for or to be more accommodating of. In this section I will discuss the various ways of ‘being’ which constitute Lammas utopian nature, these include moments of silence or stillness, hope, happiness, and spiritual connection to nature.

Just as the first section of this chapter: ‘Environmental Futures’, is twined with the first section of the previous chapter, this section is twined with the previous chapter’s second section on Anti-capitalism, and similarly it deals with reverse elements; namely the utopian reverse. Capitalist ‘mainstream’ society could be said to be concerned with ‘having’ as opposed to ‘being’, as DeGeus suggests: “in modern

⁸ For example Eric planned to earn a living while, or rather extra income (as their ‘living’ will be provided by their plot at the ecovillage; e.g. growing their own food etc) by using wood from the site to make fine furniture; “I should be able to make you know three or four pieces of fine furniture [per year] um and if you don’t know how much people sell fine furniture for (laugh) you should go and found out” (Appendix A, p85).

times we increasingly live in a society of 'having', instead of 'being'." (DeGeus, 2007: 41). Lammas, I would argue prioritises states of 'being' and inwardly derived well-being and happiness over outwardly and material 'having'. If we imagine, like Levitas (1990), a utopian future to be a 'better' future rather than a 'perfect' one, then this better must include better 'beings'. Better states of 'being' are in my view inseparable along with ideas of 'the good life' to the creation of better futures; the future must not just be better physically, aesthetically or environmentally but also emotionally. Once such 'better' state of being we could consider to be silent practices such as those associated with meditation e.g. "reflection and introspection" (taken from extract below). Lammas it could be said is seeking silence in a noisy world, seeking to escape the noise of modern life⁹. John below reflects on how he envisages life at the ecovillage to be (based on his experiences living similar lifestyles); he imagines that there will be more time for silent practices and the appreciation of simple things:

It's a lot slower pace, there's a lot more time for reflection and introspection, and a lot more time for tuning into your self and to your past, a lot more time for spiritualising and for making the most of those simple things, you know um making the most of the simple meal grown on the earth, because grown on the earth it takes a lot longer than a quick piece of instant pasta that you bought from the supermarket recently, and its so much more than that its so much a deeper, I remember when I lived in Tipi Valley you know there was such a culture of huge appreciation for the really simple things, like the quality of water, the quality of air, the quality of...good wood for the fire, good music, good company...(Appendix C, p97-98)

These silent moments can often produce clarity in the individual. Clarity of vision and aim was certainly something which I found the Lammas people embodied in their struggles to make their dream a reality. The focus and faith in the project displayed by of some of the core members of the group meant that they were rarely susceptible to moments of 'dazzle' in the form of being overwhelmed. This faith

⁹ That is not to say that modern life is void of silences and stillness (e.g. Thrift, 2000), but rather that the ecovillage would be absent of some of the literal noises and busyness of modern life e.g. traffic and crowds of people.

could be described as a form of hope, argued by some to be central to utopia (e.g. Bloch, 1986; Anderson, 2002, 2006). With reference to Bloch, Anderson (2006) writes “The moment of hope is inseparable from re-definition of the problems and tasks that for Bloch define the concept utopia and the practice of utopianism (*ibid*: 693). Daniel, below describes his focus on the project as preventing him from feeling overwhelmed or ‘at a loss’ as to what needed to be done:

my experience is really, right from the word go, right from first thinking about it I felt exactly like I knew what needed to be done, I’ve never been at a loss to know what the action was, in terms of the practical action of making it work on the ground.

(Appendix B, p93)

The faith in, or hope for the Lammas ecovillage, seems to have been an energy driver which kept the ecovillagers going. John below refers to his “commitment” to creating the ecovillage and the he hasn’t “ever doubted” its realisation, referring to moments of overwhelm he states:

there have been moments, but they haven’t been strong moments for me. Um because for me I’ve been feeling so firmly committed to this path, but my kind of, my joy or my energy or my source comes from just the act of service not the actual result, what the goal will look like I don’t know, whereas for me there’s joy to be actually feeling like I’m doing something worthwhile, I’m on the right path, this is my path, this is my destiny,...I haven’t ever doubted I guess you know for me it’s always one step at a time, you know just one foot in front of the other, that’s the only way to climb a mountain, it’s just slowly slowly, small bites, one step at a time.

(Appendix C, p97)

This seemingly inextinguishable hope appeared to be powered by a certain ‘utopian energy’; an idea coined by Tower Sargent (2007), he defines it as the “will/willingness/ability to create new forms” (*ibid*: 309). This utopian energy is something which “is sometimes displaced, or at least differently placed, into activities other than the creation of utopias...there is only a limited amount of such energy at

any given time, and that if it is going elsewhere, it will not be going into actual utopias or intentional communities” (*ibid*: 309-10). Tower Sargent ascribes this ‘utopian energy’ to societies as a whole, but I believe that it could be applied at an individual level i.e. to the ecovillagers, Daniel and John above being two examples.

It is also clear from the above interview extract from John, that this in-between state of the ecovillage, is a utopian state of being in-itself, we could perhaps say a utopia of becoming (Grosz, 1999a). We need not think of utopia as merely an end state or goal, but also as a process towards such a state, in which a better now is created through the striving of a better future; John states above “my joy or my energy or my source comes from just the act of service not the actual result... for me there’s joy to be actually feeling like I’m doing something worthwhile, I’m on the right path, this is my path, this is my destiny”. Striving for the creation of Lammas gives more meaning and purpose, or a more specific purpose to the ecovillagers everyday actions. We could say that their now is brightened by the potential future. Sargisson refers to green intentional communities, specifically already formed ones, as imperfect “utopias in process”;

their imperfections absolutely do not invalidate them. These experiments might make their members unhappy – unbearably so, sometimes – but they are pursuing a dream, striving for a better life and seeking a better alternative. They are, I suggest, utopias in process, moving slowly, and sometimes unevenly, towards a better life in this imperfect world.

(Sargisson, 2007: 21)

This idea of utopia as a process rather than an end goal, as a ‘not-yet’ which has an affect on the now is echoed in an earlier article by Anderson (2006), who writes: “I define the utopic as a type of process in which plural “goods” or “betters” are “not-yet” but immanent to life and therefore have disruptive, interrogative qualities” (*ibid*: 693). This utopia in process or of becoming is not all joyful of course, as Sargisson above suggests in relation to green communities already formed, but this is also the case for those in a state of becoming such as Lammas, there is frustration and unhappiness at trying to make these dreams work. Daniel below as well as reiterating his faith in the project; “I’m quite convinced [the planning authority]

cannot say no”, describes how the waiting has made him feel like he “can hardly believe it will ever happen”:

Daniel: How I imagine it to be living there?

CL: yeah, just what it would be like living there

Daniel: I can hardly believe it will ever happen

CL: Do you think they will say no

Daniel: no, I don't think they could say no to it, I'm quite convinced they cannot say no

CL: oh

Daniel: Yeah, it will happen, it will come, it's just the waiting, its the first time, in my whole life, that I've had to wait for permission of somebody else to do something I believe in...But to answer the question, what will it be like when we live there? Well, um, when we've stopped celebrating, we'll never stop celebrating, it's going to be hard work of course, and it's going to be windy and cold, and sometimes it's going to be sunny and sometime it's going to be difficult, but overall it's going to be great, it's going to be fantastic, in terms of us and our family it will be the first place to have of our own, we'll be able go out into the woods and start working in the woods, we'll be able to get the sheep out of the woods so they stop killing everything that tries to live in there...I think it will be, I have no doubt it will be hard work but on a soul level I think it will be great, I've got a lot of energy left for that, I don't have a lot of energy left for paperwork.

(Appendix B, p93-94)

Daniel above expresses his frustration at the fact that “it's the first time, in my whole life that I've had to wait for permission of somebody else to do something I believe in”. Earlier in the interview he stated his irritation at the fact that “we're

waiting on somebody's whim and we don't even know whose whim" (Appendix B, p93). Another negative impact of the process has been a sense of mental exhaustion with the bureaucratic elements of establishing the ecovillage. Referring to when the ecovillage actually gets underway i.e. starts being built, he states; "I've got a lot of energy left for that, I don't have a lot of energy left for paperwork."

