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# **EXPLORING THE LIFEWORLDS OF COMMUNITY ACTIVISTS**

## **An investigation of incompleteness and contradiction**

A thesis submitted to Middlesex University for the degree of  
Doctor of Professional Studies

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2014

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## **ABSTRACT**

*This research investigates the lifeworlds of community activists, paying particular attention to the issues of incompleteness and contradiction. My interest in the subject area arises from a three-fold context – the development of my own subjectivity; enhancement and understanding of work-based learning; and the impact of structural inequalities, privileges and hierarchies embedded within UK society.*

*This study deploys a multi-site action research (MSAR) methodological framework to explore (auto)biographical accounts of activists' working contexts. Using a combination of appreciative inquiry and Lacanian analysis, the methods of this research enable an investigation and impact analysis of how political difference is formulated, articulated and mobilised in landscapes, established and characterised by disparity of access, injustice and social struggle. Hence, having identified and celebrated the key contours of community activism, these findings are critiqued and placed within the wider turbo-capitalist context.*

*In response to the aforementioned critique, this research concludes by exploring the opportunities and challenges faced by community activists in a global age. Particular focus is given to the issues of weakness, abeyance within social movements, cracks within the capitalist system, and anarchic readings and future developments of community activism.*

**Key words:** community activism; work-based learning; anarchy; social movements; identity formulation: incompleteness and contradiction; appreciative inquiry; weakness; turbo-capitalism.

## **INTRODUCTION – GROUNDING MY WORK-BASED LEARNING**

Due to the fact that this research is grounded within data and reflections from my own working praxis, it seems appropriate to begin this thesis with identifying both the context of my work-based practice; and what is my explicit practice. Having done this I then shall give particular attention and explanation to my current working context.

### **Naming the unnameable**

I think the task of identifying the context of my work-based practice and what my explicit practice is best achieved, by exploring the concept of culture(s) of knowledge transference and communities of practice. I start at this point, because I see knowledge transference as an inter-section between the core of my individual self and my various working contexts. Let me explain.

The first point to be made is that I work and live with the key intention of remaining as unnoticed and hidden as possible. I recognise that this may seem a strange statement when talking about developing cultures of knowledge transference; and communities of practice. However, this strong commitment to exploring a 'hidden praxis', has meant that I have had to create and forage for learning ontologies, which are not dependent on hierarchical structures (i.e. job roles, chain of command decision making, centralisation of budgets); public events (i.e. conferences, speaking engagements); written and spoken published material (i.e. books, pamphlets, podcasts, blogs); personal or organisational promotional activities (i.e. business cards, websites, branding logos). In replacement to the above said practices and paraphernalia, I have become reliant on ways of being and praxis, which are rooted in long-term friendships; consensus decision making; small group gatherings; and resilient relational network development. Thus, in understanding and constructing the culture(s) of knowledge transference and communities of practice, in which I work, particular attention needs to be given to the interaction of my individual agency and epistemological beliefs within the development of work-based learning.

It is my understanding that learning within the workplace is a process and consequence of relational interdependence between individuals and social practices that compromise their working contexts. This relational interdependence is an imperative, I believe, due to the fact that forces of social construction (comprising of societal norms, practices and values, and their enactment) or personal agency alone are not equipped to establish situ in which cultures of learning can be established or changed (Billet & Smith 2011). Therefore, the culmination of my commitment to a 'hidden praxis';

and the incompleteness of both individual agency and social constructionist paradigms, requires an ongoing reflective analysis, which enables vibrant and fragile cultures of knowledge transference to take place. In so doing, I am continually attempting to explore ways in which knowledge transference and communities of practice develop within the relational interdependence between individuals and social practices, which embrace and develop cultures of learning that challenge the dominant norms of 'organisation in the age of managerialism' (Parker 2002).

Hence, I am fascinated by the processes involved in the identification and subsequent development of worlds of perception. Or what Merleau-Ponty (1995: x) calls lifeworld, which is:

'...not a science of the world, it is not even an act, a deliberate taking up of position; it is the background from which all acts stand out, and is presupposed by them...we judge the world in relation to our experience of it, and at the same time the world or an object of the world is present, even if we are not aware of it at the moment. It is there whether or not we experience it. And it is present, as lifeworld, already when researchers start to think and to identify it.'

My praxis is one of exploration rather than expertise, developing and aligning myself with (emerging) traditions and patterns that reject hierarchy and authority, seeking instead to build communities that are organised and maintained without these usually ubiquitous features. Again, my praxis seeks to contribute and create counter-discourse(s) to the managerialism, which I believe is seeping in all areas of public and private life. In doing so, I seek to collaborate and propagate cultures of work-based practice, which embody (incarnate) alternative ways of being that can be cross-fertilized across cities and regions of the UK.

Thus, I would say that I believe I am wrestling with the ongoing desire and challenge to find ontological pathways, which can change our local, trans-local, global and metaphysical levels of interaction and existence. In other words, investigating the capacity to de-naturalize the dominant reality by imaginatively transcending what are seen as current spiritual, material and economic limitations (Reedy 2002). Such activities require that I am continually moving between and through the roles and functions of host; facilitator; agent provocateur; early adopter; community protagonist; and listener.

As stated, paradoxically, I seek to engage in such activities in the most hidden ways possible. This is not simply a point of preference, but an epistemological and ontological commitment. I seek to

conduct myself in a radically hidden different way, whilst developing counter-cultural spaces in which individuals and groups can think and act differently from the surrounding dominant culture of Neoliberalism<sup>1</sup> and its name making, logo driven economic systems. This means avoiding public recognition, platforms and plaudits as much as is reasonably possible. It also means (see below) that these desires and aims have been explored and somewhat reproduced within my various working contexts.

Furthermore, it is important to state that I engage in these activities with the knowledge that such alternative-narrative intentions cannot ever be fully recognised, but rather act as a counter-reality by which our existing dominant ideologically distorted communication may be evaluated. This research investigates further the:

‘...general sense in which [community activists and] urban social movements are becoming more integrated in existing social structures...with a tendency for state programmes to now partner with activists and movement organisations even if the latter seek to implement their own visions of a social economy, empowerment, sustainable neighbourhoods, etc.’ Pink (2012:9)

Therefore, it would be true to say that in terms of my work -based practice, I see myself engaging in experimentation; facilitation; and consciousness-raising, which may in some circles be seen as the pursuit of utopianism (Fournier 2002) - continually grappling with the challenge and use of power; the search of meaning; and the manner in which we attempt to engage in change. However, I also understand myself to be engaged in a landscape, where:

‘It makes sense to speak of neo-liberal policy as a passive revolution. The new subject [including community activist] is agile and clever, but this agility is confined to personal life and private profits, thus severing the experience of how to bring ... the struggle for a better [collective] life.’Barfuss (2011: 847)

I find this conception of passive revolution<sup>2</sup> helpful and insightful, as it suggests a series of processes that domesticate individual development and struggle within history-making acts, which seem to be

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<sup>1</sup> Neoliberalism - An approach to economics and social studies in which control of economic factors is shifted from the public sector to the private sector. Drawing upon principles of neoclassical economics, neoliberalism suggests that governments reduce deficit spending, limit subsidies, reform tax law to broaden the tax base, remove fixed exchange rates, open up markets to trade by limiting protectionism, privatize state-run businesses, allow private property and back deregulation.

<sup>2</sup> The term passive revolution was previously used by Antonio Gramsci in his *Prison Notebooks*. Gramsci used the term in reference to a societal change which did not take the form of rupture or revolution. A slow gradual metamorphosis which could take years or generations to accomplish.

progressive but which ultimately serve the dominant Neoliberal agenda. Here we can witness revolution in reverse – grass-roots mobilisation(s) being commodified within a top-down counter-reformation – a counter-reformation that simultaneously appreciates and shows partial support to the emancipation of its citizens, whilst strengthening its grip of power.

Finally, it is important to state that my praxis should not be confused with two historical typologies, which are easily evoked when thinking about consciousness-raising, namely, the charismatic leader; or revolutionary vanguard spokesperson. In thinking, not only about my personal ontology, but also the work-based context(s), this is extremely important. I view both of these options as having a long term detrimental effect upon, contributing to and propagating radical cultures of knowledge transference. My main contestation at this point is that these typologies have a strong tendency to default towards centralisation, be it around an individual; and or Party. Further still, in making such a judgement I am left with seeking ways of being which not only avoid these defaults, but go in search of participatory cultures, through which alternative and marginalised voices and praxis can be explored and encouraged within decentralised and networked contexts.

I can now turn more explicitly to the description and analysis of my current employment.

### **Sowing Seeds**

For the last seven years I have been involved in the creation and development of a grass-roots network of community activists and projects. In terms of the official position I hold within this network, my title is that of Trustee/Director; however, this is purely a legal title required because the network is a charity (officially known as the Seedbed Christian Community Trust). Hence, this title is never used, unless under very specific circumstances, such as liaison with the Charity Commission.

A more appropriate way of understanding my work-based context and [praxis](#) is by considering further what we do and, more importantly, how we do it. Seedbed currently offers support to over two thousand community initiatives, covering areas such as the environment, journalism, film making, youth development, poverty and people trafficking. The network has developed via the cultivation of fifty locality-based groups, mainly in urban contexts, supported by a part-time national development team of which I am part. Our engagement involves:

- **Distribution of money:** we have a small grants programme, which offers up to £5000 per year to projects from an annual national pot of £5,000,000.

- **Cultivation of communication:** we support numerous communication tools (locality websites, literature, face-to-face events, etc.) within the local networks. These explore and strengthen connections amongst local actors and projects.
- **Shared learning:** open spaces in and through which learning at a local, trans-local and national level can take place, thus exploring the wider socio-political and economic issues affecting and connected to the grass-roots networks (see Appendix 1).

However, it is in understanding the praxis of our approach that the most insight into my current working context can be gained. Basically, the ongoing desire and struggle for a more just and equitable world has shaped every aspect of our activities. This is evidenced in multiple ways, but here are some key characteristics and indicators to be found in my working context:

- For the past five years we have devolved the majority (approximately 95%) of our budget to locality groups. In practice, this means that there is no central control of how support is received or who receives support from our grants programme.
- As a direct response to the wider culture of (charity) managerialism, branding, and celebrity name making, and its connection with Neoliberalism. Seedbed has no public face (no logo, website, business cards, etc.). Hence every connection we have is built on face-to-face relationships, trust and counter-cultural subversion. Our aim is to remain, as much as possible, 'under the radar' of structural powers.
- Following the above, Seedbed is better understood as a series of (conceptual) incubation spaces, rather than named as a charity (a requirement of the Charity Commission). We aim to release the dreams, visions and hearts' desires of people and initiatives that are not found within mainstream structural, financial or political power or influence.

In conclusion, I shall now focus directly on the specific contribution I make to this network. In doing so, I shall link back the underpinning 'big ideas' that drive my engagement, the key characteristics of my praxis (discussed above), and the areas of incompleteness and contradiction that I seek to tackle via this research.

It is essential to make clear that my praxis is embedded in the idea of translating and interpreting ideas, experiences and failures from person to person, group to group, and network to network. One of my key skills is to dislodge and disrupt the day-to-day experiences of community activists (myself included), so that they may be able to see alternative or more radical options in their change-making activities.

Central to these activities is the distribution, sharing and dialogue, within my working relationships, of political, theological, academic and economic theories and practices. The importance of understanding the connections that I make between day-to-day activism and these sources cannot be overstated. I emphasise this so as to avoid being misunderstood as over-intellectualising my work-based learning within this study. This thesis is littered with academic references drawing from the traditions of anarchy, social movements, network theory, theology etc., all which are and have been highly influential for my ongoing identity (de)construction and working praxis. However, the importance of this point, at this time, is to make clear the way in which I continually share and distribute this thinking within my day-to-day practice. In doing so, I am continually making an effort to break down the prominent dualism between academia and practical engagement.

