Saving Space, Sharing Time: Integrated Infrastructures of Daily Life in Cohousing

Dr. Helen Jarvis
School of Geography, Politics and Sociology
Newcastle University
Daysh Building
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE1 7RU
Helen.jarvis@ncl.ac.uk
Abstract
This paper explores the concept of collective housing, notably the North American model of purpose built cohousing, to better understand the functions of space and time at the neglected scale of collective (co-located) inter-household collaboration. The defining features of this form of intentional community typically include the clustering of smaller-than-average private residences to maximise shared open spaces for social interaction; common facilities for shared daily use; and consensus-based collective self-governance. This paper critically examines the infrastructures of daily life which evolve from, and ease, collective activity and the shared occupation of space. Discussion draws on observations from eight communities in the UK and USA, using selected ethnographic vignettes to illustrate a variety of alternative temporalities which coincide with a shifting and blurring of privatised dwelling. The resulting analysis exposes multiple temporal scales and innovative uses and meanings of time and space. The paper concludes by speculating on the contemporary significance of collective living arrangements and the role this might play in future sustainability.

Acknowledgements
I wish to acknowledge Faculty funding from Newcastle University for the research on which this paper is based. Unreserved thanks go to the communities visited for their generous and enthusiastic welcome. Many thanks to participants of the 4\textsuperscript{th} ESRC Time-Space and Life-Course seminar, Durham University, for constructive comments on an earlier version of this paper. I wish to acknowledge valuable comments and suggestions made by three anonymous referees – and expert editorial guidance from Nigel Thrift.
INTRODUCTION

The ideals of collaborative living are today re-emerging in a number of collective housing experiments. Defining features typically include the clustering of smaller-than-average private residences to maximise shared open spaces for social interaction; common facilities for shared daily use; and non-hierarchical consensus-based resident management. Superficially at least, these characteristics oppose the ‘tyranny’ and ‘arrested development’ of individual dwelling that Charlotte Perkins Gilman observed in 1903, in the replication of a myriad routine domestic tasks in millions of separate homes (Gilman 2002: 10; Parker et al. 1994). While some aspects of domestic social reproduction have changed enormously in the West, there has been remarkably little appetite to reconfigure individual dwelling norms to any equivalent extent. Periodically since the early 20th century there have been experiments with ‘stripped down’ living quarters supplemented by central kitchens, family hotels and serviced blocks (Sullivan-Catlin 2007; Vestbro 1997; Hayden 1984), but the persistent cultural norm in both the UK and the USA remains that of conservative emphasis on privacy (Lawrence 1982) home-centred individualism (Ozaki 2002) and continually rising expectations of comfort, cleanliness and convenience (Shove 2003).

This paper explores the concept of collective housing, notably the North American model of purpose built cohousing, to better understand the coordination and social construction of space and time at the neglected scale of collective (co-located) inter-household collaboration. Critical evaluations of recent ‘urban village’ developments highlight the significance of a ‘social architecture’ to correspond with the priority usually given to the physical design and layout of individual buildings (Brindley 2003). Rather than to view the social and material as separate and consequently vulnerable to ‘add on’ status, this paper develops an integrated framework recognising all that it takes in a practical (and emotional) sense for individuals, households, and cooperative networks to ‘go on’ from one day to the next. Inspiration for this approach flows from the Nordic feminist housing and community project ‘New Everyday Life’ (Forskargrupperen) (Gullestad 1991) where the shared vision is of a more harmonious, creative and just society in which children’s and women’s needs and the social reproduction of all peoples and natures are valued as central motives for action (Jarvis
2005; Jarvis et al. 2009: 133). These concepts have been advanced by progressive planners (Horelli 2002; Booth and Gilroy 1999) but they remain under-developed in urban social studies. It is important to stress that these infrastructures are socially constructed, inhabited, negotiated, coordinated and embodied.

The paper is structured first to raise awareness of enduring but neglected visions of communality; then cohousing is differentiated from other intentional communities to locate this ‘pragmatic utopia’ (McCamant and Durrett 1994; Sargisson 2010) on a continuum of sites and systems of communality. A mix of primary and secondary ethnographic data is then discussed for eight communities, to develop an understanding of the infrastructures of daily life which evolve from, and ease, collective activity and the shared occupation of space.

PRIVACY AND CONNECTEDNESS
There is good reason to question cultural norms of individual dwelling in the UK and USA today, not only because of growing interest in cohousing, but also because the fastest growing demographics are one person and single parent households. Britons living alone in 2010 account for 29% of all households while the equivalent figure for the USA is 26% (ONS 2010; US Census of Population 2010). This highlights a paradox whereby yearning for connectedness coexists with neoliberal policies and cultural norms which promote self-reliance and the accumulation of private property (Sargisson 2010). Disaffection with feelings of isolation and harriedness in a work-centred culture (Schor 1992; Southerton 2003), can be witnessed in new social movements associated with communal dining (such as slow food, supper clubs, and national and regional events which seek to reconnect people with place and convivial contemplation) (Finz 2007; Miele and Murdoch 2003; Petrini 2001; The Big Lunch 2009). These trends converge in cohousing where shared meals that neighbours prepare and eat together in a common house are the ‘glue’ that binds and endows meaning to community relations (Meltzer 2005; Blank 2001).

MULTIPLE SCALES OF SOCIAL INTERACTION
Intentional communities are frequently viewed as ‘laboratories for testing and demonstrating new ideologies and social structures’ (Forster 1998: 39). Yet, few contemporary urban social studies appear to recognise this unique locus; one which has
greater scope for mutuality, cooperation, reciprocity and exchange than the household; one which is more routinely interconnected than the conventional street or apartment block.

