

## **'Waiting for chronic': Time, cannabis and counterculture in Hawai'i**

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### **Abstract**

What does it mean not to wait? It is possible to live in ways which do not entail waiting? Through close examination of time and its articulations among a group of US 1960s-generation 'hippies' and younger 'drop outs' in a rural backwater of Hawai'i, I argue in this paper that it is possible to live without waiting. Drawing on Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1953) and Baba Ram Dass' countercultural invocation to 'remember, be here now', I explore unexpected interruptions to anticipated temporal flows. Structured around three vignettes on failing to hitchhike, learning to do ethnographic fieldwork through stopping trying to do ethnographic fieldwork and an unexpected interruption in the supermarket, this paper builds up a picture of non-waiting in action. Located against a backdrop of waiting as temporal interruption and affective mode, I argue that this group sought to collectively disrupt the affective modes of indifference and/or frustration they grew up with in urban mainland America. Through new forms of affective engagement they became able to collectively reframe temporal interruption as existing within rather than without local temporal flows, interruptions ceased to be ruptures to temporal textures but part of their very fabric. Located within temporal flows, they did not force individuals out of a moral community of (time is money) efficient, productive citizens but reframed productivity itself in terms of producing sociality, positive affective experience and communitas. Out of a multitude of moments of not waiting, a temporal texture of American counterculture emerges.

### **Keywords**

Waiting, not-waiting, boredom, counterculture, Hawaii, cannabis

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We've nothing more to do here.

Nor anywhere else.

*Waiting for Godot*

This paper seeks to explore what, if anything, the experiences of a group of Americans who have been relocating to a rural backwater of Hawai'i since the late 1960s to live out countercultural lifestyles can shed on the phenomenon of waiting. A look through my ethnographic fieldnotes reveals that references to 'waiting' are few and far between, clustered mostly at the beginning as I described the frustrations and irritations of 'waiting' for my washing cycle to finish at the laundrette, of trying and failing to practice the art of 'just settin'' (Stewart, 1996) and being still within my body. It seems, reading and reflecting back, that there was very little 'waiting'. Lots of apparent inertia, plenty of sitting still, but not much 'waiting', at least as it is described within much of the waiting literature.

This paper, then, seeks not to examine the phenomenon of 'waiting' within a community of hippies and younger 'drop outs' who have grown up, usually in urban settings, on the US mainland and then made a choice to relocate to rural Hawai'i to 'really heal and connect with my body', 'get deeper in my yoga' or to 'grow really great 'erb' (cannabis). But rather to think about how this group of people who have all sought to live as adults in a very different way to the ways in which they grew up have *rejected* mainstream, mainland (urban) American concepts of waiting, as they have rejected so much else.

To do this, I explore non-waiting in three settings. As such, the paper is structured around three vignettes, each exploring a different facet of waiting and non-waiting. The paper begins with 'waiting for chronic' (cannabis). More commonly known as 'erb', this substance served as economic mainstay, social lubricant and key symbol of countercultural identity. The story begins with a local high-quality grower seeking free 'erb' and the clash of temporal experience between him and his smoking peers and a luckless hitchhiker. This vignette throws in relief the learned nature of non-waiting temporal orientations, which are explored in the second, more autoethnographic 'just settin" section. Drawing on Stewart's reflections on spending time 'just settin" in *A Space on the Side of the Road* (Stewart, 1996), I explore the process of learning to do ethnographic fieldwork in this setting. Having explored non-waiting as learned practice, the paper finishes with non-waiting in action, through a close look at the experience of an unexpected delay at the supermarket. Through this exploration of nonwaiting in learning and everyday enactment, the place of temporality in the practice of countercultural community becomes clear. Time is central – as central as cannabis or food – to experiencing and enacting contemporary counterculture. And through an exploration of this temporal counterculture, it becomes possible to bring into question the apparent universality of urban-inspired, haste-oriented, accelerating timeways.

### **Waiting for chronic**

One spring morning Zebedee, a young elite cannabis grower, had run out of 'erb'. As someone who regularly had a bong hit before getting up, this was not a welcome turn of events. After breakfasting he declared that the two of us should go 'find some 'erb' together. Curious to see how someone who frequently 'smoked out' others would go about finding 'erb' when he had no money with which to buy it, I said yes. After some deliberation he selected the beach as our first destination. We pulled in to the small parking lot at the head of the descent down the cliff face to the clothing-optional beach below, and clambered down. After a modicum of success (sharing a joint with a friend who was there sunbathing) we headed back up to the car park, where we sat on the wall to wait and see what happened. And what happened was that after a while a young man came up and asked us if we had any rolling papers. I did, and after having fetched them for him, he then proceeded to roll a succession of large joints. As these lazily passed between Zebedee and Robert, and the day sauntered from early- to mid-morning, others joined us and left us in waves, some sharing 'erb' they had, all smoking the many joints that Robert rolled and circulated through the eclectic gatherings that came and went on the wall.

An unsuccessful hitchhiker arrived and provided several hours of entertainment as she struggled to get a ride. First trying to get a ride in the wrong direction, then seeming to alienate those who stopped for her once pointed the right way. This was but one of several amusements which unveiled themselves throughout the day (others included a small child playing with fireworks and a man who had lost the key to his car, abandoned the vehicle and invited us to 'rape the bitch', which various wall dwellers duly did, plundering speakers, spare tyre and more).