Contrastingly those involved in the project who could be described as not being as emotionally attached and involved in Lammas seemed to be unsusceptible, or even immune to extreme states of being or emotion e.g. disenchantment or loss of hope, joy, or overwhelm. Ruth was one example of this; "I personally have had so much going on in my life, other things than Lammas that I haven't had time to think about it, it's just either happening or not and I do what I do and that's it" (Appendix A, p88). Although she wanted the project to succeed, if the project did not go through it would not be any great loss in that she would simply find another way to live this sort of lifestyle i.e. low-impact. In our first conversation Ruth suggested to me that for her this type of lifestyle is more logical and practical, as well as more ethical, for others though she stated that sustainability had a more spiritual aspect. For Daniel, as shown in the below interview extract this was certainly the case:

for me the evolution, my personal evolution of coming to this point comes from playing outside in the countryside, in nature, and enjoying it, of growing up doing that...outdoor activities and loving that and spending time outside and feeling alive there, and feeling alive with my friends at that time, I wanted to continue doing that with the, with the increasing depth of appreciation of being in nature, of what nature is, I think there comes a natural awareness of its value and possibly its fragility and the impact we're having on it, and with that a natural want or tendency to play an active role in being a steward of nature to some extent, helping to protect it, and to honour it, if you experience it and realise that... and see its value, its innate value in-itself, then you know, of course you want to act in a way which looks after it. So for me, yeah that is a spiritual thing, that understanding, that familiarity, the shared experience between myself and nature, yeah that is quite a spiritual life. (Appendix B, p92-93)

Daniel reinforces the environmentalist view of nature's "fragility" which is the driver of his urge to "play an active role in being a steward of nature to some extent, helping to protect it, and to honour it". He is suggestive that he feels more "alive" in nature, presumable than human spaces. Eric expresses a similar discontent with human spaces: "I've never been particularly happy in towns, I've always been happiest in countryside and woodlands...I've always felt most sort of spiritually happy in natural places, you know away from mainstream society and industry," (Appendix A, p84 and 89). This view of being happier in nature is echoed by the Lammas website on one of the family's pages:

We belong to no cult. We are not Nature Lovers.
We don't love nature any more than we love breathing.
Nature is simply something indispensable, like air and
light and water, that we accept as necessary to living,
and the nearer we can get to it the happier we are.
~ Louise Dickenson Rich¹⁰

Here nature is seen as essential not only to happiness but also to life just as "air and light and water". This view is suggestive that modern discontent and unhappiness may be a result of our separation from nature. This was also suggested by Eric:

in the back of my mind I feel that we as people, we as humans have spent the majority of our um time on this planet being connected with nature so there's a comparatively short amount of time that we've isolated ourselves from it, um and I think that we should be more in tune with nature, and I think that we might be happier and more healthy, and more mentally stable you know if we're living more like the animals that we actually are.
(Appendix A, p89)

¹⁰ quoted on the Gipson family's page of the Lammas website.

Eric however was seeking a deeper state of being than happiness and a deeper connection to nature; a “spiritually derived naturalness” and a feeling of being “more connected with the world”, through Lammas:

I don't have any religious belief or faith, but I do feel um as if there's some sort of destiny, as if, I've always felt my entire life that something wonderful is going to happen and this will be good and things work...I'm hoping that I might reach some sort of epiphany, where by if I put myself in a harmonious lifestyle, where I'm paying attention to the phases of the moon, I'm paying attention to the cycles of life, that I might become more connected with the world, that something might just sort of jump out and grab me and say look I'm here, um and I might just stumble upon some sort of spiritually derived naturalness, if that makes sense. But it's not, I'm not looking for it, I just think that it might sort of happen, I haven't got it already so I'm not being religious about this, I'm being practical about it.

(Appendix A, p89)

The being to which Eric above describes could be linked to the Buddhist state of enlightenment; he talks of hoping to reach a “some sort of epiphany...”. Eric's above description is the highest expectation I came across in my research, specifically it was the highest state of being which an ecovillager was hoping or aiming for. This is I would argue the most overtly perfectionist utopian state of being of my research into Lammas. We could in this sense see it as utopian or eutopia within a utopia, something which is aimed for once settled into the ecovillage, a utopia to pursue after the first i.e. the realisation of Lammas is complete.

The Lammas ecovillage could be said to embody DeGeus (2007) argument for a new vision of what constitutes ‘the good life’; a shift from ‘having’ to ‘being’, to which he argues is essential to our future well-being and happiness. The ecovillage, both in it's current state as a utopia of “becoming” (Grosz, 1999) or in “process” (Anderson, 2006; Sargisson, 2007), and as an end goal or aim, could be said to allow more time and space for hoping, happiness, and as John suggests silent practices such as “reflection and introspection”. As well as providing an outlet for the ecovillager's “utopian energy”. The future was therefore present through its effect on their current states of being and as beings envisaged or hoped for at the ecovillage. Silence was

present in the silent practices referred to above. Here dazzle is absent; referring to times when the drive and hope of the core members of the group was at its strongest. In the next and final section of this chapter I will be reflecting on the role of belonging in Lammas, both in relation to the community and the place itself.

(3.3) Belonging

Community or more specifically belonging; to both a place and a community are essential to images of utopia and ‘the good life’, as Tuan below argues:

Most of us will agree...that good personal relationships are at the core of the good life. What do we mean by good personal relationships? Perhaps nothing more than what transpires in a supportive family, among helpful neighbours or congenial colleagues: in other words, what one is likely to find in a good community.

(Tuan, 1986: 106)

A ‘good’ community and a sense of belonging to that community as Tuan above argues is a core part of ‘the good life’ and also I would argue utopia. But as Tuan suggests, a ‘good’ community is not a fixed idea but something which varies between groups and individuals, he writes that: “the concept of community, with its irreducible idealistic element, [is] something capable of almost infinite expansion and deepening such that how it develops and how it finds social expression are the principle measure of peoples wisdom” (Tuan, 1986: 106).

We can think of belonging as more than simply community, and belonging to that community, but also as belonging to a particular place, and having a place which belongs to us. One future resident of Lammas who moved to Wales from England “because the lack of community and open space in England” (quoted from *Living in the Future*, episode 12) refers to Wales as the place she has felt most “at home” and “rooted”:

at home or rooted in the landscape, since I, you know, my life, in the whole of the British isles...there's just so much of value here like all the local produce and the fact that community is still so intact out here, it just a rich sort of tapestry for us to click into it and it's not surprising that a policy such as policy 52 would come out of a rich sort of seed bed of local culture. (*ibid*)

This feeling of connection and belonging will perhaps be more apparent at Lammas than other places as the villagers have designed and will be building their own homes. For Ruth, one of the ecovillagers I interviewed, having a place to belong was important to her:

I'm hoping that in an ecovillage I would have warm water, shower and a toilet facility that would be actually indoors, and enough electricity to watch films...that would be quite nice. Um... on the other hand to me just starting up with the Lammas project means that I will have one home instead of three, and I can actually have valuables and start taking care of my own business and not have to keep moving around and moving my stuff around from one place to another and always forgetting something in another place...stuff like that, I'm just expecting to have a home really and be able to start that with the lifestyle I want to live.

(Appendix A, p84)

She refers to the way in which the ecovillage will be a step up in comforts from her current eco/low-impact lifestyle, for this reason she was looking forward to the simple pleasures and comforts that the ecovillage would provide: "warm water, shower and a toilet facility that would actually be indoors, and enough electricity to watch films...that would be quite nice". The ecovillage offers her more stability, a more fixed lifestyle; "I will have one home instead of three...not having to keep moving around and moving my stuff around...I'm just expecting a home really". This need for stability is contrasting to previous alternative cultures of the 80s and 90s to which Cresswell (1996) and others refer, in which stability is associated with 'mainstream' lifestyles which groups such as New Age Travellers sort to rebel against with their mobility. This importance of home fits in with Kraftl's idea of comforting and unsettling utopias, the homely is of course associated with the former, he writes:

Comforting utopias... the artistic, the free, the communal, and the rural are bound up in a desire for safety, comfort, homeliness, and/or political stability. Ecotopias' or 'green' utopias are often imbued with such homely, communitarian concerns. (Kraftl, 2007: 122)

For the ecovillagers the community of Lammas was primarily for practical purposes; having people around them to help out when needed or look after their plot, their livestock and plants; this is something which Eric pointed out:

when it seemed as if it was possible to have you know a slight twist on my ideal lifestyle with a group of people around who all want similar things, so you can have a mainstream family life knowing that if you want to go on holiday for a week that one of your neighbours knows just as much about milking goats as you do, and will you know look after your vegetables and let your chickens out, and do all the things that need to be done, in return for you doing the same for them. It just makes an awful lot more possible, because if you did it on your own you'd be tied to the place 24 hours a day and you'd never be able to leave. So um the community side of things wasn't that important to me, but I'm working on the principle that anyone that would quite happily live on their own in the middle of nowhere without anyone, probably shouldn't, so having people around is a good idea.