At its best, I believe social science is an integrated component to social movement and change. My distinct and primary aim and contribution is to explore cultures of knowledge transference in which this admirable aim can become manifest. The methods I use to explore this include cafe napkins, workshop spaces, animated films and academic research. I value all of these methods with the same measure, challenging any privileging (i.e. academic accolade) or counter-privileging (i.e. anti-intellectualism). Underpinning all of this is a deep faith, a faith that history can be changed by people who are not in possession of the 'levers of mainstream power'. David Graeber (2001:xii) suggests this means:

'accepting that people, in part of social movements of one kind or another, might be capable of affecting the course of history in a significant way. That alternatives can indeed be created, and not just come about. That would in turn mean having some serious thought to what role intellectuals can legitimately play in the process, and how they might do so without fomenting the kind of stupid sectarian dogmatism we've so often ended up fomenting in the past.'

Nonetheless, so as to avoid any sense of idealism, it is also important to state that I use academic insight and frames to expose personal and collective fault lines and vested interests present within my work-based environments – identifying the links between the making of power, meaning and change. In other words, part of my translation and interpretation of the day-to-day is to explore the incompleteness and contradictions (i.e. relationships of community activists to the wider consumer lifestyle; relationships of community activists to money and economic systems) littered throughout the landscape of my own and others' lives. Hence, the primary reason for embarking on this research adventure, in a nutshell, is to try and make further sense of this world and my life!!

In seeking to frame some of the primary thinking connected to these areas, I shall now:

- Identify the core motivational factors in my life that cause me to engage in the work that I do.

- Give clarity and definition to what I understand as work-based learning.
- Give an account of my current 'professional/working role', paying particular attention to the dynamic interaction of lifeworld experience and academic interpretation.

Let me start by making it very clear, this thesis represents a quest for meaning; and an ongoing struggle for liberation. As the following words and pages shall display, the influences which initiated me in this quest began from an early age. Influences which raised questions concerning liberation, representation, identity and the propagation of communities and societies in which we can struggle for a better local and global future.

This requires a continual exploration into the complex landscapes in which subjectivity is constructed and constituted by language; the relationship among discourse, social justice and action; historical memory, the connection between interpretation and historical practice; and how forms of authority may be addressed and justified in the context of pedagogy and practice (Freire 1993).

It is important to acknowledge that my initial concept of work in my early years, due to its connections with the issues relating to cultural context and upbringing, carried a real sense of personal alienation. As expanded on in Chapter One of this research, from the starting point in my early employment, my concept of work was fraught with complexities. This position was developed from within a subjective sense of marginalisation and (economic) inequality. Thus, I started from the understanding that work was for the pay packet, with no other purpose other than providing for my real interests in life (friendships, subcultural activities, etc.).

Nonetheless, due to key opportunities and experiences gain through working in more alternative working contexts (see Chapter One), I identified and developed a desire within myself to explore a more holistic understanding and ontology regarding work. Further still, these experiences helped me to develop approaches in my work-based praxis that sought to contribute to social change, which was motivated by the pursuit of a more just and equitable world. Obviously this position has matured, become less idealistic and reconfigured over time, but is still shaped by these key factors.

Hence my understanding of work-based learning, a term I use throughout this research, is best understood as a combination of three emerging components – ongoing identity (de)construction and the centrality of subjectivity shaped by the key factors of justice and equity; ongoing analysis of socio-political and economic landscapes; and the identification of issues of paradox (incompleteness and contradiction) produced via continual engagement in these contexts. In this sense, work-based learning is a component of my ongoing life-based learning, which would also embrace these three

components as well as including the fields of friendship, family, cultural activities, etc. In setting out this understanding, I shall now bring focus to my current work context using these three factors.

## **STRUCTURE OF DOCUMENT**

In structuring of this document, I have sought to make sense of my world, and the worlds of those that I admire and collaborate with, with my primary concern being the growth and well-being of all involved. Hence:

‘Methodologically this means that one does not seek to become a master of what is in the text but to become the “servant” of the text; one doesn’t so much try to observe and see what is the text as to follow, participate in, and “hear” what is said by the text’ (Palmer 1969: 208).

Thus, I approach this study not merely as an academic exercise but as an exploration of my very existence, and from a perspective in which meaning is never finally complete. Meaning is always contextual and recognized as expandable and expanding (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, 1995) and the possibility for understanding is infinite (Gadamer, 1995). Therefore one cannot say that meaning is described once and for all. Meaning emerges in relation to the lifeworld, and when the lifeworld changes, meaning changes as well.

**Chapter One** reflects upon various themes and experiences that have shaped my own development and the formulation of this study. I explore issues that emerged in my early life, ranging from representation, subculture(s), employment, advocacy and God talk. In turn, I give account of the specific influence and impact that community activism, anarchy and social movements have had upon my life and work-based learning.

I aim to explore the ‘modes of human organization rooted in the experience of everyday life’ (Ward and Goodwin 1997), which I understand as a fluid, questioning, disruptive landscape, exhibiting a strong sense of mystery and excitement. Consequently, my interest in anarchy and social movements is identified in seeking to understand what Diani and McAdam (2003: 1) say resembles a:

‘String of more or less connected events, scattered across time and space; [that] cannot be identified with any specific organization, rather consisting of various levels of formulation, linked in patterns of interaction.’

Therefore, I establish a space from which to explore how social movement and anarchic theory can be considered and applied to practical support for organisations connected to my work environment, within the wider UK socio-political context. The adopted approach to this task has particular emphasis on methods of leadership, activist motivations, (self) organisations, and identity formulation theories. I also raise the aim of wanting to respond, from a grass-roots perspective, to the then-new coalition government’s Big Society agenda.

I conclude the chapter by considering some of the underlying contradictions, and what the French psychoanalyst Lacan termed 'lack' and 'fantasy', encountered within my work environment and the lifeworlds of activists. In particular, I draw upon the work of Johnsen and Gudmand-Hoyer (2007: 336) and:

'the understanding of human subjectivity as a radical under-determined phenomenon dominated and scarred by the peculiar sense of *lack* that runs through it like a melancholic undercurrent. And secondly, an understanding of the role of *fantasy* in character formation as it shields the subject from the terror of living with the relentless sense of incompleteness.'

This, it is argued, enables further exploration of the incompleteness in the lifeworlds of community activists, my own personal motivation and subjectivity, and the wider socio-economic context of turbo-capitalism.

**Chapter Two** offers a review of information and knowledge that has not only shaped my personal growth and development but also influenced this research. Moreover, I make clear how academic writing has been a continual companion along my journey of work, specifically, writing concerning social movements, anarchy and political analysis, radical theology, reflective learning, community development and radical organisational studies.

Furthermore, this is also the context in which I initiate a dialogue with work-based learning, politics of everyday life and radical philosophy literature. This cluster of themes represents two important components of this study: firstly, the themes supply new areas of personal learning and, secondly, they push and twist the phenomenological pursuit of this study into unforeseen arenas.

Finally, throughout this chapter I introduce the dynamic (self) praxis of an activist as translator, interpreter and broker. In particular, I display how the interplay of academic thought and my personal work experiences weave a series of frameworks to unveil the lifeworlds of community activists.

**Chapters Three and Four** deal with the issues of research ethics, methodologies and methods. The former chapter initiates questions concerning the power relations in a researcher approach, which 'operate even when they think they are being collaborative' (Herr and Anderson 2005: 34). To ensure as little interference as possible, I name and consider the most prominent issues within my work-based context:

- Root of all evil – money, influence, persuasion, etc.
- Familiarity with research participants – bias, prejudice, assumptions, etc.

- Dark secrets – beliefs suppressed deep within my subconscious, hidden from my day-to-day views

I also recognise the requirement of establishing an appropriate relationship between the research participants and myself, and hence produced a 'stakeholder agreement'.

Further still, to counter the power footprints exposed by the above discussions, I seek, in the subsequent chapter, to embark on a research design process that de-centres and dislodges (McNiff and Whitehead 2009) these influences, prejudices and preferences. However, before doing so, I set out key characteristics of my current work situation(s), and the demographic and selection rationale of my interviewees.

I began my research design by re-familiarising myself with social movement theories and their various connected methodological positions. Due to the complexity of social movements, many of the commentators warn against the reduction of specific facts, personalities and events, which can airbrush out crucial insights and learning opportunities (i.e. Taylor's 1989 work on feminist movements and McAdam's 1982 work on black insurgency). These warnings led me to think seriously about the dynamics of insider/outsider research (Herr and Anderson 2005), the impact of partiality, and the fragmented nature of social phenomena.

Thus, the further this investigation proceeded, the more I developed a desire to branch out into the wider action research literature for inspiration and direction, although this also causes a hybridisation of thought and research position, forged by a series of inter-connecting and unique personal reflections. It is at this point that I discovered Fuller-Rowell's recent (2009) work contrasting coalition-based research and multi-site action research (MSAR). The former brings influence to the operations of organisations, individuals and data involved in a research programme in a systemic, centralised fashion, whilst the latter approach offers a similar triangulation but not in a centralised manner, allowing the primary focus of participants to remain upon their own development and working context. After much deliberation, I chose to work with the MSAR approach, as it resonated far more with my work-based context and core participants.

With the methodological framework identified, I then established a cluster of methods to enable my data-gathering processes. Initially I conducted appreciative enquiry (AI) interviews, using Cooperrider and Whitney's (2000) 4D cycle as the meta-framework. I placed within the 4D cycle a series of questions shaped by my interest in social movement studies, anarchic formulations and small world networks.

On completion of these interviews, and subsequent thematic analysis, I then moved on to the second stage of my research process – the foundation workshop. This enabled a collective investigation of the emerging findings and themes gained from the interviews. I wanted the workshop to be as interactive as possible and hence utilised the ‘world cafe’ technique of engagement.<sup>3</sup> This, it is argued, allows the participants a real opportunity to interrogate and/or endorse the emerging findings.

It was at this point that I introduced the Lacanian ideas of lack, fantasy and hysteria. My rationale for this was to remain in an action research discipline of emergent findings but I also concur with Reed (2007: 57), who writes:

‘Critical theory can prompt AI projects to reflect on the taken-for-granted images of organisations and activities that participants may have. This can be in the way that questions are formulated or data is interpreted.’

The foundation workshop enabled the development of a framework, which I have since used<sup>4</sup> and continue to use (see concluding chapter – Ways Forward) within my wider working context. The data from these subsequent workshops is not directly included in the findings in Chapter Five (although photographic and other evidence can be found in Appendix 3) but must be acknowledged within the ongoing shaping of my learning, translations and interpretations (Chapters 6–8).

Further still, this supports the ongoing dynamic and unfolding nature of this action research. The AI/lack and fantasy approach that I have developed has an inherently cyclical nature, which is a strategic part of my design. As mentioned, this research is situated within the architecture of cultural change. It was and is my hope, intention and belief that if the results of this research prove to be

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<sup>3</sup> World Cafe is a flexible, easy-to-use process for fostering collaborative dialogue, sharing mutual knowledge and discovering new opportunities for action. Based on small world network thinking, this innovative approach creates dynamic networks of conversation that can catalyse an organisation’s or community’s own collective intelligence around its most important questions (*The World Cafe: Shaping our Futures through Conversations that Matter* 2005).

<sup>4</sup> List of workshops and participants completed so far:

- **Bank of Ideas (n.6)** – participants were made up of direct action activists and academics
- **South East Village (n.8)** – participants were all working in the same urban development context (with differing roles)
- **Manchester faith networkers (n.7)** – all participants were actively involved in mobilising faith organisations to become involved in social justice issues
- **Leeds community development network (n.35)** – wide variety of community activists working across the city of Leeds.
- **Peterborough environmental activists (n.10)** – variety of environmental activists working across Peterborough

meaningful then the findings, processes and subsequent workshops may contribute to developing an ongoing learning context and exploration for community activists in the future.

**Chapter Five** is a detailed examination of the data, what I term 'contours of a community activist', resulting from the primary interviews and workshop stage. I present these contours as a composite of reflections, rather than an innate, fundamentalist, fixed identity of a 'pure' community activist. They are constructed as follows:

- PRIMARY MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS – Passions and Gifting; Associations; and Violations
- MODES OF ENGAGEMENT – Cultivating Outrage; Challenging Inevitability; and Developing Alternative Moral Communities
- RESOURCE MOBILISATION AND POLITICAL OPPORTUNITIES – Favours, Opportunism and Relationships; Patchwork Portfolios; and DIY – Spontaneous Ordering and Mutuality
- SMALL WORLD NETWORKS – Architecture and Development; Translation, Interpretation and Brokerage; and Connections, Creation and Change

In a sense, this is the key part of the research, in which the participants own voices come alive and in which the dynamic of MSAR comes into its own, with the opportunity for self-identification and de-centralised collaboration.