As this core of four or five men and various shorter-stopping visitors smoked '*erb*', watched the car plundering and speculated on just what the hitchhiker was saying to the drivers who stopped for her, eventually she wandered over to the wall to come talk to us. Upon arrival a pipe was proffered to her. 'What is it?' she asked, 'Marijuana? No thank you'. 'What are you, a Fed?' came the humorous reply, both for her unconventional rejection of a passing cannabis pipe and for her unusual lexicographical choice. Walking away, she turned back, and accepted the pipe, 'For medicinal reasons', eliciting further guffaws from the men on the wall. She then resumed her hitchhiking vigil, popping back periodically for another 'toke' on the pipe, to be directed as to which direction she should be hitchhiking in, and even being offered the abandoned car and a free driving lesson, the key having been found. The men resumed watching her, watching the pillage of the car, getting high and chatting and relaxing in the sun. After several hours of her hitchhiking, and the men smoking and sitting she came back and, frustrated, asked, 'What are you all doing here?' Robert, requester of cigarette papers and primary patron of cannabis consumption on the wall that day, laughed and replied, 'Waiting for chronic!'

According to Robert, we were 'waiting for chronic', waiting for cannabis, waiting for '*erb*'. We were 'waiting' for the very thing that we had, the very thing which tied this fleeting coalition of people together. While it was true that Zebedee and I had originally sat on the wall in the hope of someone with '*erb*' arriving and be willing to share, the hitchhiker's interlocutor was in no such position. He had 'chronic' in abundance and was content to spend the day smoking it with anyone who cared to join him. As the sun set, and the gathering dispersed, he went on his way. He had not been there anticipating the arrival of a dealer who would bring him the sought after substance. He was simply there, enjoying the entertainments that a sojourn on the wall provided, 'smoking out' old friends and new.

As these men sat 'waiting for chronic' the practices in which they were engaged shared some characteristics identified within scholarly analyses of waiting: a bodily stillness (Ehn and Löfgren, 2010; Thrift, 2000), a slowing of time (Anderson, 2004; Bissell, 2007), perhaps a shade of anticipation (Eri et al., 2010) – although one rendered problematic by the disjunction between the stated object of desire (chronic) and its lack of exclusive future positionality. How then to square this circle, to render intelligible this tension between the future orientation and present experience? Perhaps the description 'waiting for chronic', is, like *Waiting for Godot* (Beckett, 2011 [1953]), less about the future than a reflection and commentary on the present. The substance of the play is not what the men are waiting for (for even that seems vague and unfamiliar) but the act of waiting itself, the being, the relations that unfold in the doing of the wait. In Bennett's post-existentialist analysis

of the play, the absurdity of the wait ('Let's Go' *They do not move*) is given meaning by its sociality. Whereas for more existentialist interpretations, such as those put forward by Esslin (1961) or Gordon (2008),

Waiting is to experience the action of time, which is constant change. And yet, as nothing real ever happens, that change in itself is an illusion .... The more things change, the more they are the same. That is the terrible stability of the world. (Esslin, 1961: 51)

Building on Esslin (1961), Gordon (2008) argues that there are two temporal scales: that of cosmic time, where one's acts have no effect on the universe, similar to that described by Esslin above, and the mechanical time of life, ageing and death. It is this which is picked up and emphasised by Bennett (2011), who sees the inherent lack of value, the nothingness of their actions as wellspring of potentiality. When Estragon claims, 'I wasn't doing anything' and Vladimir responds, 'Perhaps you weren't. But it's the way of doing it that counts', Bennett muses, following Camus (2005 [1942]), that while our actions are devoid of significance or import, and we can in fact do nothing (on a cosmic scale), but we can choose how we do our 'nothing' (on a mechanical scale).

Yet this apparent nothing prompted the question 'What are we doing here?' by both Vladimir and the unsuccessful hitchhiker. For Gordon the ensuing silence in *Waiting for Godot* articulates an acceptance of 'the only viable life alternative: that they wait and accept their act of waiting' (2008: 81); it is through this acceptance that either the absurdity of life is articulated (Gordon, 2008) or sociality emerges which gives their doing nothing meaning (Bennett, 2011). Bennett goes on to argue that 'nothing' exists in binary with 'something' and that 'nothing' is that which is 'assigned no value in this world'. In assigning value (the generation of sociality which gives life meaning) to the 'nothing' that Vladimir and Estragon do, Bennett raises – sadly without addressing – the question of *who* assigns value. Yet it is precisely this question which sheds light on why it was the unsuccessful hitchhiker, rather than any of the smokers, who asked this question that day at the beach. The men on the wall were doing 'something': they had assigned value to their actions. The hitchhiker, however, could not understand the purpose of their actions. It appeared that to her they were not productive, their actions had not value. To her they were doing 'nothing'.