(Appendix A, p84)

So while close-knit rural communities are often considered suffocating and restricting, the ecovillage to Eric offers in fact more freedom; the ecovillage community "makes a awful lot more possible, because if you did it on your own you'd be tied to the place 24 hours a day and you'd never be able to leave". Although Eric stated that he found his local village of 150 people to be a "bit busy" (Appendix A, p87), he acknowledges the importance of being around other people to him, not only for practical purposes, but also for mental health and well-being; "I'm working on the principle that anyone who would quite happily live on their own in the middle of nowhere without anyone, probably shouldn't, so having people around is a good idea". A project such as Lammas and its people are easily categorised as similar to

the communes of the 1960s and 70s, Eric however does not fit this stereotype, he reinforces the importance to him of having his “own space”:

even if I don't feel that people are that important I know that they are, um but for me it's more the opportunity to do what I want to do and we'll have an autonomous plot, so we'll have our own land and our own life and our own management of what we want to do, and just neighbours, rather than some of the people who are going to be living in the terrace building might have a more integrated life with people around them. So I'd hate to live on a commune, I would not want to live...no matter how wonderful the people were, no matter how like-minded they were, I couldn't live that way, I need my own space.

(Appendix A, p86-87)

The community element of Lammas was important to Daniel for different reasons, namely for his children, the presence of other children growing up at Lammas he felt was important to stop them from feeling too abnormal:

CL: Was part of the attraction of the ecovillage living with similar minded people?

Daniel: yes definitely, um particularly those with other children, if it was just us we wouldn't mind so much being on our own but because what we're doing is a little bit outside the box for our children to be growing up with us doing that, having an unusual lifestyle on our own, I think that could be a bit unfair on them making them feel too weird or something, whereas to be with others, growing up with other children who have the same sort of lifestyle is very valuable, and also in terms of us, you know it's good to be surrounded by like-minded people, always, keeps your strength up.

(Appendix B, p91-92)

He also felt that the community, all sharing the aim of sustainable living, offered solidarity and strength; “it's good to be surrounded by like-minded people...keeps your strength up”, similarly we might argue to a conventional activist

group. Contrastingly John reflected that Lammas was not going to necessarily consist of 'like-minded people': "Will Lammas be with like-minded people? [laughs] to a degree yes I think we'll share a common commitment to sustainability. Am I looking forward to living with like-minded people? Yeah, but a commitment to sustainability isn't a recipe necessarily for like-minded people." (Appendix C, p96). His response made me recognise an assumption I had been reinforcing; that a group of people with similar aims and dreams for the future are the same in other or all ways, and further that these similarities produce some sort of harmonious community. While Lammas plans are highly detailed and extensive, the one element which cannot be planned for or predicted as John states below is Lammas social future:

I'm looking forward to living in Lammas, I'm looking forward to taking that further, quite how that will be socially I cannot quite foresee yet, because the people I'm going to be neighbours with in Lammas, I mean I know them but don't know them really really well, because we've only met through Lammas and they're kind of certainly not hippies by any means or spirituals or anything like that, its drawn people together from all walks of life, again there is this shared commitment to living lightly on the earth and yeah I'm looking forward to sharing that culture, but how that's going to be socially I don't know...it's a long way away it feels to me.

(Appendix C, p96)

Utopia's are often assumed or presented as perfect worlds or societies, this of course includes community, a utopian community is therefore assumed to be a perfect one in which people know one another very well and always get along. One resident of Findhorn ecovillage in Scotland reinforces this assumption made by outsiders; "there are quite a lot of people who might wander round thinking that everything's all perfect and rosy, but it's just like anywhere else, it has its little [sound effect and hand gestures suggesting friction] and its how you deal with that." (quoted from *Living in the Future*, episode 7). Tower Sargent below, like Levitas (1990) argues that rather than 'perfect'; utopias should be thought of as 'better', including 'better' people and social relations:

utopias do not, with few exceptions, present “perfect” societies inhabited by “perfect” people; they represent better or good societies inhabited by people who are better *because* they live in a better society.

(Tower Sargent, 2007: 305, emphasis in original)

This assumption of perfection, in every aspect, is why, as many have argued, (e.g. Levitas, 1990; Tower Sargent, 2007; Sargisson, 2007) utopia is not taken seriously and is seen as unattainable. The Lammas ecovillagers however, seemed to have no illusions that Lammas would be such community; i.e. a perfect one, despite the surface similarities in viewpoints between residents. Ruth, as shown in the extract below, was expecting a community life like any other, including arguments with neighbours:

Ruth: what I am expecting um from village life is what I view village life is supposed to be like, there will be arguments with neighbours about boarders and about their cat coming and running into my chicks and stuff like that and...

Eric: and arguments over me shooting their cat

Ruth: (laughter) yeah. And lots of villages will have some sort of community things going on, the difference being that we haven’t exactly chosen our neighbours but the neighbourhood has been chosen by principles of what they are planning to do, and what they are going to do, and what they can do, and so obviously this community will be slightly different but I’m sure there will be the same advantages and disadvantages that you would get in any village, anywhere.

(Appendix A, p90)

In the above interview extract, Ruth points out that in the same way as moving to any place, the ecovillagers have not chosen to live with each other, which is why there is an element of chance and unpredictability involved in the future of the community in social terms. During the second meeting of the gathering at the ecovillage site, I could already envisage tensions arising between the two most strong-

willed and outspoken females as an argument almost arose. But there were also more positive glimpses at the social futures of Lammas, during the gathering at the ecovillage site. For example, during the meetings talking sticks were used, this created an atmosphere of inclusiveness and equality, in which each person had the right to be heard. It also added to the already playful nature of the gathering with the sticks constantly being changed for larger, smaller or more interesting ones. Serious discussions were woven with talk of pony riding and football playing, frequently during the meetings a pony or a dog poked their heads in and a child showing their parent the frog they had found. The community also seemed to manifest itself in a very physical form at the beginning of the second day's meeting when everyone joined hands and closed their eyes for a couple of minutes in a kind of meditation or moment of connection.

Rules of appropriateness which we may find in a more urban 'community' or other situations in which people do not know each other very well, did not seem to apply and were demonstrative of the ecovillagers love of life and warmth. For example, a new couple to the community on leaving blew kisses to everyone; one member of the same couple offered me a piggy-back through the mud to the compost toilet. This affectionate and playful atmosphere was supplemented with optimism and hopefulness, particularly on the second, sunnier day; one person commenting on the weather of the previous night (and day) stated that if that was the worst weather they were to expect then things were going to be fine. The good weather accompanied by the playful nature of the gathering and people seemed to create an optimistic atmosphere, which I found to be quite dazzling. This contrasted to the previous day in which the long journey and terrible weather at the site seemed to produce a sense of silence and disillusionment with my research.

Community is important to the ecovillagers in more than the immediate area i.e. the Lammas site; they aim to connect to other communities; Eric states "we're not going to isolate ourselves from everyone, we're going to be forging links with the wider community" (Appendix A, p88). Daniel below suggests that this connection is vital for strength and resilience, presumably he means in the face of impending environmental and resource crises:

I like to be closer to my community, to my neighbours, be they in the same settlement as me or in a neighbouring one, or in the neighbouring

village, yeah definitely I'd like to be closer to them, and I think that's probably one of the most challenging and important things for the future, is for us to develop and, develop resilience in our communities.

(Appendix B, p92)

Lammas could be said to be emerging as a light in the dark or a beacon of hope for the future. This hope is offered in one way through its aims of reviving the lost sense of community, both to the ecovillage and the surrounding area, and possibly further afield by those affected and inspired by the project. But we could argue, as Jones (2007) suggests that community is not dead but rather more hidden from view; we have to work harder to find it. His surrounding community in Bristol he believed to be void of any sense of community but he soon unearthed several small communities of different forms to which he was previously unaware: "if you didn't look for them, you wouldn't ever know they were there" (Jones, 2007: 206). So rather the ecovillage is and will be restoring a sense of community to these people; the future residents of the ecovillage. The surrounding area was certainly not void of a community spirit, as shown by some of their collaborative resistance to the project itself. This hope is offered in other ways through the ecovillage as a future, its effect on the ecovillager's current states of being, and those strived for, as well as environmental futures imagined and pursued in their present actions,.