Urban theorising on time has tended to relate this to urban space, technology and movement at a macro-scale (McCann 2003; Crang 2001; Graham and Marvin 2001), with sociological contributions at the micro-level focussing on the reconciliation or ‘juggling’ of home, work and daily life from a household perspective (see Bryson 2007 for a review; Jarvis 2005a). Bridging these two approaches, there is limited theorising of the multiple temporalities constructed and reproduced through resident interaction, where order and action in this ‘privatised public space’ (Lofland 1973) is shaped by shared arrangements for daily living. Research has drawn attention to resource sharing within virtual communities (such as freecycle) (Nelson et al. 2007), for specific populations of students and young professionals (Heath and Kenyon 2001; Chatterton 1999) and institutional or semi-institutional health care facilities (Parr 2000), but not situations where co-residence is intentional, enduring and dependent on human capital (time, sweat equity, emotional labour) as well as rent or mortgage payments.

There are two explanations why the lived experience of collective housing has been neglected and remains under theorised. Firstly, while a popular yearning for ‘traditional’ neighbourhoods and close-knit community affiliations has been widely reported, the impact of this ‘turn’ on urban planning and social policy has been dominated by debates on the new urbanism and the role of developers and the state. While undeniably influential and important, this focus effectively draws attention away from alternative low-impact and novel forms of urban coexistence (Talen 1999; but see Pickerall and Maxey 2009; Seyfang 2008). Secondly, the cohousing moniker implies a narrow ‘housing’ interest. Although a more enlightened field of housing studies today recognises the house and home as the ‘centre of a complex web of social networks and access to essential services’ (Coates and Fordham 2000: 2), terms such as ‘neighbourhood’ ‘community’ and ‘governance’ continue to excite greater cross-disciplinary engagement than do ‘house’ and ‘home’. Yet, what is innovative about cohousing is not the internal layout and external appearance of the home. Rather, it is the array of social, institutional and coordinating practices that together cultivate solidarity and shared endeavour. Moreover, what differentiates cohousing from other
new social movements which share similar (feminist, peace and ecology) motivations—
is co-location. Opportunities to collaborate daily within a particular locale contrast
with engagement in stretched out and fragmentary social networks (see Melucci 1989).

Opening up the meso-scale to closer scrutiny requires an integrated social-
environmental analysis, beyond that typically recognised as a ‘pattern language’ of
compact, barrier-free, ecological housing and landscape design (Alexander et al. 1977;
but see Williams 2005). As Louise Crabtree (2006: 713) observes, we need an
integrated approach to the way ‘houses, economies, citizenship and responsibility for
sustainability are viewed across social, economic and ecological spaces’. Before
expanding on the feminist ‘infrastructures of daily life’ from which this paper draws
inspiration, attention is drawn to the concepts and theories of time-space coordination
and the meaning(s) of time that elucidate the characteristics of daily life in cohousing.

PATHS, POCKETS AND PROJECTS

It is widely accepted that the objective properties of time and space (time-use, distance
and the coupling constraints of conventional time-geography) are co-constitutive with
the subjective social construction or ‘content’ of time (culturally specific rhythms,
routines and meanings and motives for action) (Dodgshon 1998; Golander 1995):
content and meaning function through parameters of possible coordination while
meanings of time are variable and unsettled (Greenhouse 1996: 93). At the same time,
undue emphasis on social construction runs the risk of neglecting well established
theories of integration to be found in the time-geography of Torsten Hägerstrand
(1982). In order to retain the legacy of an integrated ‘choreography of existence’, this
paper begins by acknowledging time-geography’s limitations (for instance Davies
2001), then seeks alternative, intersecting temporal constructions, that enhance
humanistic content.

Hägerstrand’s concept of ‘life-path’ traces the environmental influence of spatial-
temporal constraints (authority, capability and coupling) from day to day, from cradle
to grave, in a continuous and unique sequence of ‘projects’. The ‘projects’ of daily life
can be as habitual as preparing a meal or as long-term as building a home or planning a
career. The concept of project is used ‘to denote a goal directed undertaking’, while the
goals and projects can be themselves shaped by the everyday movement of individuals
through ‘pockets of local order over which (individuals) have greater or lesser degrees of control’ (Lenntorp 2004: 225). While it is possible to expand upon ‘pockets’ as representing local cultural practices, or moral rationalities, and ‘projects’ as being subject to mediation and transformation in negotiation with others, the linearity of the ‘life-path’ insufficiently represents daily life in cohousing: it fails to reflect the multiple, co-constitutive, existential qualities of lived, imagined and remembered time.

A non-linear perspective can be achieved from the combined concepts of Fernand Braudel’s historiography (from Hall 1980); Bergson’s ‘duration’ (from Bergson et al. 2003) and the ‘public time’ of Cornelius Castoriadis (1998). Braudel explains the coexistence of different temporalities by identifying three intersecting scales of objective time: everyday ‘surface’ events (brief and ephemeral moments); the history of groups or groupings; and the relationship of the human life-span to the ecological ‘everlasting time’ of the environment (Hall 1979; 1980). Anticipating the need to respect the variable nature of social time, Henri Bergson uses the concept ‘duration’ to signal mindful or creative (subjective) temporal states. While Braudel argues that all phenomena have their own temporal phases (Hall 1980: 116), Bergson highlights time’s ‘liquid’ and ‘elastic’ qualities (Grosz 2005: 102; 123). Significant to this project are insights gained, from these intertwined theories, of the unique rhythms and attachments associated with particular mental outlooks and social and political ecologies of dwelling. Finally, to appreciate and interrogate the multiplicity of rhythms, we need to consider the importance of learning. It is through habitual participation in collective projects and time-space relations that the residents of cohousing potentially share alternative temporal outlooks. For this we turn to the concept of ‘public time’.