Having long since decided who would give her a ride home, the men on the wall watched her repeated unsuccessful attempts to get a ride with pleasure: her active and productive use of time as she waited for a ride, punctuated by brief, puzzled visits to the wall where she was unable to sit, unable to chat, unable to stop and watch the unfolding of time, provided the primary source of entertainment that day. But it was equally clear that whatever she was saying to drivers meant that she wasn't going to get a ride. And that the beach is not a place any of these men wanted a young, naive woman to be stranded come dark. Thus, she waited for the very thing she had, just as the men 'waited' for that which was already in their possession. The difference between them being that the men knew this, enjoyed this and celebrated it; the unsuccessful hitchhiker was too busy being productive,

too engaged in 'frenetic stillness' (Sayreau 2010), to see it. Had she but given up her productivity project and simply 'gone with the flow', allowed herself to take the time to make new friends, watch the events of the world unfold before her, she could have spent her time waiting for chronic, rather than waiting for a ride: she always already had access to both. Perhaps Robert, in responding as he did, was providing the unsuccessful hitchhiker with a cryptic clue to mull over as she stood at the side of the road: they already had that for which they were purportedly 'waiting', freeing them up to be in the moment. Perhaps if she had more successfully embodied this 'be here now' orientation she too could have enjoyed the stillness, the close attention to the minutiae around her, the emerging and cementing of social relations. But the unsuccessful hitchhiker didn't, and as darkness fell John offered her the ride she always had and she – and everyone else at the wall – got that which they had been 'waiting' for all day.

Waiting for a ride and waiting for chronic that day both entailed 'the body [being] stilled in the sense of being physically relatively stationary' (Bissell, 2007: 284) but for only one form of 'waiting' did this stillness mask the hidden currents beneath, the 'diligent watchfulness' discussed by Bournes and Mitchell (2002), the lack of repose seen to characterise the bodily stillness of microanalyses of waiting (Ehn and Löfgren, 2010; Thrift, 2000). Can this relaxed, rather than tense, stillness be meaningfully and usefully be characterised as 'waiting'? Can one be waiting for that which one has? Especially when its assertion is articulated as a joke or a cryptic clue? The answer is yes and no, and it is in this space between yes and no that perhaps some reflections from a group of drops outs in Hawai'i can shine back onto debates about what it means to wait.

For all his largesse, Robert welcomed those who sat on the wall and shared their '*erb*; for all that he gave, he was happy to receive, and to wait for its arrival. With our cigarette papers ready, and Zebedee's reputation for prodigious consumptions preceding him, Robert correctly read our actions and motives as 'waiting for chronic'. Not searching for it, but waiting for it – he, like Zebedee, was confident that it would come. All Zebedee and I had to do was put ourselves in the right place, and allow time to flow over and around us, allow events to unfold, to enable that which we sought to come to us. Everyone was always waiting for chronic – even the unsuccessful hitchhiker, calling it marijuana, explaining that she consumes it only 'for medicinal reasons' could be seen to be waiting for chronic.

Cannabis was a critically important social lubricant. People liked to 'smoke out' those they were with or be smoked out by them. It was not uncommon to watch a pipe move around a circle until everyone had con- firmed to the originator of the pipe that they had experienced a 'head change'. These drop outs, then, can be seen as all always waiting for chronic. And as they were all always waiting for chronic, whether they had it or not, whether they had experienced a 'head change' or not, they were simultaneously never waiting for chronic. It was, by and large, simply there.

To wait is to not wait. To wait is to reflect and accept the moment, to 'be here now' and enjoy it for what it is. To reject the anxieties of anticipation, to spurn future

orientation, to shun ‘diligent watchfulness’ in favour of playful observation is to reject waiting, it is to not wait. Thus in ‘waiting for chronic’ these men were conspicuously *not* waiting, and drawing attention to the pleasures (and, through the unsuccessful hitchhiker, pains) of bodily stillness, an acute focus on the moment and the productivity – in the sense of building and cementing social relations – of apparent nonproductivity (or following Bennett (2011), giving meaning to an otherwise meaningless existence). This was not a ‘suspension’ (Bissell, 2007), or ‘dead time’ (Moran, 2004) or an ‘empty interval between moments’ (Schweizer, 2005), and it certainly didn’t appear – expect perhaps for the unsuccessful hitchhiker – to be a form of ‘punishment’ (Vannini, 2002), as waiting has been variously described. This *was* time, this *was* the moment, this was a full day of each of these people’s lives. A fulfilled and fulfilling day, and enjoyable day, time well spent.

### **Learning to ‘just set’**

Waiting is often described in negative terms, as ‘dead time’ (Moran, 2004: 218), ‘a temporal aberration’ (Schweizer, 2005: 779) and, importantly, ‘an event of the unwilled’ (Bissell, 2007: 287). There are many ways to wait, and many things to wait for. One can be ‘waiting for’ an anticipated future point, or ‘waiting out’ an unwelcome present moment (Reed, 2011). One can be engaged in in the ‘situational waiting’ of waiting for a specific object or event or in ‘existential waiting’, which lacks such a clear end point (see Musharbash (2007) and Svendsen (2005) on situational and existential boredom). One can be waiting in relation to something that will likely pass quite quickly, such as for a train or in a queue (Ehn and Löfgren, 2010) or something far removed, such as the end of a prison sentence (Reed, 2011), an asylum decision (Griffiths, 2014) or the end of apartheid (Crapanzano, 1985).

Waiting takes myriad forms. It evokes a range of emotional engagements. Yet there are themes which run across this body of work which appears to tie these diverse experiences into a singular, shared ‘universal experience’ (Bournes and Mitchell, 2002): to be compelled to pause, to anticipate, to be trapped in unproductive time.