Both dazzle and silence I found to occur in relation to my experiences of being with and to an extent in the community. Silences manifest themselves predominantly during moments in which I felt most detached from the ecovillagers or most out-of-place, which was usually during negative states of mind. Dazzle occurred when I felt more a part of the community, for example when gestures of help were offered to me by the ecovillagers, these moments were generally accompanied or perhaps in part produced by a more positive state of mind.

The ecovillagers do not view their future as perfect but simply better or closer to what they want it to be. But this does not mean that we cannot think of their aim as utopian. It is important to retain our 'utopian dream' (Jones, 2007), reveal these glimpses, and create fractures in our presents to which Lefebvre refers, as they offer a light in the dark, hope and possibility to an 'age of apathy' (Jacoby, 1999), disenchantment (Bennett, 2001), and dystopia (Baeten, 2002b). In the following, and final section I will summarise and conclude.

Conclusions

Dazzle, Silence and
Futures Present

Conclusions

Dazzle, Silence and Futures Present

In the introduction and methodology chapter I posed the questions of what futures were present within the Lammas project i.e. both dystopian and utopian, the forms these futures took, and whether the ‘conventional’ methods I utilized were adequate for researching the presence of the future. I would argue that to an extent they are. All three methods revealed the presence of the future in various ways. During participant observation such presences took the form of the enactment of the future community; for example helping each other at the festival by building a mud oven together, joining hands to meditate and reflect, listening intently to each other at the meetings on the site, sharing food, and passing around the ‘talking stick’. As well as the performing of practices which would be integral to ecovillage life; chopping firewood, using a compost toilet, and cooking on a wood stove. The interviews unearthed an array of futures both dystopian e.g. fears of environmental ‘destruction’ and human apocalypse, remaining trapped in ‘mainstream’ lifestyles, and utopian e.g. the freedom and independence that ecovillage life promises, futures in which there is increased well-being and spirituality, and more environmental futures in which nature is persevered and protected. Textual analysis uncovered futures in the form of futuristic architectural designs, intricate plans reminiscent of utopian city plans of the eighteenth and nineteenth century (Pinder, 2005), and images of light suggestive of hope and change for the future.

The interviews I found to be the most effective simply for the way in which futures were explicitly revealed and presented, during participant observation and textual analysis, though I did not have to look very hard or far, the futures had to be found or unearthed rather than presenting themselves. There are though of course more futures present than I have captured, and perhaps than such methods could capture. Future research, with a similar focus could explore different, perhaps less conventional methods abilities at revealing the manifestations of the future in the present. Similarly, less conventional methods could be used to explore the presence of ‘dazzle’ and ‘silence’, including whether we see such states occurring in these different methods and if so do they manifest and affect in the same or different ways.

In my methodology chapter and introduction I also posed questions relating to 'dazzle' and 'silence' how these states were present and their effects both in relation to the ecovillages development and my own experience of learning about or 'researching' the project. My interviews revealed a sense of dazzle in relation to impending environmental dystopia or apocalyptic visions, the feeling of an overwhelming amount to be done in order to prevent environmental disaster, the ecovillagers also referred to feeling overwhelmed or dazzled by the planning process and the bureaucracy involved. Conversely, the uncertainty of the planning application also produced feelings of disillusionment and disenchantment which we could describe as forms of silence, and the apparent silencing of the ecovillage's future. During the participant observation I found that I could only explore my own experiences of 'dazzle' and 'silence', e.g. feeling dazzled by the optimism buzzing around the ecovillage during my second day at the site. It was impossible to read either states in others, and it could lead to the labelling of states or moments as either dazzle or silence incorrectly. Although I realised on reflection that this could be overcome by asking others, but it requires long or rather precise explanations of what is meant by dazzle and silence which I did not come equipped with during my participant observation. This was also the case with textual analysis, similarly though this could be overcome by involving the ecovillagers in my textual analysis i.e. asking them if they experience dazzle or silence in relation to any of the 'texts' I analysed. Just as I did in relation to futures present, I also asked in my methodology whether the traditional methods I used were appropriate for exploring dazzle and silence. I would say that they are but with more planning and forethought, as well as more time 'in the field' they could have been utilised more efficiently. As I did not try other less 'traditional' methods I do not know whether other methods are in fact more effective for exploring these two states.

The finally question I posed in relation to dazzle and silence was whether these states occur in relation to knowledge production more broadly. Although my knowledge of the concept of 'knowledge production' is limited I would argue that this is the case, if only in a very small way 'dazzle' and 'silence' are states of being just as they are states of 'knowing'. It is also I would argue difficult to draw the line between research 'knowing' and life 'knowing' especially in relation to social enquiry. Therefore, the experiences of both the ecovillagers and I offer suggestions that 'dazzle' and 'silence' occur in our creation of knowledge forms other than those

characterised as ‘research’. This inescapable nature of both states indicates that rather than trying to avoid or overcome such occurrences, they could become tools with which to create alternatives to our presents and open up real methodological possibilities for the future. Research is full of dualisms and contradictions, we can choose to confront, embrace or ignore them. I would argue that the research process needs to be analysed and unpicked more thoroughly if we are to propose real changes to the way in which we do research.

The utopian and dystopia categories which I divided the present futures into are very extreme manifestations, although Kraftl (2006) argues that elements of the banal or mundane can be considered utopian, or equally I would argue dystopian. But even taking this into consideration, I still consider them to be rather extreme categories in which to place futures, utopia being an extreme good or better, while dystopia can be considered an extreme or perfect bad or worse. There are of course futures present, both in activist and everyday presents which are not so extreme, or those which do not easily fit into either category, and which equally deserve notice and attention. Future research could therefore involve uncovering other futures in either activist or everyday presents. In relation to activist presents in particular, there are perhaps other equally vital futures aside from utopian and dystopian ones which need to be unearthed. If we imagine activism to not only involve extreme and confrontational approaches i.e. those categorised as ‘direct action’ or those explicitly labelled as such, then it follows that other less extreme futures must be present, which could equally be considered as integral to activism.

Utopian processes are not only something which occurs out there, but also in our offices, both in our attempts to create better or perfect worlds out there, but also in attempts to create perfect work. Perfection is therefore a problem for our own research just as it is for the world out there. I realised my experience of being ‘dazzled’ by my own research, that is overwhelmed by what I felt needed to be done, read, included, was produced by the perfect image I had of how my dissertation should look. This perfection overwhelmed me and made the whole project seem unachievable and unrealistic. I was trying to create a perfect piece instead of one which was simply better than its current version. Utopian visions can be disenchanting just as they can be enchanting. In the words of one of my interviewees; “for me it’s always one step at a time, you know just one foot in front of the other, that’s the only way to climb a mountain, it’s just slowly slowly, small bites, one step at a time” (Appendix C, p97).

The adoption of such an approach, will I believe in my own case, prevent some detrimental ‘dazzle’ in future work.

Research should seek to unearth the unknown or overlooked. As Clark writes with reference to Deleuze; research should be about creation:

rather than looking for the something previously undiscovered, thinkers or researchers should aim ‘to bring into being that which does not exist’ (Deleuze, 1994/1968, p147). For Deleuze, as for those philosophers who prioritize language, ‘[t]o think is to create’ (1994/1968, p147). Deleuze, too, encourages a rich and stylish use of language, but he is quite clear that the ultimate aim of this is to unleash the potentials of ‘life’ in general and not simply of language or culture.

(Clark, 2003: 30-31)

The ecovillage while it may not physically exist in its built form, traces of it can be found within and between plans, drawings and other representations, conversations, hopes, fears, and actions which bring it ‘to life’:

One is always writing to bring something to life, to free life from where it’s trapped...The language for doing that can’t be a homogeneous system, it’s something unstable, always heterogeneous, in which style carves differences in potential between which things can pass, come to pass, a spark can flash and break out of language itself, to make us see and think what was lying in the shadow around the words, things we were hardly aware existed.