SOCIAL SPACE, PUBLIC TIME
In general, cohousing clusters individual homes in a horseshoe so that front doors and porches face into the common house (a legacy of the pioneer settlers who would ‘circle the wagons’). This increases the proportion and variety of semi-public and public-relative to private and semi-private space. Cultural norms of privacy and private possession are challenged not only by alterations to land-use arrangement, but also by participatory design. Chuck Durrett (2010: oral comm.) describes a practice adopted when co-designing spaces between buildings. He asks prospective home-owners to
physically stand where their front doors would be on a conventional plot and then to adjust this position over the course of the cohousing co-design process. Repeating this exercise over the course of many months he witnesses a progressive lowering of privacy buffers until distances between front doors are reduced to 15 – 18 feet (5 to 6 metres) which is unusually close by US standards.

The suggestion is that participatory practices which challenge privatised dwelling also cultivate a ‘public time’ of collective engagement and learning. The Greek philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis conceived the notion of public time as a way of distinguishing collective orientations, ruminations, and practices which deepen democratic values from the instrumental discourse of ‘corporate time’ (Giroux 2003; Crang 2001). This temporal theorising has previously been applied to questions of shared cultural understanding (Crang 1994: Thrift 1996), and to critical pedagogy (Giroux 2003) and civil society (Bauman 2002; Sennett 1978) but not to the concrete, everyday realms of dwelling and community. Indeed, the original theory shuns ‘all the ‘trivial’ activities that make up daily life’ to concentrate within the public realm on ‘more ‘elevated’ activities, with weightier consequences, those which directly effect other people’s lives and those that aim at universal and lasting creations’ (Castoriadis 1998: 73). Yet, the values used to distinguish public time are also evident in cohousing: ‘passion for self-governing, actions informed by critical judgement, and a commitment to linking social responsibility and social transformation’ (Giroux 2003: 149).

The claim is not that those attracted to cohousing exercise single-minded resistance to an instrumental ‘time squeeze’. Collective living does not promise a life of leisure or reduced domestic labour as an antidote to conspicuous consumption and career burnout. Indeed, the commitment most cohousing residents demonstrate toward environmental conservation, volunteering and the development of community initiatives arguably adds a ‘second shift’ to income-generating activities. Instead, it is argued that the self-governing activities and the ‘examined life’ that cohousing instils (Carol Holst, interviewed in Milner 2008), opens up significant potential for different (emancipatory) temporalities, through mutuality and reflexive learning; working-group connections to the seasons, cycles and rhythms of growing, maintaining and celebrating shared land, property and events; and witnessing and adapting to ageing, crisis and renewal in the dwelling, community and external ecology.
INTENTIONAL COMMUNITIES

Lucy Sargisson (2000: 1) defines intentional communities as ‘groups of people who have chosen to live (and sometimes work) together for some common purpose beyond that of tradition, personal relationship or family ties’. This makes them communal in the sense that ‘people knowingly and willingly share aspects of living accommodation and material goods’ (Wood 1989: 6). By emphasising both collective activity and shared physical space the most straightforward and inclusive definitions coincide with a long and rich history of communal settlement and mutual cooperation (Metcalf 1995). Embedded within this tradition are expressions of resistance both to social isolation and modernity’s narrow, instrumental, unitary view of time and space – as well as a diverse variety of radical, social and political experimentation. Yet this appearance of a common ground can be highly problematic. It provokes paradoxical claims of certain yet contested understanding: one person’s commune is another person’s ‘mini Centre Parcs’ (Moorhead 2010) which for some embodies utopia while others find evidence of nostalgic, escapist, elitist, gated communities (Zukin 2010).

In the literature there is considerable slippage in the language and terminology used by practitioners and scholars with respect to a wide variety of intentional communities and other structures; including cohousing, ecovillages, housing cooperatives, communes and retreats. These forms may in practice involve very different groups of actors; from among grassroots resident pioneers, religious groups, developers, or the state, and they may be variously situated in urban, suburban or rural settings (Dawson 2006; Meltzer 2005; Bates 2003; Bamford 2001). An important distinction typically made in cohousing, for instance, is the absence of a shared economy or income pooling (Cohousing Association of the USA 2010). Arguably, further work is needed to distinguish new types of cohousing from other contemporary and historical modes of intentional community. A useful point of departure might be to visualise a continuum of sharing to privacy and to identify axes of difference in relation to, for instance, land use and architectural design, labour systems and income pooling, property codes, governance and interpersonal relationships (Crabtree 2008). Rather than to create a political or ideological pecking order, pitching ‘more private’ against ‘more communal’ communities, the aim of such a continuum should be to acknowledge the multiple, intersecting, locally constructed spheres of mediation which are continually in play to
ensure that neither the individual nor the group is submerged by the other (Sargisson 2001).