As we watch participants in studies on topics as diverse as nursing care, commuting and entrepreneurship declaring, ‘I hate to wait’ (Hunt and Adams, 1998; Naef and Bournes, 2009; Punpuing and Ross, 2001), and analysts explaining that ‘nobody likes to wait’ (Schweizer, 2005: 777), it becomes clear that waiting is not generally perceived as a welcome activity. Moments of waiting are described as ‘banal and prosaic hiatuses’ (Bissell, 2007), ‘suspensions’ (Bissell, 2007), requiring ‘endurance’ (Schweizer, 2008), even experienced as ‘punishment’ (Vannini, 2002). Waiting is frequently understood as interruption to temporal flows, as unwelcome punctuation, as that which breaks up the flow of time, forces one to experience the ‘punishment’ of an enforced ‘suspension’ from a desired experience of time. Waiting is rarely chosen. Drawing on Schweizer (2005), Bissell (2007) argues that waiting frustrates because it jars: it interrupts anticipated flows, forcing a different, slower temporality on us. The rupture lies between the temporality of waiting (slow) and the pace of ‘modern’ life (fast). As the two temporalities rub up against one another, they cause the discomfort of ‘restless stillness’ (Sayreau, 2010).

However, some scholars have responded to this apparent universality of discomfort by endeavouring to reclaim waiting as a (potentially) positive experience: as a

chance to ‘trace a passage of withdrawal from engagement’ (Harrison, 2007, quoted in Bissell (2007)) or an unexpected opportunity for ‘slowed rhythms’ in a too-fast world (Schweizer, 2008). Preceding slow movements<sup>1</sup> and these recent analyses of waiting, Simone Weil (1979) argued that we should relearn waiting as a form of attention. This is similar to the line of argument put forward by Vannini (2002), who seeks to reclaim waiting as an opportunity for introspection and/or close engagement with one’s environment. It is possible, then, to learn to re-engage with this ‘temporal aberration’ (Schweizer, 2005) without necessarily experiencing it as such. In this section, I trace something of my own process of relearning waiting as a form of attention.

I arrived in Hawai‘i for the first time in 2004 after completing a Masters degree in a UK city. As I struggled to adjust from the fast pace of my Masters to learning how people use their bodies to articulate countercultural identity in Hawai‘i, I had passengers clutching the dashboard of my truck as I ‘raced’ through the village at 30 mph. I discovered I lacked the ability to sit for minute at the laundrette, and to-be participants watched in quiet amusement while I sweltered my way busily through the mid-day heat in an earnest quest to be ‘doing’ proper fieldwork. Over time, I learned to ‘just set’ (Stewart, 1996), and later on still on a 30 minute wait outside the laundrette seemed to reveal but a tiny glimmer of the fascinating flows of village life, and I craved a longer cycle just to fill in the detail. I learned to stroll slowly across the village, to see its rich textures. By the time my mum came to visit after 10 months she told me that I needed to spend less time stopping and chatting to everyone I passed as I traversed this space and get on with my fieldwork. I chuckled as my now-participants had once chuckled at me and explained that this *was* doing fieldwork.

Perhaps the turning point – if one can identify a single Geertzian moment (Geertz, 1973: 412–417) – came about four months in to this first period of fieldwork. I was sitting on the wall out the front of the village health food store where Feliz sold coconuts from the back of his girlfriend’s car. Over the course of the 2–3 hours that I was there, just sitting, doing nothing, various people came by to drink coconuts, smoke roll ups, chat and pass the time of day. At one point a truck rumbled along the main (only) road in the village. All conversation stopped – we all watched this truck roll by in a choreography of looking – and then resumed our conversations. As I turned my head in sync with my participants, I realised that a truck passing through the village constituted an event. I had finally slowed down not only enough to ‘see’ it, but to embody it, to without thinking halt what I was doing to share this event, this moment, with those around me.

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<sup>1</sup> Slow movements have their origins in the slow food movement that emerged in Italy in the 1980s as a response to the rise of de-localised, remotely processed, fast foods. Since then slow movements have expanded beyond this original focus on food to embrace slow exercise (Honoré, 2004), slow scholarship (Mountz et al., 2015) and even slow cities (Pink, 2008). Slow movements tie tempo (slow) and spatiality (local) together – for example eating locally produced foods, prepared without haste and consumed at leisure – in order to produce new forms of sociality and being in the world which are not predicated on time-is-money notions of efficiency and productivity.

As I sat on the wall doing ‘nothing’ that day, I watched Feliz’s girlfriend Natalie making a complex and intricate beaded bracelet she would sell for little more than the cost of the materials. But it helped her resist the urge to smoke, so was to her worth it. I watched a woman looking for a caretaker find one. I met a young man who would, a few months down the line, become my neighbour and give me access to his starfruit tree (a fruit I loved). I saw a man with ‘erb to share meet a woman who wanted to get high; I watched them disappear to a more discreet spot to smoke together. And throughout I watched Feliz sell his coconuts for a price of \$1–\$3, depending on what he thought he could get – that knowledge dependent on his knowledge of the buyer, their dwelling, their income, their social circles. I may, then, have been doing ‘nothing’ as I was sitting there, but far from nothing happened. By allowing myself to sit and to be, instead of frustratedly waiting for ‘proper’ fieldwork to begin, I watched webs of relations spin and re-spin, moments in narratives stretching into the past and the future.