(Deleuze, 1995, p141)

Though this aim of bringing ‘to life’ or ‘creating’ can seem quite an ambitious task for research, if I think of my task as having been to bring to life the Lammas ecovillage, what I am bringing to life or creating is my versions of things. This bringing ‘to life’ of the ecovillage is something which is already done by the actions of the Lammas group in their daily efforts to make their dream a reality, my perspective will differ from theirs, as theirs will between each other. For example utopia and dystopia are concepts which I attach not the ecovillagers themselves. As

Thrift writes; our knowledge is always situated; “because what we know and how we know it is situated” (Thrift, 1996: 33). My knowledge of the ecovillage is constructed through different representations and experiences, these in turn, that is my reading of them, is affected by my own situation both momentary, and more long-term;

It has become increasingly clear that there are strong limits on what can be known and how we can know it because of the way human subjects are embodied as beings in time-space, because of our positioning in social relations, and because there are numerous perspectives on, and metaphors of, what even counts as knowledge, or more precisely, knowledges”.

(Thrift, 1996: 32).

I do not therefore assume this dissertation to be an accurate representation of the Lammas ecovillage in-process, but rather a glimpse at a possible future; a future which is both dazzling and silencing.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Due to the loud drumming and music present in the back of all my interview recordings they may not be entirely accurate, especially in terms of what I say in the interviews as my voice was often the most difficult to make out.

In all the interviews the names of the interviewees have been changed to keep their comments anonymous, their names were chosen at random from the first names of authors whose books I was reading at the time.

A blank line in the text e.g. _____ indicates inaudible speech. In a couple of cases a blank line was used in place of what was said in order to preserve the interviewees anonymity.

First interview between two potential residents of the eco-village, at the Celtic Blue Rock Festival, this took place inside one of the other residents yurt, during lunch. There was constant drumming in the background throughout the interview, this was coming from the Chai Chapel café near the tent; which was situated in one of the main fields of the festival. I had forgotten to switch the tape recorder on after I had done a test recording which is why there is a break at the beginning.

Ruth: I wasn't sure whether you had started with your set of questions.

(laughter)

Eric: Be aware that if you don't ask questions...

Ruth: He will just talk and talk and talk, for hours

(laughter)

Ruth: be a good idea to at some points to just say shut up, it's someone else's turn.

(laughter)

CL: First thing is just sort of reasons, kind of how you first heard about or reasons for choosing, kind of, to be part of it...you might have different reasons.

Eric: reasons for choosing?

CL: Reasons for...reasons for wanting to be part of the eco-village.

Eric: Oh right, ok.

Ruth: you go first.

Eric: you want me to go first? Ok. Um I've always dreamed of living that sort of lifestyle, um where I can be sort of self sufficient in many ways. I hadn't actually dreamed about totally self sufficient, I wanted to provide myself with fuel so that I

don't have to earn money to buy it, I wanted to provide myself with, you know all the vegetables I know are easy to grow, simply because they taste so much better than what I could afford to buy. I've never been particularly happy in towns, I've always been happiest in countryside and woodlands, so I had in my mind the idea of buying a big enough plot of woodland to be able to just build something without planning permission, just do something sneakily, on my own, and hopefully get away with it. But it would be incredibly difficult to do that though because it's illegal, you can't plan things properly, you couldn't invest money in a building, um and you'd end up with a really miserable anti-social life where you couldn't even tell people where you live. Um, so, that got sort of put on hold, I still had it in my idea that I might buy some woodland and you know have a more transient life with a campervan and have some things set up there, and come and go, and when it seemed as if it was possible to have you know a slight twist on my ideal lifestyle with a group of people around who all want similar things, so you can have a mainstream family life knowing that if you want to go on holiday for a week that one of your neighbours knows just as much about milking goats as you do, and will you know look after your vegetables and let your chickens out, and do all the things that need to be done, in return for you doing the same for them. It just makes an awful lot more possible, because if you did it on your own you'd be tied to the place 24 hours a day and you'd never be able to leave. So um the community side of things wasn't that important to me, but I'm working on the principle that anyone that would quite happily live on their own in the middle of nowhere without anyone, probably shouldn't, so having people around is a good idea.

Ruth: That is actually quite much my thoughts as well so I haven't got anything to add to that.

CL: Ok, um I was just wondering how the eco-village sort of contrasts to how you live now.

Ruth: The eco-village is contrast with what?

CL: with how you live now

Eric: how differently

Ruth: I'm hoping that in an eco-village I would have warm water, shower and a toilet facility that would be actually indoors, and enough electricity to watch films...that would be quite nice. Um... on the other hand to me just starting up with the Lammas project means that I will have one home instead of three, and I can actually have valuables and start taking care of my own business and not have to keep moving around and moving my stuff around from one place to another and always forgetting something in another place...stuff like that, I'm just expecting to have a home really and be able to start that with the lifestyle I want to live. What do you want to say?

Eric: Well at the moment, I'm torn between two homes, neither of which is ideal, Ruth and I are living together in a little chalet which is hideously un-insulated, with inadequate solar panel set up and no luxuries whatsoever, so we have cold running water, um it's cold in winter and hot in summer. Um I'm just looking forward to being able to do the job properly, to be able to build a house that we can live in easily without needing to worry about um electricity bills because everything's going to be

ultra low um power, really efficient. Um I like planning stuff, I love the idea of um planning for the future in terms of planting ash and um dealing with the present by planting willow. Um and knowing that... because I'm perfectly happy working, but I'm not very good at working for someone else, earning money. So um I'd happily spent most of my life just doing the things that need to be done, if that means that you know the tomatoes need to be reduced and bottled, you know or reduced and frozen, if that's the job we're going to be doing for the next couple of days, with everything being planned for the future. Just being able to make decisions and get on with things and organise your life so that you've got the important facilities around you, which most people don't have, you know most people don't have huge pantries filled with jars with food preserved in them, um, and that's what I'm expecting from the set up. Um, interesting they say that if you spent more than 10 percent of your income on fuel your in fuel poverty, and I was just thinking, well 10 percent of my income, if you equate it to um daily, a day of your time being 10 per cent of your income, if I'm spending one day in ten managing our straw coppice _____ coppice, sawing fire wood, I wouldn't regard that as difficult, I imaging that we'll be spending a lot more than that dealing with our fuel. Um so all the things that mainstream people do in their lives, you know having to earn vast amount of money to pay for vast amounts of money to allow for very basic things to happen, don't seem to make any sense to me.

Ruth: The difference _____ obviously there is a house, a place which we live in which has all the facilities _____ not very eco even though people living there do quite eco stuff, but again it's someone else's house I visit sometimes to have hot showers, its lovely but there is no house space, no possibility of having any stuff there _____ just having my own space and my own home.

Eric: That's my parent's place that she's talking about, as far as most people's homes go it is eco, there's a green electricity supplier, um and all the lights are energy efficient, things don't get left on standby, um but it could be so much better it's badly designed because it's a mainstream house and it doesn't make any sense, um and I know how much the bills cost and I know how much you know um oil they use to heat the place, I've been providing them with firewood for the last ten years and I know how little of my time it's taken to keep you know one room heated so we could do much more with wood, um and there's about two acres of land that's not being used but we could easily have a couple of pigs, we could easily have a couple of goats, we could easily have lots of chickens and ducks.

Ruth: But that's not going to happen.

Eric: It's not going to happen because it's too difficult, but it's not too difficult you just need to build fences, you know.

CL: When you're living in the eco-village will you sort of need to keep employment outside or will it just be sort of self funding?

Eric: um, should be self funding, um bearing in mind that we're looking in terms of having a fairly comfortable bit of capital to start with, um so if we had to get a mainstream mortgage to pay for this then we have to have a awful lot more money, so we might have to go earn more money, whereas if we start with a lump of capital that's effectively given to us and regard it as free money, and have a very frugal life

then we don't need to earn much money, as a furniture maker I can charge a rather silly amount of money for my time so we've calculated that most of the work we're doing in terms of managing the land will be to provide us with food and fuel, and we should have an excess of certain things that we can sell, mainly high value produce, and in the winter when there's most electricity being generated and the least work to do on the land then I can work in my workshop, about three months of the year, using wood which is provided from the site which is an incredibly valuable thing, from that I should be able to make you know three or four pieces of fine furniture um and if you don't know how much people sell fine furniture for (laugh) you should go and found out.

CL: How much?

Eric: um, I'd be thinking in terms of probably sort of three to four thousand pounds for a desk, um if you go to someone who's established and well known, um it's very easy to spent sort of ten thousand pounds on a bit of high quality furniture, if you're looking for a one off, artistically made, that lets face it will last for three, four hundred years.