COHOUSING

The cohousing ‘housing-cum-neighbourhood’ type of intentional community (Bamford 2001: 2) was initially inspired by Danish boføllesskab (living-togetherness) and Swedish kollektivhus (collective housing) dating from the late 1960s (Vestro 1992). It was then ‘discovered’ and successfully promoted in the USA by architects Kathryn McCamant and Chuck Durrett. Cohousing accounts for a tiny fraction of new housing construction in the UK and USA today but the number of completed projects significantly under represents this mode of living. While there are 1714 intentional communities listed in the USA (95 in the UK; FIC 2010), the Cohousing Association of the USA (operating since 1997) lists 113 completed cohousing communities (the earliest dating from 1987 with 55 completed since 2000), together with a further 115 at various stages of ‘forming’ (group meetings, selecting a site, owning a site, building or retrofitting units) (Cohousing Association of the USA 2010). The UK Cohousing Network (established by volunteers in 2005) lists 10 existing cohousing communities established over the past thirty years (four in the last six years) and more than 20 ‘forming’ groups (UK Cohousing Network 2010). While recent activity does indeed suggest a renaissance in the concept, in practice fewer than 4,000 households actually live in cohousing in the US compared with an estimated 5% of Danish households (some 300 households in Britain) (UK Cohousing Network 2010).

METHODOLOGY

This paper draws on first hand ethnographic observations from eight collective housing communities; four located in the North of England; four located on the US West Coast. Further comparative and historical insights are drawn from observations, testimonials and published papers for additional cohousing communities in the UK, USA and Scandinavia. The sample of communities and methodologies shown in overview in Table 1 were selected to reflect key characteristics and variations associated with architectural design, shared resources, tenure and mode of development.

The UK ethnographic studies focus on small-scale adapted dwellings which reflect a climate in which the difficulties of acquiring land, finance and planning permission
tend to inhibit innovative new construction. Horizon and Fountain represent converted large historic buildings while Hearth and Briar comprise neighbouring houses which are owned and managed as cooperatives. Additional case study material from the Creating Cohousing Together national conference of the UK Cohousing Network 2010 offers insight to the achievements of the small number of existing (and proposed) purpose built projects (notably Springhill cohousing in Stroud).

The US sample focuses on the dominant North American model of purpose-built cohousing (see McCamant and Durrett 1988). Construction can be resident-led, developer-led or joint-venture but all typically emphasise participatory co-design between architects, developers and signed-up residents. In addition to these first hand accounts, the study benefits from secondary data and additional accounts of collective housekeeping through a review of existing research on similar communities (Williams 2005; 2008; Meltzer 2005).

The research approach draws on a fine-grained reading of dwelling designs and community settings, both from visual records (blue-prints, photographs and annotated maps) and tours of the sites to observe the arrangement and use of shared and private spaces. Contact was made with individual communities and a trusting relationship cultivated through established links with a number of on-line and off-line networks (the Fellowship of Intentional Communities, FIC; the Federation of Egalitarian Communities, FEC; COHO USA; the UK Co-Housing Network; Radical Routes and Diggers and Dreamers, UK). Several of these organisations have very sophisticated mechanisms for promoting the lifestyle practices of intentional communities, including annual conferences, organised tours, homes for sale notices, training programmes and publications on topics of widespread concern (such as newcomer induction, conflict resolution, consensus decision-making and alternative sources of community heat and power).

The cohousing community data are first extensively explored to build up a detailed picture of the infrastructures of daily life. Then, following the influence of Braudel, above, the data are interpreted in-depth at three temporal scales: the rhythms and routines of everyday life; the history and development of the group; and engagement with the living time of the natural environment. The paper refers both to interviewed
subjects and community groups by pseudonym to preserve anonymity. Real names are supplied for communities reported from existing public accounts already in the public domain.

Table 1: Sampling Frame and Research Methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Year Built</th>
<th>No. of Units</th>
<th>Tenure</th>
<th>Methodologies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North of England:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Eight semi-structured digitally recorded interviews with a total of 15 community members. One interview was conducted over a shared meal with 5 residents; one was a ‘focus group’ with 3 members representing the ‘pioneers’ who initiated their particular community; two interviews were with couples living in cohousing with young children and 3 were with one person households ranging in age. Data collection involved personal visits (to individual homes and through participation in communal meals) together with an audit of shared facilities and community notice-boards. Interviews were transcribed for thematic coding and narrative analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horizon</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Private O.O LLC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearth</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Cooperative Tenancy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Briar</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Cooperative Tenancy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fountain</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Registered charity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK: additional case study evidence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Materials from the UK Cohousing Network Creating Cohousing Together conference, April 2010; conversational interviews with UK Cohousing members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background studies of purpose built cohousing communities in Stroud and Lancaster</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Coast USA:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ten semi-structured digitally recorded interviews with a total of 22 community members. With the exception of one ‘focus group’ with pioneer members, all interviews were with individual households (one person or a couple) representing a cross-section of the age/family/employment profile of the community. Data collection involved personal visits (to individual homes and through participation in communal meals) together with an audit of shared facilities and community notice-boards. Interviews were transcribed for thematic coding and narrative analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Island</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Private O.O Cooperative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valley</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Private O.O LLC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orchard</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Private O.O LLC + non-profit rental</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harbour</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Private O.O LLC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA: additional case study evidence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Guided tours, conversational interviews with architect-developers and prospective residents; attendance at home meetings and presentations for a newly forming community, April 2010.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark and Sweden:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Guided tours of six communities (an extended period of residence in one). Conversational interviews and testimonies gained from participation at the International Collaborative Housing Conference, Stockholm, Sweden.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

INFRASTRUCTURES OF DAILY LIFE

There is rich evidence of mutuality, sharing, cooperation, reciprocity and exchange across the sample. Collective and reciprocal childcare occur in all of the communities (Orchard operates an on-site nursery). Meals are taken to elderly and sick neighbours (either prepared in the common house or by individuals) and pets are cared for when owners are away. Several of the communities have electric ‘pool’ cars which are
cooperatively owned and maintained. All of the communities pool large domestic appliances (washers, dryers, lawnmowers) and they maintain well equipped workshops for carpentry and heavy DIY. Innovative practices for circulating books, toys, recipes and DVD’s include on-line calendars, centralised storage and swap-shops. On-line calendars are used (in Horizon, Island, Valley, Orchard and Harbour) to coordinate and apportion common-use facilities such as guest rooms for which each household has access to an annual quota on a time-share basis. The general aim is to strip all non-essential or infrequent space-needs out of the individual dwelling: friends and relatives tend to visit a few days at a time, several times a year and for this level of use it is wasteful to set aside a permanent guest room in each private dwelling. This rationalisation is nevertheless complicated by the seasons when demand for these facilities exceeds supply.