If I follow Bennett (2011) in his analysis of the seeming nothingness of the wait in *Waiting for Godot*, I can read this afternoon of doing nothing as one where ‘something’ happened because the apparent nothingness was in itself highly productive of sociality. Through that sociality affective bonds and material resources flowed. However, at the time, when learning to ‘just set’ in the early days, I did not feel I could afford to sit on the wall like this, in the hope that ‘something’ would happen: to wait for knowledge and understanding to come to me. Rather, I felt I had to go out and find it. Like the luckless hitchhiker, I was compelled to learn that being busy in ‘productive’ action (be that flagging down a ride or generating interview transcripts and detailed field notes) could simultaneously limit the ability to see what you already had. It was only in accepting sitting on a wall as a ‘productive’ use of my time that sitting on that wall came to be a productive use of my time. In ceasing to be productive, I came to see what I always already had – dense webs of relations that I had been invited to both observe and embed myself in. In sitting around with people, it eventually transpired that I hadn’t been waiting for fieldwork proper to start at all, that was my fieldwork. Like the men on the wall at the beach, like Vladimir and Estragon, in waiting I ceased to wait. In waiting, in being, I came to see that I already had that which I was waiting for.

What I was not, by the time I sat on that wall, was bored. This was not true of my experiences of ‘just settin’ when I first arrived in Hawai‘i. As mentioned above, when I first arrived from my busy UK city I moved either dangerously or comically fast – either way, too fast for the local tempo. And I struggled to sit still. I struggled to ‘do nothing’. There was a distinct lack of stimulus to engage me as I sat in the village in the sunshine waiting for my washing to go through its cycle in the laundrette. There was nothing going on when I sat on a wall drinking a coconut to rehydrate before leaving in order to be getting on with *something*.

These early struggles recall Chris Fuller’s 2011 examination of young people’s experiences of ‘timepass’ in India in which he discusses young urbanites visiting relatives in the countryside, detailing villages where these young people’s parents are content to stroll around, chat and sit on the porch and watch the world go by. However, when the young city dwellers arrive they very quickly become bored; there

is nothing for them to do. Recalling the luckless hitchhiker, ‘nothing’ appears to be happening in their natal villages, just as ‘nothing’ appeared to be happening on the wall by the beach.

Yet far from nothing was happening in these Indian villages. The space may not electrify such that ‘nervous impulses flow through [the individual] in rapid succession, like the energy from a battery’, to borrow Benjamin’s description of crossing the road in the city (2003 [1939]: 328); with its dearth of billboards, rotating stock in shops and Internet the space appeared to lack stimulation. Such a lack of stimulus led Fuller’s study participants to see their rural parental homes as ‘boring’. The constant stimulation these young people craved – indeed needed – was not available to them in the village. Or, alternatively, the stimulation that *was* available to them – to stroll, to watch, to chat – failed to be stimulating enough. It felt as though there is nothing to do and to do nothing is boring.

When I first arrived on the island, I had purchased a truck on the neighbouring island of Oahu and was waiting for it to be shipped across. I was to stay initially in the house of a couple who had temporarily relocated to the mainland. Given a lift from the airport via the health food store by the one person I knew, and I then had four days before she would drive me to the dock to collect my truck. Having spending the first two days cleaning up the many, many dead insects which littered this previously vacant house, I struggled to pass the time without Internet access, television or even radio. After clearing the house of dead insects, I came to realise I had far from cleared the house of insects, and many – in particular ants – became my constant companions. So, with ‘nothing’ to do, bored, I began to watch them. I learned that in the early morning they’d wander in all sorts of directions, but by mid-morning had laid down a series of paths, rigidly adhered to. I spent an evening learning to that if ants want to enough, they can drag a dying cockroach across a room.

Some months later I moved into Belinda and John’s home, a beautiful space beneath a huge tarpaulin, and thus without walls; I shared this home with many spiders. To manage my UK-cultivated fear of arachnids, to cope with their presence, I learned to distinguish them, creating names for them, watching their behaviour and realising that the terrifyingly huge, hairy ones (cane spiders) were in fact timid creatures and would run away from you as quickly as they possibly could. I also for a while had two web-building garden spiders take up residence: one male, above the shrine, one female, above the sink. One day there were many baby spiders on the female’s web. Excitedly showing a neighbour this development, a young cannabis grower who – unusual among my participants – had been born and lived his whole life on the island, he asked if I wanted to see something amazing. Reaching down into the grass he grabbed a grasshopper and threw it at the female’s web. Within seconds she was upon it, cocooning it in silk before injecting it with venom to render it edible to her young offspring who fed off it for days. This was thrilling stuff. Six months previously I would have simply removed the web and as for watching with fascination as ants remade their trails on a daily basis I would have simply laid down poison until they were all gone (a strategy I tried until a neighbour pointed out that I

lived in the tropics and acceptance might form a more sustainable approach to sharing my home with insects).

In his work on the 'everyday', Henri Lefebvre (2008) argues that boredom is a product of modernity: it is qualitatively different from its religious or aristocratic antecedents such as acedia or *ennui*. It is a mass rather than individual phenomenon and a feeling which not only fails to be satiated by, but is in fact produced by, constant craving for novelty in a world which stresses constant innovation and change (Gardiner, 2012). But as we have seen not just any novelty will do. After all, sitting stationary on one's parents' porch and watching neighbours stroll may have been novel to Fuller's urban research participants and being in a space filled with unfamiliar plants, and insects and birds was certainly novel for me – yet both I and my urban to rural Indian counterparts found ourselves bored. The novelties of modernity are essentially characterised by a particular sort of tempo: they are the novelties of a social world that values and encourages continuous innovation and change. As Benjamin reflects on learning to cross urban roads in 1930s Paris, he notes not only the technological innovations of motor car development, traffic lights and the like but the effect of these innovations on the self: to cross the road in such a setting sends 'nervous impulses' through the body, electrifying like 'the energy from a battery'. It too is thrilling stuff.