Working from these contours, **Chapter Six** moves to appreciate these activities and responses, rather than concentrating on their problems. This is assisted by experiences gained from the subsequent workshops and my ongoing work-based learning. However, I also make sure that I avoid painting a picture of idyllic utopia, focusing instead upon the utopianism suggested by Fournier (2002: 192):

'From this perspective, utopianism is not a blueprint for a "perfect society", but may be better conceptualized as a movement of hope. It undermines dominant understanding of what is possible and opens up new conceptual spaces for processes rather than better states.'

Thus, I explore the activities and responses of participants by eclectically drawing from the data, using a rationale that is shaped by the fluidity and complexity found within their lifeworlds. I begin this process by exploring the individual and collective nature of community activism found within this research. This direction is underpinned by the desire to rethink the relationship between the psychological and political aspects of community activism. Following this, I then conclude by bringing these two areas together through the concepts of lack, fantasy, fetishisation, symbolism and hysteria developed by Jacques Lacan.

**Chapter Seven** takes this study on a radical reroute, away from celebration, to a full-scale critique and assault of community activism. This approach challenges the very idea that community actors' perceptions of themselves, or others' perceptions, in any way represent the audacity of hope (sic.). Further still, this chapter is not only an attack on the effectiveness of community activism but also an accusation that such activities are compliant with turbo-capitalism and actually preserve of its authority.

Moreover, I use the lack-fantasy schema and my own personal narrative to ensure this interrogation explores the philosophical, political, social, legal and individual aspects of community activism, thus raising the challenge that community activism is 'vanity, vanity all is vanity' (Ecclesiastes 1: 2). I address this task by constructing the subsequent four sections:

- *Unleash the Hounds – The Slovenian Hamlet and Friends!!*: A consideration of the work of Slavoj Žižek (the Slovenian Hamlet) and some of his contemporary thinkers regarding the futility and compliance of community activism within the context of turbo-capitalism.
- *The Criminalisation of Resistance – An Investigation of Surveillance and Policing*: Explores the links with current policing policy, direct and community activism, and the social control of citizens.
- *Tripping Down Memory Lane*: Reflective analysis of previous (work-based) experience. Mapping out the early footings of entrapment in turbo-capitalism via structural responses to needs and individual lifestyle consumption patterns.
- *We Are Family – Big Society and Big Brother*: Starting with analysis of the coalition government's Big Society and austerity measures, this section develops an autobiographical account of the fantasy of a community activist living in the UK. In this section I seek to de-mask my own fantasy as a change agent, using personal insights and reflections gained whilst engaged in this action research and previous work-based experiences.

Following this reroute and onslaught, I initiate **Chapter Eight** with a series of introductory reflections, which give a personal impact analysis of the study. I begin these contemplations by acknowledging a deepening appreciation and understanding of *weakness* and *the weak things of this world*, with the recognition that this is not a study of the dominant narrative of turbo-capitalism, although its weight is seen as a constant presence. Thus I am left with:

'a conception of the human being defined by an experience of enactment that exceeds the limits of potency and strength and in which authenticity is rooted in an affirmation of weakness and impotence' (Critchley 2012: 14).

Subsequently, this second point of reflection develops a sightline from which the stories of this research create unorthodox vantage points and heretical readings, which expose the vested interests of mainstream society. These heresies not only contend the dominant, orthodox reading of history and culture but also have the nerve to construct incomplete and contradictory alternatives. The frail and subtle characteristics of these narratives are shown to hold inbuilt collective struggles with dominant patterns and lifestyles of turbo-capitalism (Holloway 2010).

Thus, I depict community activists as ‘nomads of the present’ (Melucci 1989), having left, in part, mainstream society, not knowing where they are heading but searching for a land they have not yet seen.

In my final initiating reflection, it becomes necessary for me to share my subjective internal conversations regarding what I would term the spiritual dynamics of community activism. In doing so, I articulate the least externalised elements of my own being – causing words to become flesh – the external manifestation of the internal being. Hence, the mixture of weakness, nomadic, subversive narratives, and spiritual dynamics within the lifeworlds of community activists underpin the three following sections of this final chapter:

Section One – *Looking Through the Eyes of Abeyance* – considers how community actors can continue in non-receptive political climates to remain active and survive. The suggestion being made here is that the participants of this research are best (re)conceived as narratives of abeyance, rather than the vanguard of revolution. In part, this is a response to and an explanation for why I cannot fully agree with Žižek and friends’ call to disengagement.

Section Two – *Don’t Believe the Hype* – then moves on to explore the lack of consistency and totality within the dominant narrative of turbo-capitalism. Working closely with the ideas of Michel de Certeau (1994) and Margaret Archer (1996, 2007), questions are raised about the internal cohesion and coherence of (dominant) cultural narratives.

Section Three – *In Search of Living Parables* – seeks to rethink the day-to-day impact and engagement of community activists. This task is assisted by a historical anarchic analysis of the teachings of Jesus and the early church, paying particular attention to the dynamics of love, aesthetics and humour.

Finally, in **Ways Forward**, I set out to display the ongoing impact, commitment and direction of this action research. This is broken down into three interwoven areas: academia, work-based development and creative expression. Each area shows the achievements gained so far by this research, and the working plans for the forthcoming year.

## **CHAPTER ONE – ORIGINS AND FOCUS OF THESIS**

*'If ethics without politics is empty, then politics without ethics is blind.'*

*Simon Critchley*

Let me start at the outset by establishing the key reasons why I am and am not engaging in this research. It is important to highlight that the aim of this study is not to produce a dead academic cipher of data. My aspiration, as I shall explain, is that this text is seen and read as a complementary extension of my current work praxis and is linked to my future learning and community engagement.

To understand this more, it is necessary to appreciate that over the past twenty years I have developed an approach to integrating my own understanding of epistemology, grass roots community development practice and academic theory (particularly social movement and anarchic formulations). Consequently, a key part of my ontogeny has been, and still is, a continuous journey of reflection, translation and interpretation to effect greater personal and social change. Hence, this project is not simply a stage of my career but is also about my very understanding of reality.

I begin with an autobiographical account of my work-based learning, which in turn will offer explanations for and bring into focus the issues being explored via this research. En route, I reflect on the issues of memory, representation, subcultures, advocacy and 'God talk'. I then give an account of some of the core influences in my early life, and consider the central themes of community activism, anarchy and social movements. Finally, I conclude this chapter with the specific aims and objectives of this thesis.

In terms of sociological thought, anarchy and social movement studies represent the strongest influences upon my work-based learning. Nonetheless, I must acknowledge at the outset the fragility and partiality I have found in these sources. Latour (2005) warns critical sociologists to be cautious when:

*'beginning mapping the many contradictory ways in which social aggregates are constantly evoked, erased, distributed and reallocated. For scientific, political and even moral reasons, it is crucial that enquirers do not in advance, and in place of actors, define what sorts of building blocks the social world is made of.'*

My aim is always to explore the modes of human organization rooted in the experience of everyday life (Ward 1982), which I understand as a fluid, questioning, disruptive landscape, exhibiting a strong sense of mystery and excitement. In other words, my interest in anarchy and social movements involves trying to grasp what Diani and McAdam (2003: 1) suggest resembles a:

‘string of more or less connected events, scattered across time and space; [that] cannot be identified with any specific organization, rather consisting of various levels of formulation, linked in patterns of interaction.’

Whilst writing my research proposal, I started to explore the overall reasons for doing this project. At that point I highlight that:

- There is a need for a sensitive and nuanced response from grass-roots community and user-led organisations to the (then new) coalition government agenda.
- I have a desire to explore how, within this wider socio-political context, urban social movement theory could be considered and applied in terms of practical support for organisations connected to my work environment.
- My intention is to engage within an action-research framework, with particular emphasis on methods of leadership, activist continuity, self-organisation, and (new) social movement theory.

I also highlighted that my attention had been drawn to consider some of the underlying contradictions – and what the French psychoanalyst Lacan termed ‘lack’ and ‘fantasy’ – encountered within my work environment and the lifeworlds of activists. I recognised that drawing upon Lacan may open up an abyss of psychoanalytic thought, which could lead to utter distraction. Therefore, I sought to clarify my interest by drawing upon the way Johnsen and Gudmand-Høyer (2010 336) suggest Lacan’s two central insights – lack and fantasy – provide an opportunity to explore:

‘the understanding of human subjectivity as a radical under-determined phenomenon dominated and scarred by the peculiar sense of lack that runs through it like a melancholic undercurrent. And secondly, an understanding of the role of fantasy in character formation as it shields the subject from the terror of living with the relentless sense of incompleteness.’

Creating such a focus, I believe, will enable me to explore not only the incompleteness and contradiction situated within the environmental lifeworlds of the participants but also their own personal motivations and impact. I also recognise that such an exploration provides a real opportunity to challenge perceptions and assumptions within my own lifeworld. Thus, the objective of these investigations would be identifying what McAdam et al. (2001: 34) describe as ‘mechanisms of interpretation’:

‘Opportunities open the way for political action, but movements also make opportunities. Opportunities may shape or constrain movements, but movements can create opportunities as well. Activists frame and adapt political processes, changing their strategies in relation to them. For political processes to turn into opportunities activists need the perception and some form of

awareness that specific opportunities exist. Therefore movement actors have to activate mechanisms of interpretation in order to recognise the specific situation as a political opportunity.'

Due to the retrospective elements of this chapter, before embarking any further, it is also necessary to make some specific comments about memory formation and social positioning. I consider my activities and memories to be socially positioned on the pavements and not the platforms (Erskine 2008) of society. My ontology and praxis has been attracted to being 'under the radar' of public gaze, seeking to collaborate with those whose voices have not been valued or heard. In such contexts, I concur with Misztal (2003) that memory has the potential to construct reality from the bottom up, enabling a way of remembering and forgetting that can be initiated from the local and the particular.

Nonetheless, experience has also led me to recognise that all such stories carry an inherent partiality. For many years I held the view that the 'grass-roots voice' is the real site of authenticity and truth; this thought has been disrupted, problematised and critiqued over time. Constant circumstantial change has demanded me to listen to alternative paradigms and escape the traditional binaries of Left and Right, oppressed and oppressor, and hence develop a more eclectic and learning-centred approach. I have come to believe that memory recollection, representation and (self) advocacy is a nuanced and complex but also fallible system of storing and sharing information. The summarising, condensing and rewriting of past events concerning myself and others result from interactional encounters and processes in which we are all personally involved (Misztal 2003).

Bakhtin (1937) suggests that:

'Language exchanges are like mirrors that face each other, each reflecting in its own way a piece, a tiny corner of the world. Thus we are forced to guess at and grasp for a world behind mutually reflecting aspects that is broader, more multi-levelled, containing more and varied horizons than would be available to a single language or single mirror.'

I consider memory to not simply be about recollection but also about forgetting. The reader will see much of my journey has been one committed to understanding the characteristics of 'the second life' (Presdee, M 2000) – living and listening to the voices positioned towards the edges of society in terms of power and influence. I have spent most of my existence within the margins of historically determined and structurally unequal contexts (Presdee, M 2000). Such spaces, in which access to and distribution of resources between socio-demographic groups is imbalanced, create continual sites of resistance, oppression, hope, death, etc. This is compounded further in recognising that:

‘Within the public domain, not only the recording of the past but active re-working of the past is more likely to be transmitted if it happens in high prestige, socially consensual institutions than if it happens at or beyond the edges of conventional organisation’ (Schudson 1997: 23).

Therefore, which and how memories are heard and remembered has been a huge area of learning for me over the years. Furthermore, I am fully aware that, despite my passion and interest in the subject matter(s), all of the following is simply a tiny corner of the world, in which I see through the glass dimly.

### **Memory, Representation, Advocacy and God Talk**

I grew up in a working-class, single-parent household, which had seven children. These early formative years were to offer me the ‘development blocks’ to a strong awareness of inequality issues. Many of my earliest memories relate to themes connected to access and opportunity: for example, not only the consequences of not having a father or any money but also the benefits of having a very strong mother, three older sisters, three older brothers and the wider council estate community network. I now recognise that these and other circumstances developed my initial interest in issues concerning resource distribution, representation, (self) advocacy and cultural politics.