As we shall see in the ethnographic vignettes, cohousing opens up different (collective, participatory, everlasting, examined, mindful) temporalities in the social spaces, moral codes and practical systems of sharing facilitated by the infrastructures of daily life in these particular settings. Yet, while these infrastructures are necessary to support residents who seek to ‘live lightly’, to fulfil the social, ecological and spiritual ambitions of communality, they are not sufficient. The infrastructures of sharing are inspirational but also in tension with competing networks, and subject to negotiation and compromise (see Jarvis 2005a on this duality within dual career couples).

In this sense the infrastructures of daily life in cohousing include not only mechanisms for reciprocity and exchange but also, crucially, circuits of learning, doing, being and becoming. These can be progressive and transformative or conservative and inhibiting. We learn from these communities that social networks alone are insufficient: a mesh-work of social, spatial, material and institutional infrastructures all contribute to lived experience. This is illustrated in the setting at Briar, where two detached houses make up the community space; each has a functioning kitchen but most of the time meals are cooked and eaten collectively with one house providing a shared living room and the other house accommodating a large dining-cum-meeting room. Food is bought in bulk from a wholesaler and paid for collectively for general consumption. Use of different spaces across the two houses changes over time in response to resident turnover (at
present, for instance, none of the single/partnered adult residents have children) and as a function of sharing a physically divided space.

Ms. Angus observes that social contact between the two detached dwellings changes with the seasons. In summer, when it is fine, activities that normally occur indoors (such as cooking, eating and socialising) spill out into the shared garden and social interactions unfold with ease. In wet weather and through the dark winter months ‘it can be a bit of a pain to trek through the garden for meals and meetings’ and at such times there is a tendency for the two houses to manage routine aspects of housekeeping separately. At the same time, she suggests that continued physical separation allows a degree of flexibility over what is shared and how much privacy is available for those who need to withdraw from shared living periodically.

At Horizon, everyday social interaction is strongly influenced by the unique spatial arrangement whereby twelve individual households are accommodated in an eighteenth century manor house. Rooms on the ground floor of the house have been retained for common use, with two staircases leading to individual owner occupied flats above. Although a significant proportion of the interior space (and all of the exterior grounds) are shared in common, the flats themselves are fully self contained, each with kitchen, bathroom, living and sleeping areas. Residents routinely meet in the shared lobby where newspapers, bread, milk and personal mail are delivered and they work together in teams at the weekends to maintain the house and grounds.

At Hearth, residents live as multiple households (singles, couples, single parents, children of a variety of ages) in four terraced homes, each joined in pairs, the two pairs separated by a full length ground floor ‘alley’ to the garden behind. To the passer by these houses look identical to other terraced houses lining both sides of this inner city street. Yet a communicating door has been inserted into the internal party wall of each pair of houses and this facilitates shared childcare and close social contact between interdependent family groups. Externally, the removal of fences dividing four discrete garden areas has created a large space for collective vegetable production and a number of sheds and out-buildings have been rationalised to provide shared resources on a scale unimaginable for any household to stock and maintain individually.
The mobilisation of local information and communication technologies (ICT) is widespread in cohousing; used among co-located residents to increase (rather than replace) face to face social interaction. On the one hand, Mr. Ellwood was keen to stress that ‘emails are a nice supplement but (this technology) shouldn’t be the heart of community interaction’. He cited recent examples at Island where notice boards and art installations had been used to celebrate community events in unique ways: ‘we have all phases of life so when a baby’s announced there’s a baby meter, you know, and when someone passed away recently…. I don’t want that as an email!’ On the other hand, Orchard makes use of a number of different email lists, each serving discrete functions within the community; one is for business meetings and agenda; one is for advertising units for sale and public outreach; one is called ‘chat’ for anyone wishing to make immediate contact with anyone else in the community who is online at the time. The chat facility is useful to announce a trip to the library or the grocery store, to ask if anyone who is housebound needs anything fetching, or to encourage others to join in a picnic or trip to go berry picking. Customised meal-plan software are also used (at Orchard and at Valley) to promote opportunities for spatial efficiencies and social interaction. For instance, if a group of residents want to go out for a meal or order in a pizza they can do so and charge the cost to the meal-plan, noting those involved, and this will feature in their monthly accounts. Similarly, the meal-plan takes account of individual purchases from the community pantry enabling small households to fetch bulky dry goods (beans, flour, sugar, rice) one cup at a time from a communal store, charging this to the meal-plan, thus minimising the private space needed for storage. These arrangements demonstrate not only the intertwining of real-time, co-present, and time-shifted on-line interactions but also the interdependence of these infrastructural networks with multiple economies (see Gibson-Graham 2003).