The German philosopher Hermann Lübbe (2009) also highlights innovation and change as central to modernity. However, for him what is key about the continuous change and innovation that characterises modernity is how it affects how people experience the present moment, the now. The present, for Lübbe, is the period in which past experience forms a reliable basis for current action, and current action provides a viable template for future action. The present is that moment in which one can be confident that past knowledge is useful for navigating contemporary life and current skills will prove useful for navigating the future. But as the rate of innovation increases this period shrinks, the more things change – and the faster they change – the shorter the period in which one can be confident past skills are useful for now and current skills will prove useful for the future. This generates among other things a sense of constant change, but also a 'modern' personhood which is, indeed must, be responsive to rapid change, adaptable and eternally dynamic. If we read these Fuller's participants as modern actors, they are indeed flexible, dynamic and responsive. Yet they are primed – as was I – to be responsive and flexible and adaptable in response to certain types of innovation and change: speeding up, new upon new upon new, not slowing down, not a reduction in demanding stimulus.

It is this setting of continuous innovation and change that creates a stimulatory backdrop against which a reduction in that stimulation results in boredom. This could be in the form of situational boredom described above and epitomised for Anderson (2004) in the repetitive action of chopping vegetables or more existential forms of boredom that characterise Aboriginal life in Australian Aboriginal reservations described by Musharbash (2007): either way a period (whatever its duration) outside the flow of innovation, dynamism and change, of external stimulus, becomes boring.

Boredom, at least its situational variants, was challenging to Fuller's young Indian urbanites and to myself because it represented a temporal rupture. The pace jarred, it forced people – as waiting forces people – to move with 'slowed rhythms' (Bissell, 2007), to navigate multiple temporalities, or rather to abandon the fast pace of the city for the slow pace of the country, to change one's frame of reference sufficient to identify stimulus in small things, develop heightened awareness of one's environments, or one's self, as described by Vannini (2002) in order to help 'pass' the too much time of the countryside. Existential boredom poses similar problems of filling the too-much time of life outside the slipstream of modernity, rendered existential rather than situational by the fact that unlike Fuller's urban participants, or myself, the young Aboriginal people on the reservations lack the possibility we possessed to return 'home' to the city, to innovation, to modernity when we wished.

In the process of learning to live in this setting, I had to slow down, to move more slowly, to engage in restful, rather than restless, sitting, to learn to 'just set'. In the process of learning to do 'proper' fieldwork I had to let go of the goal of doing proper fieldwork. The trust required to allow me to watch cannabis growers harvest and dry their plants, or dealers to discuss their accounts with me, or even to be welcome to note who discussed what with whom while sitting on the wall watching Feliz sell his coconuts all came out of slowing down, taking the time to 'go with the flow', to follow opportunities as they arose and to let go of schedules which more often limited rather than facilitated my embedment in relations with others. In so doing I was able to pause, watch a truck and realise that everyone does this – or rather everyone else, because it was only in doing it that I noticed it happened at all. And only in noticing it, that I could reflect on what counts as an event, what counts as 'something' in times and spaces where previously I have perceived 'nothing' to be happening. In the village 'nothing' happens, each day bears striking similarities to the last – Sandy sells his incense, Feliz his coconuts, people eat lunch and chat outside the health food store, the young growers congregate in their favoured spaces to admire, critique and share their '*erb*', hitchhikers stand in the same spot seeking a ride. It's boring. It's lacks dynamism, change, innovation. Like *Waiting for Godot* it is repetitive, it lacks a clear point and clear meaning; the backdrop is only minimally different between the two acts or between two consecutive days, and the refrains and structure of the first act permeate the second. There is repetition, and nothing much happens. Yet, of course, that is precisely the *point* of the play – that meaning is made in exactly these settings, and it is only through immersion that its meaningfulness, however you interpret it, can be drawn out. In learning to let go, in learning to 'just set' in learning to 'be here now' I stopped waiting for fieldwork to begin and found it already had.

### **Not waiting, but being**

The heart of the village – at least for the American hippies and drop outs who lived in its environs – was the health food store, a supermarket-sized shop selling a range of locally sourced, fair trade, organic or otherwise ethical foods, beauty and household products. Just inside the front door was a chiller cabinet containing vegetarian and vegan sandwiches, a coffee and (herbal) tea station and a hot food counter selling 3–4 different vegan curries and stews, usually – as my participants liked to note – made from the vegetables reaching the end of their saleable life in

the fruit and veg section of the store the day before. Outside the front was a water machine where you could buy potable water (almost no property in the area is attached to mains water) and four picnic tables under a small roof enabling people to sit outside protected from the frequent rain. These tables were a space where people could drink coffee, eat food purchased inside but also sit and read the free paper, or just chat.

While buying my lunch there one day, I stood in the queue for the checkout when Dominic joined the queue behind me buying chocolate. As we discussed our favourite flavours the man in the queue in front of me spotted a \$20 note on the floor, asked if it was mine, to which I checked and replied it wasn't and so he asked the woman in front, who had in fact dropped it and thanked him and then me for returning the note. This prompted Dominic to say thank you, then the woman at the front of the queue said thank you too, then the cashier and finally everyone in the queue and all the people at the hot food and coffee stands joined in a collective chorus of thank yous. When the man in front of me got to the front of the queue he introduced me to the cashier and she and I exchanged introductions while the already swelling queue continued to grow behind us.