Another central factor in my development was growing up in the environment of pubs and social clubs, in which my mother cleaned and worked behind the bar. Again, I now consider this to be a key part of my early understanding of the world as it meant that I was nurtured in a strong oral culture of humour, critique, altered states of being and deep friendships. This period offered continual opportunities to work, be part of groups and explore what I would now term ‘bar-room politics’. However, I also recognise that this rich oral context was almost completely barren of any formal education, written material and what may be termed ‘middle-class signification’.

In other words, these early environments resulted in me living amongst narratives played out, in the cracks and holes of the structures of official society (Presdee 2000), and dwelling within the margins of historically determined and structurally unequal contexts. What’s more, these places and experiences shaped my very understanding of work, learning and subjectivity. Within these circumstances I developed a personal perspective and position very similar to that shown in Rose’s (1999a: 55) reflections:

‘Work. The very word, for many, conjures up a vision of the more or less direct exercise of power upon the body of the worker: coercion, exploitation, discipline, control. In work, it would appear, the worker is no more than a factor of production, just one factor among many caught up in a process whose sole rationale is profit.’

On reaching sixteen and leaving school with no meaningful qualifications, I was 'working for the wage packet'. Escape, recreation and reflection were all found within my class friendship group, family and popular music. Again, this represents an important junction in my story and the direction of this research – my dwelling place was within the subcultures of the day.

Greg Martin (2002: 73–88) offers a great overview of the dynamics of subculture in his paper exploring the combined theories of social movements and subcultures and their ability to 'provide a way of conceptualising cultural politics'. I now quote him at length, not only for explanation in this part of the thesis but also as these thoughts offer a framework of reflection that I shall also use in the analysis of this research.

Martin begins by pointing out that:

'The "new subcultural theory" (Cohen 1987: iii) that emerged in Britain during the 1970's, and its association "with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS)", differed considerably from the classical American approaches, such as functionalist anomie theory and the work of the Chicago school.'

He then displays these differences via two key concerns produced by this substantial body of research:

'The first concerns the way in which subcultures are conceptualised. Like some of their American counterparts, the CCCS attempted to show how working-class youth cultures were internally coherent despite "official" perceptions of them as lawless forms (Hebdige 1979: 113). They did this through the concept of *homology*, showing how the focal concerns, music and dress of these groups were organically connected and fitted together to form a distinctive subcultural "style". Indeed, these ideas also served a political purpose deriving from a tendency to romanticise working-class culture (Turner 1996: 164) and "elevate delinquents into the vanguard of the revolution"' (Cohen 1987: xxvi).

Martin then suggests that this revolutionary potential relates to the second important area of CCCS's work:

'The CCCS showed how working-class youth subcultures emerged as a response to the disintegration of traditional working-class communities, which was brought about by post-war re-development and re-housing policies (cf. Young and Willmott 1957). However, they did this symbolically. In other words, they "express and resolve, albeit 'magically', the contradictions which remain hidden or unresolved in the parent culture". Working-class youth subcultures did this through their style.'

He concludes these reflections by identifying how:

'The CCCS famously used Gramsci's notion of hegemony to show how working-class youth subcultures represented an attempt to "win space" and, indeed, they did win *real* cultural space, in the neighbourhood and institutions, real time for leisure and recreation, actual room on the street and street-corner' (Clarke et al. 1976: 45).

Ultimately, though, their solutions were no real solutions at all. In short, working-class youth subcultures offered no solution to the problems of being in a subordinate structural position. No solutions, for example, to unemployment, educational disadvantage, dead-end jobs, low pay and lack of skills. In fact, they tended to 'reproduce the gaps and discrepancies between real negotiations and symbolically displaced resolutions. They solve, but in an imaginary way, 'problems which at the concrete material level remain unresolved' (Clarke et al. 1976).

I find these considerations extremely helpful, as they locate not only my own involvement and identification within subcultures (punk and 'second wave' mod) but also my frustration with their political inability to win 'real cultural space'. Although subcultures offered me a real space for identity formulation and reflection, I was still acutely aware of the inequalities that I faced in my own life and in society as a whole.

The next significant change came at the age of nineteen when I began some voluntary work with people with learning disabilities. Through these experiences I not only strengthened my, by then already enthusiastic, critique of dominant norms<sup>5</sup> but also developed in me a new subjectivity regarding identity of 'the workplace'. I began to recognise that work could be seen more as a vocation than a pay packet. I began to realise a strong similarity in the processes of exclusion and marginalisation being experienced by disabled people and that which I had also experienced in my own development. Although there were distinct differences as to why these limitations were in place, I was struck by parallels in the lack of access to housing, education, meaningful employment, etc. The further I proceeded in this work the greater the level of solidarity with people with learning disabilities grew within my understanding and praxis.

Furthermore, this led me to a shift in my perception of work to what many term as a calling.<sup>6</sup> I knew from these experiences that my future lay in working 'in the margins of society', with individuals and groups that were facing various levels of exclusion and prejudice. This period of time led to a deep questioning of wider cultural norms of leadership and whose voice counts (Chambers 1997) within local and national democratic systems. I gained a greater recognition that the lifeworld(s) that I

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<sup>5</sup> At the age of thirteen I attended my first picket line, in solidarity with the printers' union at the newly opened site of News International at Wapping. This then developed into my first experience of direct action as I began targeting, with stickers and posters, newsagents that sold *The Sun* and the *News of the World*. This was the beginning of my direct political involvement.

<sup>6</sup> 'Beyond profession, my concern has been to find and follow a calling, a deeper voice. In the truest sense of the word, *vocation* is that which stirs inside, calling out to be heard, calling out to be followed. Vocation is not what I do. It finds its roots in who I am and a sense of purpose I have on earth' (J. P. Lederach, *The Moral Imagination*, 2005).

inhabited were contested landscapes (Ferrell, Hayward and Young 2008), in which the issues of representation and (self) advocacy were highly important. My personal and work identities began to merge as I sought a deeper ontological expression of my evolving political perspectives and values.

Paradoxically, I also began to face unexpected dilemmas connected to these developments. The more involved I became and the more experiences I gained (self-advocacy movement for people with learning disabilities; support work with New Age travellers; County Community Development Policy Officer, etc.), the more I wrestled against the wider cultural system(s), the more I became exposed to offers of positions of power. This not only presented itself as promotion, opportunity and pay, but also beckoned me away from the 'pavement and onto platforms' (these issues are elaborated on in Chapter Seven). It was in the context of such factors that I started to articulate the incompleteness and contradiction within the lifeworld of an activist (Erskine 2008). Pierre Bourdieu (1991: 206) refers to 'the mystery of the ministry', in which:

'The delegate becomes ... capable of acting as a substitute for the group which gives him a mandate. In other words, the delegate is, so to speak, in a metonymic relation with the group; he is a part of the group and can function as a sign in place of the totality of the group.'

Such 'delegation' provoked a series of questions within my work-based learning: Was it really possible to work with and amongst marginalised groups? Can the group truly be substituted by the delegate (to use Bourdieu's terminology)? Are there other praxes which would remove any sense of hierarchical delegation? It was in seeking to answer such questions that I began to be drawn to the thoughts, experiences and ideas that are located within the themes of anarchy, activism and social movements.

However, before moving on to the next section there is one more area of my identity I need to disclose. Without explaining my entire spiritual journey, and the pitfalls of God talk (Fine 2002 in Davis (ed.) 2002), it is important to say that in 2002 my life became rerouted through the narrative of Jesus Christ. This could be perceived as deeply contradictory, considering the perspectives and values I have disclosed above. I recognise that the narrative of Jesus viewed through the lenses of colonial systems and power is at odds with my own social position. In some ways, in fact, it would have been easier to exclude this part of my identity, particularly in the 'post-Christendom context of the West' (Murray 2000). Nonetheless, it is important to name this identity connection.

As I have written elsewhere (Erskine 2008), I believe there to be an anarchic reading of this ancient narrative, which de-institutionalises and decontaminates its content from the apparatus of Empire and structure. In that context I would argue (with myself more than others) that, for me, Jesus operates as an 'activist archetype' within my life-long learning. In short, my perspectives and values

are deeply challenged by this peasant worker from Palestine. As John Milbank (2006: 391) so eloquently points out, even:

‘Nietzsche was forced to recognize that there was something uniquely “perverse” about Christianity, and its peculiar mode of difference, the celebration of weakness showed up by contrast a *common* element in all the other cultures, namely, a heroic ethical code celebrating strength and attainment.’

My particular interest, and point of referral in the later stages of this research document, is the particular mode of difference, the celebration of weakness found within the Christian narrative. In a sense, I believe that this brings a unique offer to the party, the opportunity of what could be termed the ‘carnival of fragility’ (elaborated on in Chapter Eight).

### **Activism, Anarchy and Social Movements**

As I have discussed, many of my roles have been as an activist seeking to ensure that the marginalised voices of others are listened to and valued, embarking on work that seeks to initiate social change. Furthermore, I have sought to show that this journey has also been one of self-discovery and understanding. Thus, as I have pursued these goals, I have found myself engaging in deeper questions regarding the limitations to and contradictions of freedom within our system.

Zygmunt Bauman (1998: 9) suggests:

‘Freedom was born as a privilege and has remained so ever since. Freedom divides and separates. It sets the best apart from the rest. It draws attraction from difference: its presence or absence reflects, marks and grounds the contrast between high and low, good and bad, converted and repugnant.’

Writings such as this, coupled with my ongoing life experiences, resulted in me developing three key perspectives. Firstly, that the story of freedom, purported to be at the heart of Western democracy, is a ‘fable of the few’. Secondly, and connected, that democracy takes place within a context of vested interest, which creates an uneven playing field for its citizens. Thirdly, that I must always recognise that I too am situated within this uneven playing field and am a custodian of my own vested interests (again see Chapter Seven).

Elaborating on these ideas, Gramsci (1971: 287) suggests that all activist activity takes place within the ‘affirmation of capitalism’, highlighting:

‘the territorial, spatial and geographical dimensions of uneven development, as well as the combined character of its crystallisation within a social formation ... enacted by the introduction of new methods of rationalisation, regulation and disciplining as well as their impact on familial arrangements, the gendered division of labour, cultural and ideological forms.’

Building upon this, Morton (2010: 316) draws attention to:

‘Historical instances in which aspects of the social relations of capitalist development are either instituted and/or expanded, resulting in both possibilities of “revolutionary” rupture and “restoration of social relations”.’

In other words, the concepts of Gramsci (1971) raise the suggestion that any movement of social change carries the dialectic of ‘revolution/restoration’, the question being which one predominates. Thus, although my ongoing work experiences strengthened my ontological and practical commitment to working ‘with’ and not ‘for’ those most deprived and excluded, it raised many (personal) issues concerning citizenship, power, knowledge and ownership.

Therefore, I began to explore the (non) organisational conditions needed to not only gain more equality but also practice equality within the processes of these struggles. I increasingly investigated the potential of articulations of self-governance, ‘to reclaim the choice and responsibility for organizing our own lives’ (Fournier 2002: 206) – I had embarked on the pursuit of anarchy!

Although I give a more systemic account of anarchy in the literature review, it is crucial for the purposes of this chapter to clarify two central components of my understanding of anarchic formulations. The first is rooted within the thinking of Gustav Landauer, who describes how:

‘The state (all forms of hierarchical systems) is not something which can be destroyed by a revolution, but is a condition, certain relationships between human beings, a mode of behaviour: we destroy it by contracting other relationships, by behaving differently’ (cited in Ward 1982).

Secondly, and intrinsically linked, is the thinking of Simon Critchley (2007), in which he examines the concept of anarchy ‘as a disturbance of politics’. Grappling with the thoughts of Levinas, Critchley (2012: 121–2) posits the idea that anarchy is rooted in the idea that the ‘sovereign self’ is continually ‘being affected by the other’:

‘Our autonomous majesty is deposed and decapitated, our autonomous self-binding is unbound and we are undone. It is in this sense that Levinas claims that the heteronomous ethical experience of the relation to the neighbour is anarchical, the other posits me under their demand despite myself and before any act of the will.’