Ruth: I don't think you really answered the question first of all _____ having to dry it, which will take a few years _____ before you can actually start up with it, so I think if we're being quite realistic when we are starting up I will be working somewhere, we'll need some money in order to set things up selling the house, we will have to get the house finished first and then get sold, we have to get people to buy it, so it might take a while, and if we are thinking _____

Eric: I interpreted the question as when it's set up and we're living the lifestyle we want to be we won't have to work, but yeah once we setting up, the fact that Ruth is a qualified nurse, she could get quite a lot of money if she wanted to...I know you don't but you could.

Ruth: _____

CL: I was just wondering if part of the attraction of the eco-village was sort of living with similar minded people, or did that not come into it?

Ruth: part of the attraction is to live with similar minded people you say. I think my attraction is more to be able to live the lifestyle I want, I like the people who are going to be on the site, I get along with them, they certainly have sort of similar ideas _____ and I'm sure that I will have great neighbours but um it is my rather than other peoples that is taking me there

(interruption: someone comes into the tent to get something)

Eric: I think my answer to that question would be similar, um even if I don't feel that people are that important I know that they are, um but for me it's more the opportunity to do what I want to do and we'll have an autonomous plot, so we'll have our own land and our own life and our own management of what we want to do, and just neighbours, rather than some of the people who are going to be living in the terrace building might have a more integrated life with people around them. So I'd

hate to live on a commune, I would not want to live...no matter how wonderful the people were, no matter how like-minded they were, I couldn't live that way, I need my own space.

(interruption)

CL: um, ok, do you think in the future maybe a lot more people will be living like this, maybe even the majority?

Ruth: I think that there are lots of people who want this sort of life and when it becomes possible there will be lots of people, and I think the reason why it hasn't happened yet, or why so few people _____ a group of people change things so that it should be possible but I think that _____

Eric: I guess my answer to that would be, if society stays more or less as it is at the moment um then there are lots of people out there that would love to live this way but can't afford to buy the land that you're allowed to do it on, so if it's changed so that you can do it on land that people can afford to buy then more people will start living this way, if peak oil you know happens and we start to have to revalue our resources significantly, um then we going to want to contemplate being as self-sufficient as possible, as a nation and therefore it would make more sense for more people to live in the countryside than the towns because it uses less fuel, uses less infrastructure set up to feed people if you're connected to your food supply. Um, so either things will change this way nicely or something will happen to society and we'll be forced to live this way. That's how I view things, but then again that's a bit pessimistic, sort of bomb shelter building mentality.

CL: was another attraction...the eco-village seems to be quite sort of cut off _____

Ruth: _____ they would like to take the message of sustainable living and eco living to people who might not choose to live _____ On the other hand if you show people it's possible to live modern comfortable lives without lots of _____

Eric: my interpretation of that question just brings me to think of...at the moment I'm either living in a village with a population of about 150 people, which seems a bit busy to me, um or I'm living in a woodland community, loose community with about 35 houses, neither of the places we're living in at the moment are particularly mainstream. Whenever I go into town, I'm thinking about Swansea at the moment, if I'm in Swansea on a Friday and I see what people are doing with their lives, it does sort of almost sicken me, um and the idea that you go to work to earn the money, to pay the rent, so that you've got somewhere to live when you go to work, and you get paid on a Friday and you go out with your mates and you spend most of it, you do the same on Saturday, so that on Sunday you have no money to do anything and you have no mind to think, so on Monday morning you've got to go back to work to earn to pay the rent so that you've got somewhere that you can go to work from. That side of things, people shopping and just wasting money on crap for no apparent reason, you know because it's fashionable to do this, this or that, um and disposable society actually annoys me, and I'd quite happily either change it so that all of society works in the way that I appreciate, which isn't going to happen, or not have to look at it. So I

think for me being slightly isolated from whatever's going to go on around here that doesn't involve or interest me might be a good thing. But we're not going to isolate ourselves from everyone, we're going to be forging links with sort of the wider community and you know hopefully giving an example to all those people out there who are you know wonderful but don't have the _____ to go about these things at the moment, might want to change a little bit.

CL: _____ talking about research methods, there's these two contrasting states, one where there's so much going on it's kind of overwhelming, and the contrast, it's like the world's gone silent, and I was just wondering if this applies to planning the eco-village moments when it seems like nothings happening, like it's never going to happen, it's a bit of a weird question.

Ruth : (laughter) yeah you're right it's a difficult one to answer, um there's has been lots of moments when lots of Lammas people have sort of lost their faith and become desperate that it's just not going to happen, and things are going on so slowly, but I personally have had so much going on in my life, other things than Lammas that I haven't had time to think about it, it's just either happening or not and I do what I do and that's it.

Eric: I think I've either been working flat out on it, in a very manic way, or not working on it at all, I've been busy doing other things, um but I think that is reflected in me as a general rule, I mean I'm either very very busy or I'm not doing it. Um, when we were at the initial stages of applying to be allocated a plot in the first place, because we were all selected, there were a couple of times when it thought, when I thought well surely there's going to be better people out there, that know more about this that are going to be selected so is there any point in us bothering, it's a lot of hard work, we've got lots of other things we need to be doing with our lives at the moment, um you know if you're not going to get selected anyway then why bother. Um and when we were writing the application, Ruth was in _____, um and I was in Swansea and we were sort of sitting on a computer with Skype open, um talking to each other by horrible delayed feedback, um and trying to work out designs and ideas together. It took twice as long as it should have, um and it was kind of horrible, and those have been the worst times I think, for me, um we're now in a waiting game, all the work has been done, we're just waiting for the planning system to do its thing. When I say all the works been done, I'm sure that _____ still working really hard and I know that other people are, but unless I'm given a specific task to do then I don't worry about it. I'd be happy doing other useful things for our plot like planting fruit trees and soap making, and _____ you know practising doing stuff.

CL: Oh there's a question I missed out, do you like the idea of you know feeling more kind of connected to nature, like more in tune with the seasons?

Ruth: It's a difficult question because it I guess I am a bit of a tree hugger (laughter) sometimes I actually don't like being categorised as eco-hippy as lots of people would categorise, I don't think that has anything to do with eco, but I guess I am still

Eric: I guess my answer might depend on what you're planning to do with the recording, you know what are you doing with the data?

CL: It's just going into my dissertation

Eric: So this is a random thing, our name isn't going to go onto it?

CL: It'll all be anonymous

Eric: I don't have any religious belief or faith, but I do feel um as if there's some sort of destiny, as if, I've always felt my entire life that something wonderful is going to happen and this will be good and things work, and I'm an incredibly lucky person, everything just seems to fall into place, and I spend my life generally trying to be nice and useful, um and good things happen to me. And I've always felt, I've always felt most sort of spiritually happy in natural places, you know away from mainstream society and industry, and I'm hoping that I might reach some sort of epiphany, where by if I put myself in a harmonious lifestyle, where I'm paying attention to the phases of the moon, I'm paying attention to the cycles of life, that I might become more connected with the world, that something might just sort of jump out and grab me and say look I'm here, um and I might just stumble upon some sort of spiritually derived naturalness, if that makes sense. But it's not, I'm not looking for it, I just think that it might sort of happen, I haven't got it already so I'm not being religious about this, I'm being practical about it, but in the back of my mind I feel that we as people, we as humans have spent the majority of our um time on this planet being connected with nature so there's a comparatively short amount of time that we've isolated ourselves from it, um and I think that we should be more intone with nature, and I think that we might be happier and more healthy, and more mentally stable you know if we're living more like the animals that we actually are.

CL: Ok, the last bit, I was just wondering if you could kind of describe how you imagine living in the eco-village to be either talking about specific elements or just generally, it's a bit weird.