THREE SCALES OF TEMPORALITY:  
(1) THE TEMPORAL SCALE OF EVERYDAY LIFE  
In cohousing the social and material infrastructures noted above cultivate different temporalities whereby, following Braudel, different phenomena correspond with distinct temporal phases. At the ‘pocket’ scale of everyday habits, norms and local order, community members experience an evolutionary process of conforming, modifying or rejecting collective cultural styles of engagement while negotiating their own positions on privacy and communality.
Mr and Mrs Chen describe the initial phase of settling into life at Island after moving there from ‘sururbia’. They had visited a number of cohousing communities before settling with Island and they were aware that ‘in structure they are quite similar, but obviously they each have their own cultural style’: one they visited struck them as testing their taste for communality in that ‘they sing at every meal; they stand up and sing together which, now, I’m quite used to that idea, that wouldn’t be such a weird thing, but 9 years ago we were like, oh, that is a little intense!’ Then, when they moved to Island, they had to establish their own boundaries relative to others in the community, a process which they describe as evolving and changing over time and in relation to their family transitions, now caring for two young children.

We had neighbours that lived right across the way here who were high on the scale of spontaneous, impromptu visiting. We had just moved in and, like we told you, we were moving from suburbia, we weren’t quite used to it, and one day we come home and we find a loaf of zucchini bread inside our house, on the table, and we are looking at each other – ‘how did that get in here?’ and we both said ‘somebody must have come in’. And in the beginning it freaked us out, but now it’s fine because we know it’s anybody here and it’s just done out of niceness. And then we later find out, oh he said, ‘I did come in, I’m sorry, but I didn’t want to leave it outside because of the cats’. So it’s all fine. But if that were to happen in a standard suburban cul-de-sac people would call the police!

The time each household spends in a particular community tends to increase the likelihood of adaptation to the social codes of trust and ‘niceness’ whereby balance is achieved within the group. In cohousing this process goes further than one of subtle cultural assimilation because so many routine activities in and around the shared site are subject to extensive common meeting deliberation and ultimately questions of group policy. Other practices, such as leaving dwelling doors open or unlocked are unregulated but, in this example, with the general absence of door numbers or bells and the popular use of chalk boards to announce family news, there is the suggestion of a widely shared culture of openness. At the same time, individual and collective entities are in a continual state of tension in their position on the sharing-to-privacy (or light to deep ecology) continuum.
This is reinforced by what Mr Ellwood (Island) calls the ‘learning curve’ (public time) of cohousing; personal growth and change which may reflect a progressive movement toward a desired goal (such as reduced working hours or low impact ecological practices), or which may change course as a function of intersecting and colliding identifications beyond the community. Mr Ellwood recounts the case of ‘one member (who) moved to a more advanced form of intentional community’ as an example of the personal journey engendered by continual questioning and critical reflection in cohousing. In this case the person to choose a more extreme lifestyle of sharing, where the community is the primary social bond, ‘was not the person we predicted that of’.

The infrastructures developed to support large communal meals also cultivate a unique temporal rhythm. Island, Valley, Orchard and Harbour all operate a rota system for communal meals whereby teams of 4 will take it in turns to prepare and serve an evening meal for 60 rather than to have 30 households each cooking meals for 2 or 3. It is not only the scheduling and coordination of team rotas and the meal plan technologies involved, that influence this rhythm, but also the physical and social activities themselves, and the qualitatively different meaning and status assigned to ‘communal’ as opposed to ‘family’ cooking and domestic labour.

Mrs Trentmann, a senior at Harbour, observes how the six-week cycle of group cooking and cleaning duties produces a particular rhythm to her life which is less linear than she previously experienced as a mother when cooking every night for a nuclear family. She claims to be energised by the weeks that she cooks and cleans for the whole group and she is also more appreciative of receiving meals prepared by others. This resonates with the 1960s feminist ideology of cooperative ‘self work’ which emphasised that liberation from domestic drudgery could be achieved by making everyday chores more enjoyable through collective activity rather than by outsourcing them to other women as a function of ‘rational life’ efficiency and convenience (Vestbro 1992).

Temporal variations also unfold from cultural and geographic variations in communal dining practice, as well as the skills and tasks involved in preparing meals for large numbers. The rhythm and meaning of shared meals differ, for instance, between family-style dining (platters of food served to each table) and a buffet arrangement
(self-serve from a counter). Similarly, catering for inter-generational communities can highlight concerns about parenting styles or the timing and duration of meals where the noise of children playing distracts other children from eating or impinges on the ‘slow food’ appreciation of older residents (Blank 2001). In short, using the example of participation in shared meal arrangements, we begin to see the different temporalities that the shared spaces, activities and conscious living of cohousing open up at the scale of the everyday.

(2) THE TEMPORAL SCALE OF GROUP HISTORY

The ‘intricate tapestry’ of temporal rhythms associated with home, work, homemaking and the reconciliation of these through tactics and technologies of coordination (Adam 1995; Power 2009) is further shaped in cohousing by group participatory processes and a shared local history of development. Added to the life-course and personal journey of the individual and the household is the life-course of the group.