He goes on to point out that such a view of anarchy disallows it to become a principle of governance:

‘Anarchy should not seek to mirror the archic sovereignty that it undermines. That is, it should not seek to set itself up as the new hegemonic principle of political organisation, but remain the negation of totality and not the affirmation of a new totality. Anarchy is a radical disturbance of the state, a disturbance of the state’s attempt to set up or erect itself into a whole’ (ibid.: 122).

To summarise, my interest in anarchy is not aligned with an attempt to ‘take over the world’ but is more a dynamic that inhibits those who hold such aspirations. This anarchic motivation is rooted within the personal and work-based experiences explained above, particularly the consequences of inequalities and injustices caused by systemic power imbalances. Moreover, I hope that it will come

as no surprise to the reader that I do not think such a desire could or should be pursued simply on an individual level, which leads me to my second area of focus – social movements.

Alberto Melucci (1996) suggests there is a need to resist the acceptance of coherence and unity within social movements and social actors, avoiding the ‘artless realism that paradoxically takes for granted a quasi-metaphysical existence of the actor [and movements]’. He supports this by suggesting that, as research material evidence:

‘is gradually subjected to the scrutiny of analysis, it becomes clear that unity is the result of exchanges, negotiations, decisions, and conflicts, constantly activated by actors but not apparent on the surface. These processes are not immediately visible, since the actors tend to conceal themselves and their fragmentation. Action, in fact, entails the unification of the field by means of some common representation and the force of ideology’ (ibid.).

The tendency to make actions, actors, groups, organisations and ultimately movements solid too quickly surely is an ‘artless’ pursuit, which I have avoided and continue to be determined to avoid in my life and work-based learning. Nonetheless, rather than denying fragmentation, I explore the contradictions and incompleteness present within activist lifeworlds, always remembering that:

‘We should not forget, then, that when unification comes about it is already a product. The construction processes have outcomes of varying degrees of success, but when we observe actual collective action taking place, it should be assumed that such a process is active and is perpetuated through time’ (ibid.).

Having said this, I recognise the need to identify ways to make sense of the rich and layered landscape of my work environment. Fortunately, social movement studies, unlike the wider field of action research, is not really plagued by a proliferation of different labels (Dick 2009). In fact, there are just three core schools of thought and connected methodologies to be found within social movement studies. These are:

- **Resource mobilisation theory:** regards movement success and understanding as being rooted within the ‘right cognitive-cultural framing structures to make movement concerns understandable and attractive to potential constituencies, they also need sufficient grounding in local milieus, in particular existing organizations and networks’ (Anheier 2003 – see Diani 2003).
- **Political process theory:** the consensus among social movement researchers within this framework is that movement emergence depends on understanding three broad factors: political opportunity, organisational networks and cultural framing (Osa 2003 – see Diani 2003).

- **New social movement theory:** concentrates more on the internal complexity of collective actors who are usually portrayed – and portray themselves – as homogenous and coherent. Particular attention is given to the complex negotiations that take place between different actors in the emergence and reproduction of a movement identity (Diani 2003).

I find these theories, and connected methodological positions, extremely helpful starting points within all aspects of my praxis. Social movements truly are a complex formation of relationships, which are then reduced to specific facts, personalities and events. All too often this reductionism and ‘pop-movement’ approach can airbrush out crucial insights and learning opportunities (see Taylor’s work on feminist movements 1989; and McAdam’s 1982 work on black insurgency). I recognise that all of these approaches have their own specific way of reaching a ‘social product’ from living, changing contexts. Nonetheless, I have found that the continual reflective disturbances that can be created by ‘listening’ to these theories extremely helpful in the pursuit of understanding the lifeworlds of activists.

### **Location of Self and Focus of the Research Project**

As I have shown, I inhabit a landscape in which tensions and dynamics continually change the construction of individual and collective social actors. I have recognised, via many hours of reflection, action and reading that my interests as a practitioner lie with groups found in the margins of society, which occupy specific locations, identities and values, and that are seeking specific goal and objectives (Diani 2002). I am particularly interested in the processes, methods and identity formations that take place within these movements and within my own being. Stake (1995: 98) comments:

‘The function of research is not necessarily to map and conquer the world, but to sophisticate the beholding of it.’

In his book *The Search for Political Community*, Paul Lichtermann (1996: 227) makes a similar connection in his idea of ‘a translation ethic’:

‘A good translator has an obligation to the languages being translated and the cultures those languages articulate. A good translator practices a kind of universalistic obligation, but one grounded in specific cultures. A democratic community of diverse activists needs to translate not only diverse political ideologies, but also definitions and practices of commitment itself. By taking on a role of translator between political cultures, activists listen to the different ways that movements maintain commitment and community.’

These thoughts offer a helpful platform from which to return, in brief, to my current work-based learning locations and the specifics of this research project, as I understand a key part of my (activist) journey has been that of translation and interpretation. Once again, for the past seven years I have

been involved in developing a network of grass-roots community and user-led organisations. This relational web now works in fifty locations within the United Kingdom and relates to over two thousand grass-roots community initiatives. I believe there are five distinct characteristics to be found in this network:

- It is a registered charity that has strong Christian values, whilst being separate from all denominational institutional structures
- It has no public face (no website, logo, marketing or fundraising)
- It is committed to decentralised decision making in all aspects of its functioning
- It seeks to work 'under the radar' in the way it relates to the communities within which it has relationships
- It contains within its relational network a mix of (non-institutional) Christian projects and non-Christian projects

Initially, my key task within this network was to establish contacts and relationships with activists, groups, organisations and networks within certain locations (mainly urban contexts). As, discussed before, these relationships have now grown and I have been able to explore the ongoing potential of three core areas – **distribution of money; cultivation of communication; and shared learning.**

My main interest and energy is now found within the third area of shared learning. I embrace as my own what Lichtermann (1996) describes as the 'role of translator': developing and researching 'between political cultures', listening to the different ways that movements maintain commitment and community. In terms of organisational and professional post, I am a trustee/director. However, because of my strong hermeneutic of suspicion regarding power and position, I very rarely use or promote this title to describe my identity. I am much more 'at home' within the spaces of cultural translator, interpreter and broker. Hence, I would say that the borders this establishes between the field of enquiry and me are porous and fluid.

However, this should not somehow suggest an unprofessional or 'too familiar' praxis. Rather, such interaction offers up opportunity to deconstruct, interrogate and reconfigure the very idea of my 'professional identity'. This leaves me in unique multi-dimensional relationships across the network, recognising that I am placed within the ever-changing space of interaction and change:

'It is very challenging to explain what you do and how you do it when it is a way of being and thinking about the world, when it is who you are now and who you are coming to be through your interconnectedness with others and the world' (Erskine and Maguire 2011: 3 – not yet published).

Herein is the landscape and nucleus for my research proposal – to explore further the political actions and implications within grass-roots activist cultures. The fact is that this is something I have been doing for many years. As Herr and Anderson (2005: 36) explain:

‘There is often the sense, in insider action research, that there is not a clear beginning or, for that matter, ending of the research. Research questions are often formalized versions of puzzles that practitioners have been struggling with for some time and perhaps even acting on in terms of problem solving. The decision to do more systematic inquiry on a puzzling issue is one of asking what issue or problem am I really trying to solve?’

I believe that the combination of theory and praxis I bring to my places of work already offers opportunities for activists to reflect and develop. To make clear to the reader, I am continually occupying spaces in which I broker activists’ experiences through academic frameworks. This is seen as being a unique approach amongst the majority of my working peers. In that sense, I am continually asked to help people develop perspectives on their lifeworlds that offer an alternative reading and understanding.

As my methodology and methods will show, I work in a collaborative manner using the de-centralising multi-site action research (MSAR) approach. This enables ‘cross-site interactions’ that ‘are focused on information exchange and learning rather than on collaborative decision making’. Such a framework enables me to locate myself in the research position of an ‘insider in collaboration with other insiders’ (Herr and Anderson 2005), in that I always aim to work alongside and in alliance with fellow activists.

Furthermore, MSAR presents a framework that connects extremely well with my personal perspectives and values and my current work-based learning culture. My work-based network contribution (distribution of money, cultivation of communication and shared learning) results in continual ‘cross-site interactions’, rather than ‘on-hand’ decision making. To be working amongst activists within multi-site locations and multi-purpose activities seems to be a very ‘natural’ thing to be doing.

Finally, despite this close connection between my current work environment and the direction of research, I also resonate with Moore’s (2009 35) personal need to embark on action research:

‘I was probably in need of a mid-life upheaval in order to re-evaluate my personal priorities and career direction. By undertaking research I suppose I was sub-consciously seeking to assert my own autonomy and independence. After all, you don’t do action research in order to simply maintain the status quo. Without really realizing it, I think I must have seen the undertaking of insider research as an opportunity to be self-directing, take the initiative and redefine the nature of my relationship with my employer.’

Once again, I am brought back to the realisation that this research is focused as much on me as on anyone else that participates. My intention is not only to research and explore the lifeworlds of activists and the issues of contradiction and incompleteness but also to interrogate my own work-based learning and identity. I believe the objectives of this research are best broken down in the following way:

- I am embarking on a self-examination, in which I hope to dislodge and disrupt my own lifeworld and work-based learning
- Another trajectory is to strengthen the ability of participants to appreciate, reflect and learn from what they have achieved and how they have achieved it
- This will lead to a sharpened analysis of the environmental factors shaping their own lifeworlds and the issues they most care for, as well as awareness of the cultural incompleteness and contradiction they struggle with on a daily basis
- This in turn will create an invitation to explore the internal factors that shape their lifeworlds and the consequent contradictions and incompleteness to be found in their own identities

These activities aim to strengthen the ongoing awareness, learning and experience of the research participants (including myself). In particular, we shall explore the motivations and aspects of identity formation that are continually taking place within the lifeworlds of community activists and develop a clearer analysis of the incompleteness and contradiction present within the current political context.

However, my interest in incompleteness and contradiction also results from a sense of something present within the lives of activists, and myself, which may be undermining the effectiveness and efficacy of social change. In part, this perception has been reached due to the acute awareness of incompleteness and contradiction within society, which has been brought to my attention by the actions of contemporary activists. The complex nature and reach of global turbo-capitalism highlights the pervasive nature of this systems, implicating and influencing all citizens (including activists).

In other words, the power and effect of the negative attributes identified by activists are extremely hard to escape. This, I believe, links back to the 'restoration' forces present within Gramsci's (1971) theories. Furthermore, I believe that questions related to motivation and engagement will raise issues concerning the efficacy of participants being undermined by their own lifeworlds.

As I discussed in the aims, objectives and outcomes, in particular I want to consider if this results in the understanding of 'human subjectivity as a radically under-determined phenomenon', which defends from the terror of living with the 'relentless sense of incompleteness' (Johnsen and Gudmand-Høyer 2010: 336). If this is the case, is there a link between incompleteness and contradiction and the impact upon activists' resilience, in terms of burn-out, disillusionment and so on?

In summary, these considerations connect specifically with the ideas of incompleteness and contradiction. It is my contention that activists are extremely competent at identifying the markers of inequality to be found within the global turbo-capitalist landscape. In doing so, they are then able to translate and use these characteristics to identify targets of mobilisation and create cultural disruption and possibilities – i.e. continuous revolution. However, I am also suggesting that such activities may inhibit activists and create blind spots, preventing them from exploring and considering the impact of the capitalist restoration tendencies from their own lifeworlds and lifestyles.

## **CHAPTER TWO – REVIEW OF KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMATION**

In what follows, I shall display the areas of knowledge and understanding that have influenced this research. Moreover, I also hope to reveal how academic writing has been a continual companion along my journey of work-based learning.

I must start with a confession. I have an addiction, which is slowly taking over my house and life. This addiction is expensive and it is very hard to hide once it takes hold. It has lasted for the past fifteen years but has increased in the last five. I cannot stop buying books!! In particular, I cannot stop buying books about social movements, anarchy and political analysis, radical theology, reflective learning, community development and radical organisational studies.