Ruth: go on

Eric: what? I've never actually imagined living in an eco-village, I have imagined and I can visualise and describe my plot in total 3D imagining, I know exactly what it's going to look like, if it gets built how it is on paper, and I know what we're going to have to do, um but I've always thought about it as being you know my land, my house, my life, um and I know that our neighbours who are doing something similar but what they're doing on their side of the fence has got very little to what I'm doing on my side of the fence, unless they need a hand, or I need a hand. Um, so, I think my understanding of what our lifestyle is going to be could be anywhere we were allowed to do this, um _____ having to look after the animals, having to do the set sort of daily ritual, routine that needs to be done, um and having a surprising large amount of time off to be happy, um but as far as the village goes, um a while ago in my village I looked out my window from where I was working on the computer and across my next door neighbours field into the garden next door I saw our 6 foot 7, 4 foot wide next door neighbour sheep farmer chasing a tiny little lamb around a trailer in his field in the rain, and he wanted the lamb to go into the trailer, and she was just walking in circles around the trailer, anyway really funny and I laughed for a little while then I put my waterproofs on and put my boots on and I you know walked across our

garden, across the field next door and across to his and helped him put the lamb into the trailer, and wondered why he didn't think about asking one of his neighbours to do that at the beginning, rather than struggling, and I had no idea how long he was there for but I saw him doing it and it was funny enough for me to watch him for a good little while before I went to help, and I would like it if in the future stuff like that isn't necessary because someone will just make a phone call to say can you just pop up this afternoon because I've got to do this, and in an emergency I'd happily come running you know if there was a need for it, and that's what I'm expecting from the village aspect of it, as well as the ability to buy or trade for the things that other people are doing that we're not, so that we don't have to take on board everything to be self-sufficient, so if someone is brilliant at cider making and I'm not then it doesn't make sense for me to be drinking not quite so good cider, I may as well drink his cider, if someone else is a brilliant cheese maker I might as well use their cheese, I'm sure we could trade for it, and I think that having a community around you we're just expanding the possibilities of what we can do. That a good enough answer?

CL: yep

Ruth: what I am expecting um from village life is what I view village life is supposed to be like, there will be arguments with neighbours about boarders and about their cat coming and running into my chicks and stuff like that and...

Eric: and arguments over me shooting their cat

Ruth: (laughter) yeah. And lots of villages will have some sort of community things going on, the difference being that we haven't exactly chosen our neighbours but the neighbourhood has been chosen by principles of what they are planning to do, and what they are going to do, and what they can do, and so obviously this community will be slightly different but I'm sure there will be the same advantages and disadvantages that you would get in any village, anywhere.

Appendix B

Second interview between another prospective eco-village resident, undertaken by the sandpit in the kids zone of the festival.

CL: How did you first hear about?

Daniel: the Lammas? Um, we were living on somebody's land, actually a low-impact lifestyle if you like, and we were looking towards getting our own place, and then the Lammas project got started, and we heard about it fairly quickly because we were in the same area, on the edge of Pembrokeshire, so we sort of knew what was going on there, so we sort of came down and immediately said that we'd get involved.

CL: What was it that attracted you?

Daniel: It was the fact that there was a planning policy which was exactly for what we were doing, which is for want of a better wording, low-impact development, and we were committed to doing that anyway, we were going to do it on a piece of land without planning permission, but the fact that there was a policy where you could do it and have security, at that time what seemed like more security, so that was very appealing.

CL: So how does the eco-village sort of contrast to how you live now?

Daniel: Well I think it's quite similar to how we've lived in the past, because we've been doing the planning application and because of the uncertainty of the timing we've ended up in a rented house for the moment, which in contrast to that... gives us a lot less time really, because if we continue to try and live a roughly ecologically life it means we've got less time to spend on the family and on making good food and things like that because we've working to pay the rent, to pay for our oil to be drilled in places like the occupation of Iraq.

CL: Um, are you quite politically minded?

Daniel: yes

CL: Because I see the eco-village as a sort of like activism as a lifestyle

Daniel: yep, yep, yeah I just went to conference on direct action on climate change at Manchester uni, doing that really reminded that everything that you do is political, you know, yeah so I think to an extent it is, there I got quite a lot of kinship feeling of the relation, a good feeling of the relation between the direct action community, and, or like transition town groups and the project that we're doing, it means it puts all those on a continuous spectrum of having an impact on that, so that's good.

CL: Was part of the attraction of the eco-village living with similar minded people?

Daniel: yes definitely, um particularly those with other children, if it was just us we wouldn't mind so much being on our own but because what we're doing is a little bit outside the box for our children to growing up with us doing that, having an unusual

lifestyle on our own, I think that could be a bit unfair on them making them feel too weird or something, whereas to be with other, growing up with other children who have the same sort of lifestyle is very valuable, and also in terms of us, you know it's good to be surrounded by like-minded people, always, keeps your strength up.

CL: yeah. Do you think like in the future we'll see more people living this way, maybe even the majority?

Daniel: yes, um.

(interruption: son comes over and ask how much his bucket of sand weighs)

Daniel: Um, in the future... we are currently running out of fossil fuels and we'll stop using if we're not going to destroy the climate, which we may already have done, um if we're going to do that we've got no real option apart from part from to increase the productivity of our land massively, in order to increase the productivity of our land it's going to require more people living on it, so I think there's going to be a lot of people going back to a rural living, and I don't think we're really going to have much choice about the way we live, I think people are going to inherently be more ecological in another two years people aren't going to install oil heating in they're houses, they're going to install wood burners unless someone invents the fuel for the future, which might happen but you know it's not happening at the moment

CL: The eco-village gives the impression of being quite cut off from the world, you know its quite sort of secluded, compared to other villages and towns...

Daniel: sorry can you repeat that

CL: Is part of the attraction for you sort of being quite cut-off from the world?

Daniel: As I see it... most of our society is a living a life which is quite cut-off from the real world and I like to live a life which is more in touch with the real world

CL: you mean like the natural world?

Daniel: yeah, to me the real world is water, is earth, is living systems, is plants, is forests, yeah I like to be living closer to that, and I like to be closer to my community, to my neighbours, be they in the same settlement as me or in a neighbouring one, or in the neighbouring village, yeah definitely I'd like to be closer to them, and I think that's probably one of the most challenging and important things for the future, is for us to develop and... develop resilience in our communities.

CL: Um, a lot of people say there's a kind of spirituality

Daniel: yeah, ok so for me the evolution, my personal evolution of coming to this point comes from playing outside in the countryside, in nature, and enjoying it, of growing up doing that outdoor activities and loving that and spending time outside and feeling alive there, and feeling alive with my friends at that time, I wanted to continue doing that with the, with the increasing depth of appreciation of being in

nature, of what nature is, I think there comes a natural awareness of its value and possibly its fragility and the impact we're having on it, and with that a natural want or tendency to play an active role in being a steward of nature to some extent, helping to protect it, and to honour it, if you experience it and realise that... and see it's value, it's innate value in-itself, then you know, of course you want to act in a way which looks after it. So for me, yeah that is a spiritual thing, that understanding, that familiarity, the shared experience between myself and nature, yeah that is quite a spiritual life.

CL: Ok, this is a difficult question, there's this thing in research- two contrasting states one where you feel overwhelmed by things which are going on and the other where it's like the worlds gone silent, you can't almost think of anything, you can't find things, I was just wondering if with the planning of the eco-village there were sort of moments like that- where there was so much going on that it was overwhelming or the reverse, like you didn't know where to start, or feel like it will never happen.

Daniel: Do you mean so much going on in terms of... in the broader scheme, in terms of so much going on in terms of worldly problems and things like that or...

CL: I mean like in terms of the eco-village specifically

Daniel: So things we were doing to make the project work?

CL: yeah and quite generally, like conversations about the eco-village etc, does that make sense?

Daniel: Ok, um, was I becoming overwhelmed?

CL: were there moments when it felt overwhelming as an idea

Daniel: no, _____ my experience is really, right from the word go, right from first thinking about it I felt exactly like I knew what needed to be done, I've never been at a loss to know what the action was, in terms of the practical action of making it work on the ground, yeah so in terms of what needs working out at that level, no problem, the difficulty and the frustration is making it work at the bureaucratic level and in terms of that it in some ways there are so many different things that we could try and do er because you know I could try and get in with some member of the council and try and find out who has influence here and who has influence here things like that, which is about the things that you _____ so that's a bit overwhelming and...(interruption) sorry, um and I'm sort of not going there _____ so that's the only area where I'm aware that there's a lot whole load of stuff to make that bureaucratic bit work, more underhand moves we're waiting on somebody's wim and we don't even know who's wim

CL: um, ok, last question, I was wondering if you could describe how you imagine the eco-village to be, generally or you could talk about different aspects

Daniel: How I imagine it to be living there?