Such interactions arguably delayed everyone involved: the cashier processed no groceries while she and everyone in the immediate vicinity paused to give thanks; those waiting to reach the coffee were held up as those pouring themselves drinks suspended this action to join in a spontaneous, collective chorus; newer additions to the check out queue were compelled to experience a stoppage in their progression to the till while Simon introduced me to the cashier.

Such language – that of delay (Lahad, 2012), pause (Harvey, 2015), suspension (Bissell, 2007) or stoppage (Sayreau, 2010) – is characteristic of the literature on waiting. Yet a closer look reveals that in some analyses waiting intervals aren't just any sort of pauses (Snow and Brissett, 1986) but rather '*empty* intervals' (Schweizer, 2005), they are '*dead time*' (Moran, 2004). They are understood in one type of analysis to be moments where '*nothing*' happens. Yet far from nothing happened in this interval: friends, acquaintances and strangers halted what they were doing, be that pouring coffee, chatting about chocolate or scanning barcodes, to call out '*thank you*' to those around them. Some thing was happening here: something productive of *communitas* (Turner, 1967) perhaps, or the positively valued emotion of gratitude, or the co-creation of '*island time*' (characterised by a slow pace of life, task- rather than clock-orientation towards time, and a mixing of business and socialisation by Brislin and Kim (2003)). Whatever participants saw themselves as co-creating in that moment, their participation in it suggest they experienced the encounter as being productive of some-thing, not no-thing. This was not '*empty*' or '*dead*' time where nothing happens, but filled time, vital time where something does.

In a second sort of analysis, Sayreau (2010) goes beyond framing the time of waiting as '*empty*' or '*dead*' to emphasise a somewhat different affective character of these temporal intervals: not inert but frenetic, captured by the oxymoronic language of '*frenetic stoppage*' or '*static turbulence*'. Like the families in hospital critical care waiting rooms described by Bournes and Mitchell (2002), for Sayreau waiting people

are stationary but not still, immobile but not at rest. The timescapes of waiting are 'purgatorial temporalities' (Sayreau, 2010), sometimes 'punishment' (Vannini, 2002). They are unwelcome and difficult to live with. The bodily stillness of waiting masks an undercurrent of tension, of wishing to be temporally elsewhere.

In 1971 Baba Ram Dass published the seminal countercultural text *Remember, Be Here Now*. In it, he advocated for a temporal orientation towards – indeed a celebration of – the present moment. He suggested exercises to help readers learn to orientate themselves to the present, a skill that required cultivation:

Ask yourself: Where am I? Answer: Here. Ask yourself: What time is it? Answer: Now. Say it until you can hear it [...] Let the clock and the earth do their 'thing' ... let the comings and goings of life continue ...But YOU stay HERE and NOW. This is an exercise to bring you to the ETERNAL PRESENT ... where it all is (ellipses in the original). (1971: 90)

For Dass and his many countercultural followers now is the moment to pay attention to, the eternal present is where everything that matters is happening. This temporal orientation was shared almost universally by my participants. Zebedee, in his quest for '*erb*', focused on neither past nor future but Zebedee, in his quest for '*erb*', focused on neither past nor future but on finding a space and dwelling there. His wall co-dwellers similarly appeared to celebrate the moment: enjoying the spontaneous gathering, with friends, with '*erb*', with sunshine, now. In (finally learning to) heed Dass' advice, in orienting myself towards the wall in the village I was able to quench my thirst with a coconut but also see the very thing I had been looking for. In worrying less about where my next interview was coming from, I was able to form and strengthen connections to people whom I would later interview at leisure. Like the men on the wall at the beach, like me – eventually – drinking coconuts in the village, the people buying coffee, lunch or their shopping in the health food store lived in a community which celebrated and sought to embody over multiple generation the values of 1960s counterculture, key among them being present, 'being here now'. In the words of James on his return from a week of walking the fishing trails of the coast of the other side of the island, subsisting on only foraged coconuts,

Freedom, it's escaping want and disappointment. The whole disappointment thing is tied to things not being what you want them to be. But if you live life in the now, and live for the now, you don't suffer that disappointment.

To be present is to escape disappointment. To be present is to recognise and celebrate what you have. And what we had in the supermarket was lost money returned, honesty and gratitude. It was a good moment to be in. We could 'Let the clock and the earth do their "thing"' and celebrate and enjoy the present moment for what it was. Those who called out 'thank you' embraced the moment and did not (presumably) wish to be temporally elsewhere.

In a third sort of analysis, Bissell (2007) and Schweizer (2005, 2008) draw attention to waiting as temporal rupture, with 'slowed and even deadened rhythms moving alongside faster events and practices' (Bissell, 2007: 278). Bissell draws on Harvey's notion of time-space compression to articulate a characterisation of modernity's temporality as fast (Harvey, 1989) (a view shared by, among others, Massey (1994), Rosa and Scheuerman (2009) and Virilio (2006)). Waiting entails 'an event of the unwilled' (Bissell, 2007: 287) which compels slowness among speed. It is an unwelcome temporal rupture in a society where speed is valued.