This addiction has a couple of accompanying habits, which also need to be named for the sake of transparency and understanding. Firstly, as I have sought to display in more detail elsewhere within this document, I approach this area of learning with the desire to translate and interpret what I am seeing and listening to through this personal literary collection and wider supply chains (libraries, online journals, newspapers, television, film, etc.). Secondly, I attempt, at every opportunity that presents itself, to 'push' this information and addiction into as wide a relational network as possible. This mainly takes place in cafes, pubs, community centres, art galleries and so on, but has also stretched to involvement in film making, article writing and book contributions.

Having now confessed this addiction, and its accompanying habits, I would like to turn to the ongoing impact this relationship with knowledge is having within the development of my research. In preparing for this literature review, I sought to explore pastures new as well as review, dig up and re-seed much of my 'home turf' of knowledge. For example, this led me to explore themes including: the balance between structure, agency and internal conversations (Archer 2003, 2007); work, subjectivity and learning (Billett et al. 2010); the rhizome poly-vocalist nature of life (Deleuze and Guattari 2004; Žižek 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012); the carnival culture of criminology (Vice 1997; Presdee 2000); the formation of social movements (Melucci 1989; Diani 1992; Diani and McAdam 2003); anarchic forms of organising (Marshall 1993 Chomsky 2008, 2009; narrative development (Davis, ed. 2002); (small world) network theory (Buchanan 2003); actor network theory (Rose 1999; Latour); and radical theology (Wright 2005; Dunne 2006).

What follows is a review of these themes and the connections they make within the research.

## **Social Movements: Searching out Identity**

Within the previous chapter I gave an overview of the three core theories that make up social movement studies: resource mobilisation theory (McAdam 1988, 1999), political process theory (Tilly 1978) and new social movement theory (Touraine 1971, 1977, 2009; Melucci 1989, 1996). Each of these theories provides very helpful insights into considering the lifeworlds of activists so I would like to review a core dynamic from each. Due to the close connection between resource mobilisation theory (RMT) and political process theory (PPT), I have decided to consider them together.

Anheier (2003: 53) suggests that the RMT understanding of social phenomena is rooted within the:

‘right cognitive-cultural framing structures to make movement concerns understandable and attractive to potential constituencies, they also need sufficient grounding in local milieus, in particular existing organisations and networks.’

Osa (2003: 77) writes, regarding PPT:

‘The consensus among social movement researchers working within the political process framework, is that movement emergence depends on three broad factors: political opportunity, organisational networks, and cultural framing or other interpretative processes.’

Thus, RMT places a huge emphasis upon ‘material and structural factors and themes within the development of social movements, while PPT stresses to avoid repetition of emphasis upon the (political) opportunities present within such contexts. In thinking about the lifeworlds of activists, both of these theories may prove to be very helpful in considering the environmental contexts in which activism develops and the dialogue of changes they embody.

However, within the social movement literature, there is a concern that both of these theories reduce movements to organisations, actions, opportunities and events, thus ignoring the dynamics of identity formation within such situations (e.g. Melucci 1996; Diani and McAdam 2003). It is owing to such concerns that new social movement (NSM) theory has gained much attention.

Alberto Melucci (1996: 5) coined the phrase NSM theory in an attempt to differentiate previous theories, which he thought created:

‘exclusive concentration on the visible and measurable features of collective action – such as their relationships with political systems and their effects on policies – at the expense of the production of cultural codes.’

He suggests that the heart of this problem is an epistemological mistake, which regards collective phenomena to be constructed from unitary objects. NSM theory does not accept this coherence and replaces it with complexity and concentration on continual (personal) cultural formulation of activist

identities. Within this understanding, it has been argued, such identity building is at least as important in recent movements as is pursuing concrete strategies (e.g. Lichtermann 1996: 209).

In terms of this research, I believe that all three theories offer numerous components of assistance. However, it would seem that NSM theory presents the strongest perspective and value connection, not only with my epistemology and ontology, but also when considering the identity formulation of activists.

### **Anarchic Formulations**

Let me make it clear that I am deeply sympathetic to anarchic philosophy, theory and praxis. However, I will limit this review to aspects of anarchic thought that connect to social movements, activism and personal subjectivity, rather than giving a broader analysis. Colin Ward (1982: 8) writes:

‘Many years of attempting to be an anarchist propagandist have convinced me that we win over our fellow citizens to anarchist ideas, precisely through drawing upon the common experience of the informal, transient, self-organising networks of relationships that in fact make the human community possible, rather than through the rejection of existing society as a whole in favour of some future society where some different kind of humanity will live in perfect harmony.’

To approach anarchy from this ‘bottom-up’ perspective, and consider its ‘informal, transient, self-organising networks of relationships’, makes much sense for this research. Not only does it naturally connect with much of the previous reflection, it also enables me to highlight and consider some of the key emerging characteristics of anarchy. Ward (1973: 31) states that:

‘An important component of the anarchist approach to organisation is what we might call the theory of spontaneous order: the theory that, given a common need, a collection of people will, by trial and error, by improvisation and experiment, evolve order out of the situation – this order being more durable and more closely related to their needs than any kind of externally imposed authority could provide.’

As shown in Chapter Five, the idea of spontaneous ordering and its related components are so important in the understanding of community activists that I would like to consider this paragraph at more length. The theory of spontaneity is seen to unfold in three distinct characteristics, which are:

- Activists’ engagement in and commitment to a **culture of DIY** (trial and error, by improvisation and experimentation)
- **Organic mutuality** in relationships (which are more durable and more closely related to their needs)
- Withdrawal from and rejection of power and externally imposed authority, which creates a **hermeneutic of suspicion**

Valerie Fournier (2002: 201) argues that such anarchic formulations develop via the cultivation of outrage, the challenging of inevitability, and the invention of alternative moral economies, 'to reclaim the choice and responsibility for organizing our own lives'. However, Diani and McAdam (2003: 1) suggest that the identification of these characteristics may prove far easier within an academic paper than in the lifeworlds of activists, as in reality they take place in a:

'string of more or less connected events, scattered across time and space; [that] cannot be identified with any specific organization, rather consisting of various levels of formulation, linked in patterns of inter-action.'

This in turn links with the theories of social movements in that, through RMT and PPT, it may prove easier to identify the effects of cultivated outrage and challenges to inevitability than identity construction, along with its contradictions and incompleteness, within the context of such cultural changes. Nonetheless, Hermanns (2008: 28) suggests it is important to note that social movements have witnessed an anarchic:

'change from organised activities to actions based on personal views ... when people are enticed by personal networks to participate in protest activities or to join a political group.'

In that sense, many writers have come to see anarchy more as an attitude – a way of life that presents a critique of institutions, lifestyle and subjectivity, whilst at the same time offering the possibility of a radically transformed society (Chomsky 2008, 2010; Marshall 1993). In other words, thinking and reflecting on anarchic formulation offers crucial insights into the identity and subjectivity of activists.

I shall now turn to consider and give account of how my day-to-day activities, continual learning and unfolding work-based subjectivity have been shaped by new reading identified via this research.

### **Continual Learning and Workplace Subjectivity**

My main role as interpreter, translator and broker manifests in sharing and applying academic concepts and development praxes within my relational work-based network. In terms of internal documents, organisational website, values statements and policy documents, my working environment is very sparse. This is not because of incompetency but rather a genuine commitment to creating an anarchic relational network within a non-hierarchical landscape. In other words, we simply don't have all the trappings that most organisational networks find necessary.

In their place, we have developed a strong reliance upon continual work-based learning and reflection. In that sense, my perspectives are to be found more within a relational culture, rather than mission statements, aims and targets; more precisely, this is an oral rather than a written

culture. Ironically, in this context, the literature regarding work-based learning has proved priceless in terms of offering frames of interpretation and personal development. Billett and Smith (2006: 141) state:

‘Learning through work is proposed as being the process and outcome of a relational interdependence between individuals and the social practices that comprise their workplaces. This interdependence is necessary as neither the social suggestions nor individuals’ agency alone is sufficient to secure learning and remaking the practices that constitute work ... Participation, learning and the remaking of work are, therefore, active and personally and culturally transformative.’

My work and research environment is heavily shaped by such a relational interdependence, explaining the visible and measurable features of collective action and the production of cultural codes and identity. What is more, this work-based subjectivity has facilitated questions concerning the epistemological beliefs held by myself and fellow community activists in two distinct ways – organisational concepts of the workplace, and ideas about learners and their learning (Harteis, Gruber and Lehner 2006: 123 in Billett et.al. 2006).

This literature has helped identify fluid epistemologies amongst community activists, which also help develop an ontogeny of suspicion towards hierarchy as well as shared horizontal learning. Nonetheless, such perspectives and values have to engage with existing social practices, thus producing not only the borders/margins for potential research into active resistance and challenge but also contradiction and incompleteness.

Thus, during this research, my personal understanding and insight into the field of work-based learning has significantly developed. The collection of essays *Work, Subjectivity and Learning* (Billett, Fenwick and Somerville, eds. 2006) has proved pivotal to my own understanding and advancement in this area, as it seeks to acknowledge how:

‘Contemporary changes in what constitutes work are producing different kinds of people in organizations and thus workers can be understood as engaging in ongoing identity work’ (Scheerses and Solomon 2006: 87 in Billett et al. 2006).

Thus, although these essays do not focus upon the subject area of community activism, attention to understanding learning for and throughout life, as a component and outcome of engaging in work and work-related activities rather than workplace training, is crucial for activists. Hence, the idea of embedded learning and knowledge being acquired in and through praxes, rather than curriculum activities provided by training schedules, concurred with my own journey and the participants of this research. Further still, Fenwick (2006: 21 in Billett et al. 2006) suggests that we need to explore work-based learning processes:

‘by which people come both to recognise and constitute their subjectivities at work. Subjectivity is realised through enactment: articulations meshed with the boundaries defining the conditions, activities, geographic locations and positions that they find themselves negotiating in different work environments.’

And Edwards and Nicoll (2006: 179 in Billett et al. 2006) suggest that:

‘workplaces need to be examined for the spatio-temporal ordering of practices and the actors drawn in them in order to move beyond the totalizing discourses for instance, the knowledge economy, globalization, performance and even workplace learning itself.’

They argue:

‘that there is no single trajectory for workplace subjectivities, and that pedagogic practices are embedded in the actor-networks of specific workplaces.’

Such challenges to the consistencies of totalising discourses struck a chord with my understanding and praxis of community activism, as well as the literature of social movements and anarchic formulations. As I have shown in Chapter One, my life has been continually about ‘border crossings’ (Giroux 2005), moving beyond fixed social positions and subjectivities.

In making these connections, my reading then led me to the work of Margaret Archer (1988, 2003, 2007), which suggests that:

‘People inescapably are shaped by culture in which they live, while culture itself is made and remade by people. Human beings in their daily lives feel a genuine freedom of thought and belief, yet this is unavoidably constrained by cultural limitations – such as those imposed by the language spoken, the knowledge developed and the information available at any time’ (Archer 1996: xii).

Her writing compelled me to extend further the possibility of imagination – in terms of language, knowledge and information – for myself and fellow community activists. She argues:

‘Human reflexivity works through “internal conversations” using language, but, also emotions, sensations and images. Most people acknowledge “internal dialogue” and can report upon it. However, little research has been conducted on internal conversations and how they mediate between our ultimate concerns and social contexts we confront’ (Archer 2007: ii).

Archer’s impact on the orientation of these studies shall become obvious, but it is still important to note at this point the previously untapped dynamic that her writings brought to my attention, I embarked upon this research with a comprehensive understanding of social movements and anarchic studies, but found a field of learning that has proved to be just as significant in terms of future development. In trying to relay this impact, I can find no better collection of thoughts than the following ideas of John Lederach (2005: 175):

‘If the moral imagination lies within us as a dormant seed of potential, and this seed holds the key to breaking cycles of destructive conflict, then our challenge is how to invoke the growth of this kind of

imagination as an integral part of developing innovative professionals. Much of what currently takes place in “skills training” orients itself toward an understanding and managing cognitive and behavioural responses in human interaction. Tapping the creative side, touching intuition, knowing things kinetically, visually, metaphorically, and artistically requires avenues of exploration in the educational process that tap whole other parts of human “being” and “knowing”. It suggests that [we] build in spaces for listening to the inner voice, recognizing and exploring a variety of ways of knowing and touching reality.’