CL: yeah, just what it would be like living there

Daniel: I can hardly believe it will ever happen

CL: Do you think they will say no

Daniel: no, I don't think they could say no to it, I'm quite convinced they cannot say no

CL: oh

Daniel: Yeah, it will happen, it will come, it's just the waiting, its the first time life, in my whole life, that I've had to wait for permission of somebody else to do something I believe in But to answer the question, what will it be like when we live there? Well, um, when we've stopped celebrating, we'll never stop celebrating, it's going to be hard work of course , and it's going to be windy and cold, and sometimes it's going to be sunny and sometime it's going to be difficult, but overall it's going to be great, it's going to be fantastic, in terms of us and our family it will be the first place to have of our own we be able go out into the woods and start working in the woods, we'll be able to get the sheep out of the woods so they stop killing everything that tries to live in there, we're going to be able to start getting rid of I think it will be, I have no doubt it will be hard work but on a soul level I think it will be great I've got a lot of energy left for that, I don't have a lot of energy left for paperwork

CL:

Daniel: Do I see this as a permanent home?

CL: yeah

Daniel: yeah, I hope so, yeah I'd like to live there until the children have grown up and left home, maybe until I die, yeah.

CL: well I think that's everything

Daniel: that's everything?

CL: yeah

Appendix C

Final interview, this took place in the 'green futures' tent after the Lammas stall had all been packed away.

CL: So you kind of came up with the idea for Lammas?

John: I don't know if it was an idea that I came up with... have you switched it on?

CL: yeah

John: I talked about it with friends, and it's an idea that I just kind of ran with, I couldn't claim it was my idea, and I guess the initial idea was getting an eco-village through the planning system to create a precedence.

CL: yeah. What is it that attracts you about living in the eco-village, is it the low-impact kind of element?

John: Well, the part that attracts me to living in an eco-village is living in a culture in which living lightly in the earth is natural, and in which the built environment is those industrial elements of transport and machinery are absent, I'm drawn to a landscape with funky home made houses and lots of farmstead, that's the landscape that I'm drawn to. I mean Lammas in itself is compromise on that dream and ambition because it's an attempt to bridge the boundary as far as it's realistically possible at this moment in time in this society

CL: so how could it go further?

John: Well I would like to see it liberated up a lot more, you know the, I think the most challenging thing that Lammas is going to face is this obligation to meet 75 per cent of its household needs from the site on an annual basis, people are going to get old, people get ill, people's life circumstances change and so I think I would see something with a lot more flexibility um and on a lot bigger scale as well, you know 9 households, 76 acres, in my mind is very small, possibly too small but its all we can get away with, its what's appropriate for us to do now

CL: do you think it would work as a bigger set up?

John: yeah, definitely. I mean interestingly when we first got together we looked at various models, I think the optimum model size we came up with was between 23 and 30 households, that seems to be a natural size for a cluster. We looked at models like Holtsfield, Valley Lay, , Tipi valley, about 25 to 30 households is similar to the traditional village size as well, that seems to be a natural cluster size.

CL: I was just wondering how it contrasts to your current lifestyle, the eco-village, is it quite similar to how you live now?

John: no its not, I think at the moment, well my lifestyle at the moment, is probably the most conventional it's ever been, um, I use mains electricity, I use mains water, um I go out to work in a car. I think Lammas for me will be a return to living lightly

on the earth, I have lived in my past lightly on the earth, and there's a return to that. When I lived at Brithdir Mawr I reckon I lived as light as you can get while still having a foot in the society, so I'm not going to go to that extreme again, I mean before I shopped by horseback, I grew all my own food. Whereas Lammas is a kind of, is a... an acceptable compromise on that because it needs to appeal to the mainstream, we don't want it to be so hardcore that it appeals to just a small minority. It's going to incorporate mainstream elements like washing machines, and cars, and computers.

CL: yeah. Are you looking forward to living with quite like-minded people?

John: Um, I have lived with like minded people in the past, I lived in Tipi valley with a very strong tribal culture, Brithdir Mawr which is a very spiritual community. Will Lammas be with like-minded people? (smile/laugh) to a degree yes I think we'll share a common commitment to sustainability. Am I looking forward to living with like-minded people? Yeah, but a commitment to sustainability isn't a recipe necessarily for like-minded people.

CL: yeah.

John: Um, er, I'm looking forward to living in Lammas, I'm looking forward to taking that further, quite how that will be socially I cannot quite foresee yet, because the people I'm going to be neighbours with in Lammas, I mean I know them but don't know them really really well, because we've only met through Lammas and they're kind of certainly not hippies by any means or spirituals or anything like that, its drawn people together from all walks of life, again there is this shared commitment to living lightly on the earth and yeah I'm looking forward to sharing that culture, but how that's going to be socially I don't know, I mean particularly the first five years are going to be such hard work with basically building a new infrastructure and so those first five years with those infrastructures being put into place is not going to be living lightly its going to be lots of work, and so yeah that's a tricky one to answer, it's a long way away it feels to me.

CL: Um, do you think in the future more people will be living like this, maybe the majority even?

John: The future that I see involves the majority, an increasing number of people on the earth moving back to a much more rural, land based existence with nature yes, that's the future that I see.

CL: The eco-village looks like its quite kind of cut off from the world kind of, did that attract you?

John: Well, in that question I see that there's a changing definition in this term of eco-village, for the last... well since the whole concept of the eco-villages began, in the 60s and 70s, the original concept up until a very few years ago was that of creating a completely alternative culture, the eco-villages lived outside mainstream society, they educated their kids differently, they dressed differently, they thought differently, and now that's changed, it's no longer appropriate, what with the recent leaps in understanding that mainstream culture has gone through in the last five years lots of

things that underpinned the eco-village, eco-villages are now shared by mainstream society, you know...living sustainably, er... peak oil, um...emotional intelligence are all er...well accepted philosophies within the eco-village project and now accepted mainstream, and so I see the role of eco-villages now as being something different, I see the role of eco-villages as something much more integrated with mainstream, and particularly the next ten to twenty years the role of eco-villages will be as kind of pioneer models for research and err dissemination of err material and knowledge and wisdom about returning to a more land based lifestyle.

CL: Um, does the low-impact lifestyle kind of have spiritual angle for you

John: Um, well I can only answer that question when you say how's that in-terms for you, because its such a personal thing and I believe it is the root of, for me the root of low-impact living is to do with our relationship to um spirit, to the mother earth, to the great spirit, to god, and that for me I think of a motivation to low-impact development, sustainability, eco-villages, that wholly underpins it for me, now whether that's true for other people or not I don't know, I think you'd probably get a mixed reaction, if I think about the people who are in Lammas I think some people yes and some people no.

CL: There's this thing I'm sort of studying, well reflecting on, in research kind of like there's these contrasting states where one minute you feel kind of overwhelmed by your research, like there's too much going on, the other where it's like you can't find things its like the world's silent, is it the same for planning the eco-village, like one minute there's so much to think about and the reverse.

John: Um, there have been moments where, but they haven't been strong moments for me. Um because for me I've been feeling so firmly committed to this path, but my kind of, my joy or my energy or my source comes from just the act of service not the actual result, what the goal will look like I don't know, whereas for me there's joy to be actually feeling like I'm doing something worthwhile, I'm on the right path, this is my path, this is my destiny, there were times when it felt almost crazy, and you know three years of paper work is just a stupid amount of paper work, had if you told me that at the beginning I wouldn't have thought that I could have done it, I wouldn't have thought that it was possible to see that through, and there are times when it has felt overwhelming, when we were rewriting the application_____, I haven't ever doubted I guess you know for me it's always one step at a time, you know just one foot in front of the other, that's the only way to climb a mountain, it's just slowly slowly, small bites, one step at a time.

CL: I was just wondering if you could like describe living in the eco-village, what it will be like

John: Ok, well just kind of from experience, because I guess I consider Tipi valley It's a lot slower pace, there's a lot more time for reflection and introspection, and a lot more time for tuning into your self and to your past, a lot more time for spiritualising and for making the most of those simple things, you know um making the most of the simple meal grown on the earth, because grown on the earth it takes a lot longer than a quick piece of instant pasta that you bought from the supermarket recently, and its so much more than that its so much a deeper, I remember when I lived in Tipi Valley

you know there was such a culture of huge appreciation for the really simple things, like the quality of water, the quality of air, the quality of...good wood for the fire, good music, good company, and so for me living in an eco-village also empowerment where you tap into your own source of energy a deep relationship with the land