Cohousing communities typically begin life as a core group of ‘burning souls’ who meet regularly, often over several years, before they acquire the land, finance and additional members necessary to realise the goal of homes they can move into. This process is one of four stages (forming, storming, norming, performing) identified in Tuckman’s (1965) seminal work on group development. These stages provide a useful lens through which to appreciate the powerful intersecting influence that shared meanings and memories have on the everyday practices noted above. Table 2 illustrating this process is the case of Springhill, the first purpose built cohousing to be built in the UK.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tuckman’s Four Stages of Group Development</th>
<th>The group history of Springhill Cohousing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forming</td>
<td>In 2000, David Michael bought a 2 acre site close to the centre of his home town. He recruited 15 households, each paying £5000 to become shareholders in the limited company which was established to own the site. The group appointed a team of architects and together they co-designed a variety of house types, ground plans and a common house. Individual households chose their plot and paid their share of the completed land purchase. By the end of the first year the core group had doubled in size and planning permission for the first building stage was granted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group formation is characterised by individual members operating independently while at the same time sharing in a positive desire to be conciliatory and to keep busy. The Springhill experience suggests that some cohousing groups never move beyond this stage because they lack ‘a strong, very determined individual or small group’ (Comfort 2008). Group narratives that derive from this stage emphasise the visionary, maverick and tenacious qualities of the core group³.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
was secured (on the second attempt and after a successful appeal) for 35 homes ranging from five-bedroom houses to one bedroom and studio flats for a mix of families, couples and single people (some younger, others retired). The group was ready to begin the construction of their community – physically and in terms of how it would operate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Storming</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This is the most turbulent stage of group development when conflicts emerge and some members inevitably drop out. Irrespective of the ultimate success of the finished homes and community amenities, the storming stage represents a fundamental stage of ‘maturation’ from which some groups might never emerge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The group encountered a number of obstacles in securing mortgages to finance the construction of individual homes and the business plan and timetable had to be changed several times. This knock on effects for each household in terms of their anticipated moving date. Finding a contractor also proved difficult because the project was unconventional and the group was viewed by a notoriously conservative industry as a high-risk. After further delays and the need to find additional funds, the first group of residents began to move in from September 2003 and by May 2005 the construction side of the project was complete.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Norming</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This is the stage when agreement and consensus can be achieved effectively. Big decisions are made by consensus while smaller decisions may be delegated to a working group before they are brought back to the group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Since moving in the Springhill have been busy both with their own individual efforts of home-making and with their the work of self-governance. Compromises have been made, notwithstanding claims to consensus decision-making, and measures for ensuring adequate levels of both privacy and communality have had to be negotiated through regular, sometimes intense, community meetings. Decision-making can take a very long time (for example the ethnographic studies exposed the question of a pet policy as a common sticking point) and not everyone participates equally enthusiastically in the process.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is possible rather than inevitable for groups to reach a high-performing stage of group development in which the group functions without conflict as a unit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In cohousing, the need to refresh and revive consensus among a continually changing group (as residents move out, or die, and others move in) suggests that group orientations and resulting narratives periodically cycle through earlier development practices.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The legacy of memories and inter-personal relations, accumulated through participation in group project development, does not simply represent a discrete ‘historical’ temporal phase. It would be a mistake, for instance, to interpret from Table 2 a chronological ‘life path’ for the group as a whole. The fleshy, emotional, lived realities of this process once again highlight, in Bergson’s terms, the ‘elastic’ qualities of time. One example is the ‘stuck record’ tendency for past conflicts to stall or subvert decisions in the present and for the future. Another is the function of different temporal horizons,
whether this relates to an anticipated house move (the prospect of homelessness or the release of a loan); ageing, diminishing health or a sense of urgency associated with preserving a particular plot of land. For some forming groups there is the sense that finding community is about ‘the journey not the destination’. For others there is palpable frustration and impatience to ‘achieve this (place) in my lifetime’ whether as a place to raise children or as a place to retire.

3. ECOLOGICAL TEMPORALITIES AND LIFECOURSE

The three temporal scales articulated in this paper are not only objective (linear only is as far as ‘each Now has a past which has a past which has already happened and is thus closed to intervention’) (Husserl 1928; Hall 1980: 117) but also subjectively experienced. Illustrating this, researchers have elsewhere developed a ‘heightened sense of the manifold ways people attach themselves to place, inscribe it with meaning and construct it through discursive acts of imagination’ (Reinders and van der Land 2008: 1). This is clearly evident where the ‘everlasting’ ecological time scale exhibits a linear life-course (‘seasonal cycles and processes of ageing and decay’) which is unsettled, recalled and invented through complex functions of encounter, memory and symbolic imagining (Power 2009; Jones and Cloke 2002; Crang and Travlou 2001).

The story of the Grandmother Oak at Orchard offers useful insight to this co-constitution of objective-subjective people-place relations across multiple, intersecting temporal scales. The stages of group development and the participatory process of co-design at Orchard follows a familiar pattern and it took seven years of triumph and turbulence from the first planning meeting to the final realisation of a long imagined dream. This seven year period saw a group of geographically disconnected households, acting ‘like next-door neighbours from a distance’, raise funds, identify and purchase a site, appoint a sympathetic architect and recruit additional members.

When the original members bought the land which they went on to develop they employed a tree specialist to help them decide which trees could be taken down and which should be preserved to retain a mature landscape. Wherever possible, the felled timber was incorporated into the finished structure such that exposed oak beams and interior doors in the common house appear to ‘speak’ of the strong roots of the community in this place and its ecology. One of the most ancient trees to be preserved
was given the affectionate title Grandmother Oak and by consensus it was decided that the axis and arrangement of all the dwellings should be oriented toward this one tree. From the very beginning the oak represented a shared symbol of the group’s pro-environmental orientation—its imposing presence conveyed a sense of permanence which encapsulated the aspirations and vision of the group.

Shortly after the common house was finished—when the community was holding a tree-planting party, Grandmother Oak ‘toppled to the ground……she just gave up’ (it was as if she) said ‘you’re here now, I’m going!’ Again by consensus, the community decided to place a framed picture of Grandmother Oak in the common house and to recycle her timber into the landscape as log seating. Residents refer to the almost spiritual presence of Grandmother Oak, watching over the decisions reached by the community in their monthly meetings, as a guardian of the site.