I argue later (Chapter Eight) that the lifeworlds of community activists display the beauty and challenge of cultivating such an imagination, seeking to push through the cracks (Holloway 2010) and destructive cycles of the dominant turbo-capitalism. Nonetheless, the exploration of work-based learning literature, coupled with Archer’s reflections on culture and internal dialogue, has been essential. In understanding not only the incomplete and contradictory social positions held by community activists (myself included) but also the ways in which they retain an ability to resist and cultivate alternative moral economies, these works have been deeply influential.

This in turn leads me to the final area of literature and learning – the focus on the wider philosophical context and its continual impact on the lifeworlds of community activists.

### **Violence, Philosophy, Lacan and Weakness**

Slavoj Žižek (2009: 1) writes:

‘Subjective violence is just the most visible portion of a triumvirate that also includes two objective kinds of violence. First, there is a symbolic violence embodied in language and its forms, what Heidegger would call ‘our house of being’ ... Second, there is what I call systemic violence, or the often catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems.’

As shown in Chapter Seven, beyond any doubt, the writings of Žižek (2006, 2010, 2012) have proved to be the most confrontational, in terms of epistemology, ontology and praxis, for me during this research. It is fair to say that these have, at points, turned my world upside down. The reading of turbo-capitalism and the suggested response to it, provided by Žižek and related writers, simply cannot be sidestepped, as they bring an acute challenge to community activism and my own work-based learning.

Let me start by offering some context. Žižek (2012: 1) writes:

‘There is a wonderful expression in Persian, *war nam nihadan*, which means “to murder somebody, bury his body, then grow flowers over the body to conceal it”.<sup>7</sup> In 2011, we witnessed (and participated in) a series of shattering events, from the Arab Spring to the Occupy Wall Street

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<sup>7</sup> See Adam Jacot de Boinod, *The Meaning of Tingo* (2005).

movement, from the UK riots to Breivik's ideological madness. It was a year of dreaming dangerously.'

This brief sketch captures something of the unfolding context (and my own involvement in direct activism at Occupy London<sup>8</sup>) in which this research was produced. He goes on to say:

'There is no lack of anti-capitalist sentiment today; if anything we are overloaded with the critiques of the horrors of capitalism: books, in-depth newspaper investigations, and TV reports abound that investigate companies ruthlessly polluting our environment, corrupt bankers who continue to get fat bonuses while their banks have to be saved by public money, sweatshops where children work overtime, and so on. There is, however, a catch in all this. What as a rule goes unquestioned, ruthless though it may appear, is the democratic-liberal framework of the (bourgeois) state of law itself. This remains the sacred cow that even the most radical of these forms of "ethical capitalism" do not dare challenge' (Žižek 2012: 86).

Hence, it is not his (Lacanian-global Marxist) commentary that brings the challenge – in fact, I share the opinions of much of this analysis. The difference and disruption comes at the point of how we are to respond. In a nutshell, Žižek advocates change at the macro level, believing this to be the only hope. He writes:

'What if the true evil of our societies is not their capitalist dynamics as such, but our attempts to extricate ourselves from them – all the while profiting – by carving out exclusive self-enclosed communal spaces' (Žižek 2009: 23).

Colin Cremin (2011) elaborates on this by suggesting that any local responses to turbo-capitalism should be seen simply as pseudo micro-activities, which present a guise of resistance but are in fact stopping any real macro change. Alain Badiou (2012b: 1) writes:

'What is going on? Of what are we the half-fascinated, half-devastated witnesses? The continuation, at all costs, of a weary world? A salutary crisis of the world, racked by victorious expansion? The end of that world? The advent of a different world? What is happening to us in the early years of the century – something that would appear not to have any clear name in any accepted language?'

However, in an earlier work he suggests that:

'It is better to do nothing than to contribute to the invention of formal ways of rendering visible that which Empire already recognizes as existent' (Badiou 2012a: 119).

Hence, all these writers, each in their own way, call for a cessation of micro-activism, which they regard causes a false consciousness regarding cultural change that is not really happening. As much as I understand such positions, I respond (in Chapter Eight) with an inability to agree with them. Instead, with much assistance from the writings of Taylor (1989), Holloway (2010), Pink (2010) and Critchley (2007, 2012), I find more sense-making within:

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<sup>8</sup> <http://occupy1sx.org/?p=446>

‘a conception of the human being defined by an experience of enactment that exceeds the limits of potency and strength and in which authenticity is rooted in an affirmation of weakness and impotence’ (Critchley 2012: 14).

Such weakness and impotence, rooted in ‘the practice of everyday’ (de Certeau 1984), is found in the shadows of power – the places Holloway (2010: 3) frames as ‘crack capitalism’:

‘We protest and we do more. We do and we must. If we only protest, we allow the powerful to set the agenda. If all we do is oppose what they are trying to do, then, we simply follow in their footsteps. *Breaking* means that we do more than that, that we seize the initiative, that we set the agenda. We negate, but out of our negation grows creation, an other-doing, an activity that is not determined by money, an activity that is not shaped by the rules of power.’

The non-vitriolic nature of this weakness literature offers two key aspects to my work-based learning and research. Firstly, it enables introduction to the Lacanian concepts of ‘lack’ and ‘fantasy’:

‘Lacan’s theory of subjectivity is dominated by a fundamental ontological traumatic sense of *lack* (1991, 2006). Yet, Lacan’s theory is characterized, on the one hand, by an enigmatic structural dimension of fantasy and, on the other hand, by the perhaps provoking intuition that there remains something artificial at the core of humanity itself. Lacan finds at the heart of what it means to be human an ethical fiction that works to cover up a more radical lack and monstrosity as the ontological undercurrent of human existence’ (Johnsen and Gudmand-Høyer 2010: 332).

Thus, the Lacanian theory of subjectivity provides a creative dynamic to the work-based literature review above, calling into question the core of humanity via incompleteness and contradiction. This aspect of analysis has made its way to the heart of this research, providing a critique of both turbo-capitalism and community activism.

Secondly, however, rather than leading me to agree with Žižek et al., reviewing this area of knowledge has enabled me to conclude with an orientation towards:

‘a route through which to understand how experiential elements of both the activities and environments of everyday life might be implicated in activist processes and sustainable agendas’ (Pink 2012: 141).

Resulting in:

‘a new form of subjectivity to stand in the place inhabited by the old self ... where it is no longer organized around individual identity and its self-regarding acts of will, but is rather orientated towards that which is unconscious in the life of desire ... a transformation of the self through the act of love’ (Critchley 2012: 139).

In a sense, seeking to identify activist processes and sustainable agendas brings us back to the start of this review and the roots of anarchic social movements, in which community activists:

'tend to structure themselves in a fluid, decentralised style, to emphasise the reflexive construction of collective identities and the moral meaning of everyday life and to rely on cultural and symbolic forms of resistance at least as often as more conventional political activism' (Davis et al. 2002: 8).

Thus, embarking on this exploration of community activist lifeworlds, and the investigation of incompleteness and contradiction, I can think of no more helpful starting point than that of seeking the transformation of the self through acts of love!

## **CHAPTER THREE – INFLUENCES ON CHOICE OF RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **Insider – Role of Practitioner, Professional and Researcher**

In the earliest conception of 'lifeworld', Edmund Husserl (1936: 108–9) states that:

'In whatever way we may be conscious of the world as universal horizon, as coherent universe of existing objects, we, each "I-the-man" and all of us together, belong to the world as living with one another in the world; and the world is our world, valid for our consciousness as existing precisely through this living together.'

As I have already intimated in Chapter Two:

- I have no problem in 'self-identifying' with the role of activist – i.e. translator, interpreter and broker – within my own work-based context
- I intend to collaborate with others involved in my work-based networks that hold similar roles

Nonetheless, I recognise that, as the researcher:

'Power relations in a setting operate even when they think they are being collaborative' (Herr and Anderson 2005: 34).

To ensure as little interference as possible, it is important that such power relations are explored and named. So, let me first turn to what is often referred to as 'the root of all evil' – money. All the participants that I planned to collaborate with had received or were receiving money from the small grants component of Seedbed activities. Regardless of any protestations that I might make towards the strong single-minded, anti-authoritarian and questioning mindset that each of these individuals may carry, it would be naive to dismiss the power of these monetary transactions.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that the power footprint caused by such a dynamic is something that is already continually considered within my working environment. This has resulted in processes in which localities gain control over the budgets, all (money) decision making takes place within a collaborative framework of accountability, and no single payment exceeds £5000 per year to decrease any sense of dependency.

The second power dynamic that needs to be considered is the implication of the participants engaging through communication networks and previously shared learning experiences. I recognise that these relationships of familiarity may produce taken-for-granted, tacit knowledge, which can also:

'tend to be impressionistic, full of bias, prejudice, and unexamined impressions and assumptions that need to be surfaced and examined. Furthermore, insiders, because they are true believers in their particular practices, are too often tempted to put a spin on their data' (Herr and Anderson 2005: 36).

Clearly it can be, and has been, argued, that all researchers enter a landscape from their own unique perspectives and biases. The above challenges and issues are undoubtedly real and I sought to resist them as the process unfolded during this research. In part, I hope that the very pursuit of contradiction and incompleteness within those that dwell in my/their lifeworld displays a real desire to not become entrapped by this partisan spirit.

Finally, I also take note of Moore (2009: 32) when he writes:

'Although I was aware of some of my prejudices and preferences, there are many more experiences and beliefs suppressed deep within my subconscious that affect and impinge upon the way I think and interpret what I observe. These inner constructs and influences that direct the way I view the world are the forbidden fruit that I cannot normally see as they lie hidden within me.'

My response to such (subconscious) 'forbidden fruit' may again at first seem contradictory, in the sense that I initially used appreciative inquiry to engage with participants (see Chapter Four); however, this decision was made for two reasons. Firstly, I consider myself to have a much sharper 'deficit analysis' than 'asset based analysis' within my work-based praxis. Therefore, on initiating discussions from the latter perspective, I embarked on a research process that de-centred and dislodged (McNiff and Whitehead 2009) my prejudices and preferences.

Secondly, the employment of Jacques Lacan's (1996) thinking regarding 'lack' and 'fantasy' to analyse the findings of my investigation (see Chapter Four), I believe necessitates a strong challenge to the existing ways that I interpret what I observe. This interrogation aims to reflect upon the incompleteness situated both within the environmental lifeworlds of the participants and in their own personal motivations and impact. Once again, I recognise that, as the researcher, my own epistemology, ontology and praxis should not escape this emerging critique.

I now turn to address what I consider to be the key ethical issues in more detail. In doing so, I first address the construction of 'stakeholder agreements'; I then address key concerns attached to insider action research and conclude by thinking beyond research to a culture of continual learning.

### **Stakeholder Agreements**

Herr and Anderson (2005: 74) reflect that:

'As with much action research, we see this issue of who owns the data as an ongoing conversation and negotiation as the research evolves. At the same time, we would encourage doctoral students to

initially work out agreements with other stakeholders regarding the use of the data and its dissemination for the dissertation. To work towards clear agreements initially and then continue to revisit the working understanding serves as a protection for the doctoral student and other stakeholders against any later confusion regarding intellectual property rights. Putting in writing these early agreement makes them explicit ... The goal is to have as upfront, clear working agreements and relationships as possible, early on in the process.'

In one sense, I would like to acknowledge this very helpful advice, confirm to the reader that it was my intention to take a course of action that followed each practical step that is signposted, and move on to the next issue of ethics. However, I acknowledge the requirements of rigour and demonstrable understanding required at this stage. Hence, to clarify, I produced a 'stakeholder agreement' with each of the activists engaged within this research process. This agreement contained:

- An overview of the research aim and objectives
- A timescale for the research
- A timescale for the involvement required of each participant
- A clause allowing 'a commitment break', by the participants or researcher, at any point in the research process. This could be called upon not simply if participants were unhappy with research developments but also due to other practical issues like time commitment, changes of circumstances, etc. Hence, this aimed to break the 'meaningless ritual' of fairly static, one-time consent and replace it with a framework 'that captures the dynamic nature of evolving research' (Herr and Anderson 2005: 119) – i.e. processual consent.
- Full access to and ongoing updates on individual research data. I filmed all interactions with participants and always provided a CD copy for participants' comments and instructions. This was crucial not only concerning 'shared learning' sessions but also when thinking through wider dissemination. The bottom line was always that if stakeholders were not comfortable then the information would be excluded. This also deals with the issue of intellectual property and creates a model of parity and reciprocity.
- Official involvement endorsements, if required, from networks/organisations the activists represent. This was supported by a separate support document ensuring individual and organisational anonymity.