Similarly, Schweizer (2008) sees modernity as characterised by speed and society as speeding up. For him, waiting's 'indignities' emerge from being non-instantaneous in a 'culture of the instant', from 'the discomforts of being out of sync with modernity' (2008: 7). Waiting opens up a temporal rupture between high speed society and the suddenly slow individual, and this rupture is far from morally neutral:

The person who waits is out of sync with time, outside of the 'moral' and economic community of those whose time is productive .... The waiter's enforced passivity expels him from the community of productive citizens; his endurance of time estranges him from the culture of money and speed. (2008: 8)

Here, the 'productive citizen' is one embedded within 'the culture of money and speed'. A citizen for whom time is not money, who is not in haste is an unproductive one, and significantly a *morally* unproductive one (whether that be due to imprisonment (Reed, 2011), unemployment (Howe, 1990) or choice (Kupfer et al., 1973)). Where that lack of haste is unwilled and unwelcome it necessarily causes discomfort as the waiter is forcibly rendered unproductive, morally suspect against their will. Waiting's cessation will facilitate a welcome return to the tempo of modernity, to efficiency, to productivity.

The interruption to the flow of action in the health food store – coffee pouring, queues progressing, customers departing – cannot be accounted for by any of these analyses. Those whose anticipated progression towards a hot drink, a hot meal or a completed shopping experience did not react to the delay caused by the found \$20 bill and its consequences with the endurance required to survive dead time. Nor in suspending their planned actions to join in the chorus and thus delay themselves and others did they or those then in turn delayed appear to find this a restless moment, its end eagerly anticipated. Because there was no temporal rupture. The very same people who were delayed and delaying others in this incident would likely be sitting out the front 'doing nothing' shortly, or had perhaps paused to pass the time of day on their way into the store in the first place. Such a delay was collectively embedded *within* the temporal flows of the space. It did not jar, it was neither willed nor unwilled but simply happened. It existed within, not without, local temporal textures. It entailed no waiting.

## **Conclusion**

If waiting is to be understood as temporal rupture producing affective responses of indifference or frustration, then waiting for chronic, waiting for fieldwork proper to

begin and waiting to reach the front of the checkout queue in the village health food store entailed no waiting for they did not produce those affective responses. If waiting propels the waiter outside the frames of productive time, attention must be paid to what counts as productivity. For there were breaks in temporal flows in this community: when sitting on the wall doing the something of building sociality among the nothing of inaction, a truck passed. Everyone present interrupted their activities to watch. In the flow of movement towards coffee, or food, or the cashier a chorus of thank yous and an introduction altered those flows, but arguably did not interrupt them. The break produced a different than expected event but did not interfere with the temporal texture of the space. The collective pause to watch a truck pass entailed a different than expected event but again did not interfere with the temporal texture of the space. Because those breaks were not empty, but already filled, be that with a visual event or with gratitude – both were filled with (the potential for) *communitas*.

For a break in anticipated flows to be rendered an ‘empty interval’, temporal punishment or even (temporary) expulsion from the moral/economic time stream of ‘time-is-money’ it has to be assigned negative value. And in terms of ‘the “moral” and economic community of those whose time is productive’, where productivity is measured within a framework of a ‘culture of money and speed’ (Schweizer, 2008: 8), such pauses are inefficient. After all, a pause to watch a truck pass arguably slowed down Feliz’ sales, a break to meet a new arrival on the island decelerated the cashier’s rate of item scanning. Within these terms, this group lie outside the moral and temporal economy of modernity. They are unproductive citizens.

Yet the pause to watch a truck or meet a recent arrival to the island or any of the other many pauses, halts and interruptions to anticipated flows are not located in the context of people who are trying to be efficient and trying to be productive in these terms. Those pauses can be read as unproductive because they temporarily halt the flow of money. But they are arguably productive of something else.

Rather than nothing happening in these moments, something happens. People who want to can get high, social connections are formed through which material resources may later flow (or maybe not), collective gratitude can be experienced. But as the luckless hitchhiker illustrated, for that to happen the process of assigning value must be an active one – those involved have to assign the no-thing of unanticipated inaction as something, as productive action.

The people living in this community almost exclusively relocated as adults to the island from the US mainland, the majority from cities. They grew up experiencing the ‘nervous impulses’ associated with crossing an urban road or the stimulus management required of Fuller’s Indian urbanites. They made a choice to position themselves outside that timeflow, a choice to position themselves outside modernity’s temporal slipstream. They did not experience the existential boredom of Musharbash’s Aboriginal study participants because they always had the option of reentering the tempo of modernity.

This choice to be slow in a world of fast was productive of many things: of sociality, of communitas, of the capacity to be thrilled by the actions of a spider. But most of all these tiny productive moments were a daily celebration of the capacity to 'be here now'; they were the temporal building blocks of countercultural community. This group knew all too well the drive for efficiency, to measure time by the clock rather than its qualitative textures. This was the temporal culture they collectively departed and in saying thank you in a supermarket, in watching spiders eat grasshoppers, in spending an hour drinking a coconut, they actively cultivated (with – as the luckless hitchhiker and I have demonstrated – differential success) a counter temporal culture. The many pauses and delays that litter this text were not moments of waiting because their protagonists were not forcibly excluded from the timeways of money, efficiency and productivity. They were actively chosen, actively celebrated, a welcome reminder to 'remember, be here now', a tiny moment in the ongoing production of a sustained and sustainable American counterculture.

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