There is a powerful sense in which the residents of Orchard reproduce a collective temporality through the intermediations of this memory and artefact. It is once again helpful to draw on Bergson’s concept of ‘duration’ to understand this ‘mindful’ accord with ‘everlasting’ time. Similarly, we recognise that ecological time can be both individual and collective: it is a personal communion and a shared memory, ‘a memory that prolongs the before into the after…a continuity that coincides with the very fluidity of (the) inner life’ (Bergson et al. 2003: 205). Elizabeth Grosz depicts this Bergson-inspired convergence of objective/subjective time, action/intuition and a nature which is both within and without us— as the process by which ‘consciousness emerges from and establishes itself through … a relation of debt and belonging’ (Grosz 2005: 119). The ontologies of debt and belonging succinctly communicate how participatory design in cohousing cultivates an enduring collective debt of ‘belonging’ and ‘becoming’ in relation to enduring attachments to the natural history of the dwelling site.

CONCLUSION
Arguably, the attributes of co-location distinguish cohousing from geographically stretched out social movements and non-residential groups. In cohousing, connections are made between housing, resource conservation, mutuality and responsibility for sustainability, that are not readily accessible at the scale of individual dwelling. Crucial to making these connections is an understanding of the infrastructures of daily life
which evolve from, support and reproduce collective activity and the shared occupation of space. By drawing attention to the multiple temporalities that shared amenities and collective decision-making open up, this paper rejects the suggestion often made from architectural observations alone, that proximity and social contact are sufficient to cultivate conviviality and cooperation between residents. Instead, an integrated approach is emphasised whereby a continuous sequence of movement-and-project-coordinating aspects of time-geography is acknowledged-but only as one of several intersecting temporalities. Evidence that social and cultural constructions of time are variable and unsettled, that individual ‘life paths’ (and group histories) can be recalled and invented through encounter, memory and imagination, requires us to recognise non-linear temporalities as co-constituents of this integrated frame of analysis.

Drawing on the seminal work of Braudel, Bergson, and Castoriadis, and applying these ideas to ethnographic data for eight communities, different temporal phases and non-linear temporal constructions, notably public time, mindful time, everlasting time, are found to be cultivated by the infrastructures of daily life in cohousing. In particular, Bergson’s appreciation of ‘duration’, a consciousness of the fragile and intimate connection between human belonging and stewardship of the earth, resonates with the ‘examined life’ and quest to ‘live lightly’ expressed by a majority of cohousing residents.

Cohousing provides a system of governance, and an infrastructure, an economy of scale and a culture of peer support, within which to solve some of the problems of ‘excess’ in a culture emphasising privacy and individualism. At the same time, individual demand for shared amenities fluctuate with the seasons, and peak times of the day, such that practices correspond not only with that which is possible (and intended) but also that which results from compromise and unintended consequences: local practices vary and do not necessarily fulfil the potential for conservation and collaboration.

There are, however, compelling reasons why collective housing should be considered a priority for further research and dissemination. From the influence of the ‘new urbanism’ and ‘smart growth’ it is evident that states, developers, policy makers and practitioners are looking for new models of sustainability and ways of empowering communities. Yet the limited, sometimes damaging, influence of ‘cosmetic’ neo-
traditional design is well rehearsed (Graham and Marvin 2001: 415; Brindley 2003; Talen 1999). Experiments and innovations in collective housing may not prove to be the most ‘radical’ solutions over the long term, but they do represent a necessary shift toward fundamentally rethinking how and where people live, to promote sustainability, in the future. The energy efficiency arguments alone (fewer building materials, combined heat and power) are compelling; added to these are the need to address the social isolation and absence of reciprocal welfare characteristic of the rising number of smaller households, many with high support needs.

Nevertheless, there are obstacles (and prejudices) which appear to inhibit necessary debate and the engagement of planners and policy-makers. One explanation is that ideas on communal living have been stigmatised by 1970s stereotypes. Frequently there is hostile insistence that the quest for intentional community is yet another expression of gentrification. In reality there is striking evidence not only that we are witnessing a renaissance in communality, but that these settings really are ‘testing and demonstrating’ innovative approaches to ecology, food production, carbon reduction and low-impact architecture (Forster 1998). The paradox is that we have many examples of successful sharing and of a deep yearning for meaningful reciprocity, historically and in the current renaissance, yet there is a persistent reluctance by the state and mainstream debate to invest in this vision. This paper has sought to raise awareness of some of the compelling reasons why collective housing should be made a priority for consideration in future planning and policy.
References


Communal dining was made fashionable in London in the 1930s in the Pritchards’ Isobar restaurant which served residents and guests of the Isokon building on Lawn Road, London. The Isokon building was a Le Corbusier inspired experiment in modern living: there was a communal kitchen and restaurant and a range of domestic services made it possible to strip down individual apartments to minimal living space. News reports suggest that single professionals in major cities such as London and San Francisco are embracing the concept of communal dining at restaurants where random seating with strangers at refectory tables promotes connectedness.

It is widely recognised that by working with the dominant tenure of owner occupation, the most popular model of purpose built cohousing does not confront issues of social exclusion nor yet offer a viable means of generating affordable housing (Williams 2008).

Horizon pioneers describe themselves in 1979 as a group of drinking buddies who drew up the plan to buy a historic home and live there as a collective on the back of a beer mat. Yet this core group were also local government employees in marriages and with young children who faced several years of living on a building site sacrificing evenings and weekends to contribute the ‘sweat equity’ required to complete individual homes for everyone in the community.