My aim throughout the whole research process was to create a context in which:

‘To the degree they are capable, research subjects should be given the opportunity to choose whether or not to participate in the research; towards this end, they must be given enough information to form this judgement’ (National Commission 1979).

### **Insider Action Research**

In writing about encountering discomfort and dissonance whilst conducting insider action research, Moore (2009: 33) states:

‘The main source of my discomfort did not only come from encountering opposing views and opinions, which I could reasonably have anticipated would arise, but also from the recognition of the incompleteness and ideological contamination of my own position. It was an uncomfortable and disconcerting revelation to find that I was not as self-aware as I had previously liked to think I was.’

When I first read this article these words ‘jumped off the page’ and created an immediate value connection. The link between identification of personal incompleteness and the potential ‘fantasy shield’ to be found with ideological contamination was very exciting. Not only did I recognise the parallel with the aims of this research, I also recognised its focus to be one of my own ethical dangers as an insider researcher and acknowledged, as I do in the methodology section, that such lack of self awareness can lead to bias and identifying actions with the ideologies of the actor and of the researcher.

In one sense, this made me recognise that such disconcerting revelations are the very things that I hope to explore. Nonetheless, this does not remove the impact and emerging areas of conflict that may also be produced by such investigations. In fact, unlike Moore (*ibid.*), because of my close relational connections with the potential participants, I could also see a potential danger in ‘encountering opposing views and opinions’. This could lead to further unforeseen issues in terms of inconsistencies between participants and myself regarding previously celebrated areas of agreement.

Thinking about further areas of complication due to familiarity and relationship led me back to the broader issues of power and money. As with so much of this research, this was not an ‘untravelling land’. On the contrary, this is a central discourse and element of my work-based praxis and what I term a ‘power footprint’.

Essentially, my idea of a ‘power footprint’ mirrors the idea of carbon footprints. Within my work-based interactions, I ask people to consider the relational power footprints that exist in their day-to-day working contexts and, more importantly for this research, in their interactions within the network. We then explore ways in which to reduce any footprint imbalance (e.g. in terms of decision making, idea generation, accumulation of position and voice), with the intention of working towards

appropriate parity and a co-ethical stance. I think this is an important area of practice to point out as it may have paved the way for addressing emerging issues connected to the research (e.g. breaches of confidentiality).

### **Beyond Research – Learning, Work and Subjectivity**

This then leads me to my final ethical research question – is this research justified and what happens afterwards? Many commentators have noted that quality research is ‘for me, for us, and for them’ (Herr and Anderson 2005). In this sense, I believe it is true to say that this research has the potential of benefiting not only myself, those that participate and its academic judges but also hundreds (possibly thousands) of people that are connected to my work-based networks.

Such a statement is not rooted in arrogant self-belief but rather in the power of small world networks – this I believe is the architecture of activism. Small world architecture enables the most complex relational networks to develop and adapt. It continually provides a jumping-off point for new discoveries, new concepts and new wisdom (Buchanan 2003). Opening up connections between previously concentric organisations literally makes the world a lot smaller and potential sparks of innovations that much closer.

The basic characteristics of small world networks are organisational hubs and the weak ties that exist across and through these organisations and closed networks. However, the essential ingredients within small world networks are the weak ties, which act as viral bridges. These are the social shortcuts that, if eliminated or not present in the first place, cause a network dealing with complex relationships to be all but impossible. Or, to put it another way, these are the actions of translation, interpretation and brokerage that exist within networks.

Because of the very nature of the participants and the subject matter being considered, I believe that if this research succeeds in producing a thesis that is original, critically engages with learning, and produces technical and scholarship excellence (McNiff and Whitehead 2009), it will be located within a matrix of viral bridges. Therefore, the spread of the findings will not only take place through agreed conventional methods (thesis, journal articles, short films, books) but also through the randomness of activist lifeworlds.

## **CHAPTER FOUR – PROJECT DESIGN: METHODOLOGIES AND METHODS**

I begin this chapter with an overview of my research design and its key stages. Having set out my investigative framework, I then unpack the rationale underpinning my chosen approach via the methodology and methods sections.

### **Overview**

It is important to establish that my work-based learning environment currently consists of over two thousand community initiatives and fifty locality networks. The significance of this information is to highlight that my primary source material was collected from a sample group made up of nine ‘hand-picked’ community activists (n.9 – five female and four male; age range 28–47 years; four postgraduates; three ethnic minorities), with whom I have developed connections in this context: and with whom I have working relationships that span a five to nine year period.

The central aim of my selection was that each participant occupies a key facilitating role/position within the network(s) in which they are engaged. Thus, those chosen are highly experienced at articulation, negotiation and reflection and could be viewed as ‘connecting the connectors’. Paradoxically, I believe that these individuals (despite the small sample) make a particular contribution to the content and impact of this research, offering the potential for the outcomes to reach as wide an audience as possible. I also believe that combining the in-depth experience of these particular participants creates a unique insight into the activist’s lifeworld. Fenwick (2006) suggests that activists’ subjectivity:

‘is realised through enactment: articulations meshed with the boundaries defining the conditions, activities, geographic locations and positions that they find themselves negotiating in different work environments.’

In other words, I recognise that the sample group seemed small and even inadequate at first glance, but I am convinced that, with the assistance of the appropriate methods, prove the best way to not only access activist lifeworlds; but also to secure the richest data at stage one, for my subsequent work-based learning development. Hence, I embarked on a three-stage data-gathering process.

**Stage One** – Initially I conducted individual appreciative inquiry (AI) interviews, using Cooperrider and Whitney’s (2008) 4D cycle as the meta-framework. All of these interviews were filmed, transcribed (see sample in Appendix 2) and then used as the context for future conversations with the participants (see below and Chapter Five). I placed within the 4D cycle a series of questions shaped by my interest in social movement studies, anarchic formulations and small world networks:

**Discovery:** Can you start by giving a brief overview of your current work activities? Which area would you describe as being the most successful, in terms of creating impact and change? What contributed to this success? What resources were being used and mobilised? What opportunities for further engagement arose from these activities? What has the impact of these activities been upon your own activity?

**Dream:** Imagine if you were to return to this example in three years' time. What type of further change would you hope to see? What would be the sources of your motivation and inspiration in pursuing this dream? What would be the roles of others in this dream? What resources would you need to mobilise to achieve this dream? What would be the praxis needed to achieve this dream?

**Design and Destiny:** What role do you think planning and strategy have played in the example you have shared? Also what roles do you think planning and strategy would need to play to achieve your dream(s)? What role do you think that reflection and evaluation have played in the example you have shared? Also what roles do you think reflection and evaluation would need to play to achieve your dream(s)? How important is sharing learning within your network? Has this interview challenged the potential destiny of your praxis and engagement?

**Stage Two** – This stage of the research process involved feeding back the emerging findings within a one-day workshop with the primary participants. The data collected from the initial interviews enabled me to construct a draft 'Profile of an Activist', via a process of thematic analysis, which I then explored within the shared workshop (see below). Before the workshop, participants were asked to watch the films (and read the transcripts, time permitting) and identify any content that they would like removed from the process.

I wanted the workshop to be as interactive as possible so I employed 'world cafe' techniques of engagement (2005), hence allowing the participants a real opportunity to interrogate and endorse the emerging findings. This resulted in the identification of what I have termed 'core clusters of characteristics', all of which were endorsed by the participants.

The day started with the core participants focusing on the 'good news' gained from the AI process – what works, why it worked, what was the impact and so on – but I also discussed some of my critical engagement with the data gained from personal reflection and reading. As I shall elaborate, it was at this point that I introduced the Lacanian framework found in Figure 1 of Chapter Six. My rationale for this development was a wish to remain in an action research discipline of emergent findings but this also concurred with Reed (2007: 57), who writes:

‘Critical theory can prompt AI projects to reflect on the taken-for-granted images of organisations and activities that participants may have. This can be in the way that questions are formulated or data is interpreted.’

In asking the participants to consider the data from a Lacanian perspective, I realised I was, like Žižek (2006: 43):

‘not simply asking: “What do you want?” But rather: “What’s bugging you? What is it that makes you so unbearable not only to us, but also for yourself that you yourself obviously do not control?”’

I employed the Lacanian negative ontology, which understands ‘human subjectivity as a radical under-determined phenomenon’, as a tool to triangulate, explore and interpret the lifeworld data. In particular, this consisted of considering areas of lack and fantasy, which may shield ‘the subject from the terror of living with the relentless sense of incompleteness’ (Johnsen and Gudmand-Høyer 2010), within the dominant culture of turbo-capitalism that they grapple to change and their own identities as activists.

This resulted in this stage of the research entering into:

‘A form of collective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practice, as well as their understanding of the practices and situations in which these practices are carried out’ (Kemmis and McTaggart 1998: 275).

**Stage Three** – The ‘foundation workshop’ of stage two produced a framework, which I have since used<sup>9</sup> and continue to use (see concluding chapter – Way forward) within my wider working context. Chapter Six does not directly include data sourced from these subsequent workshops (although photographic and other evidence can be found in Appendix 3), but must be acknowledged within the ongoing shaping of my learning, translations and interpretations.

Further still, this supports the ongoing dynamic and unfolding nature of this action research. The AI/lack and fantasy approach (see below) that I have developed has an inherent cyclical nature, which is a strategic part of my design. As mentioned, this research is situated within the architecture

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<sup>9</sup> List of workshops and participants completed so far:

- **Bank of Ideas (n.6)** – participants were made up of direct action activists and academics
- **South East Village (n.8)** – participants were all working in the same urban development context (with differing roles)
- **Manchester faith networkers (n.7)** – all participants were actively involved in mobilising faith organisations to become involved in social justice issues
- **Leeds community development network (n.35)** – wide variety of community activists working across the city of Leeds.
- **Peterborough environmental activists (n.10)** – variety of environmental activists working across Peterborough

of cultural change. It was and is my hope, intention and belief that if the results of this research prove to be meaningful then the findings, processes and subsequent workshops may contribute to developing an ongoing learning context and exploration for participants into the future.

A note of caution, or more to the point clarification, is needed here. The voices located in Chapter Five and subsequent analysis of Chapter Six is representative of an ongoing matrix of translation and interpretation, which also include my own voice and work-based experience and practice. In this sense there is no purity, or some would say privileging, but rather an ongoing fusion to the desire of continual sense making; or what may be seen as triangulation. This may cause frustration, in terms of clarification and 'multi-voice fusion', if not embraced and recognised as all being partial and incomplete.

What's more:

'Rather than the process of development going from investigation to implementation to evaluation and then finishing, the impact of the exploration is anticipated to continue for some time, as the participants became aware of the potential impact of thinking and acting differently' (Reed 2007: 64).

I shall now turn to the methodological rationale that underpins my research design.

## **Methodology**

I began thinking about methodology and methods from within the context of social movements and the lifeworlds of activists (McAdam 1982; Melucci 1989, 1996; McCarthy and Zald 1977; Davis 2002; Diani and McAdam 2003). This then developed into a wider analysis of action research literature and thought (Kemmis and McTaggart 1987; Herr and Anderson 2005; Dick 2009; Maurer 2009; McNiff and Whitehead 2009).

My research methodology began within social movement studies but quickly branched out into a deeper analysis of action research theory. This was all part of engaging in the quest for underpinning values that cause:

'A transformative orientation to knowledge creation in that action researchers, seek to take knowledge production beyond the gate-keeping of professional knowledge makers' (Bradbury Huang 2010: 109).

As I discussed in Chapter One, I recognised the need to develop a research position through which I would continually be challenged to acknowledge the partiality of my own activities. As shown above, this resulted in three interconnected consequences:

1. The recognition of Melucci's (1996) warning concerning the need for all research methodologies to resist the acceptance of coherence and unity within social movements and social actors, avoiding the 'artless realism that paradoxically takes for granted a quasi-metaphysical existence of the actor [and movement]'. He supports this by suggesting that as research material evidence:

'is gradually subjected to the scrutiny of analysis, it becomes clear that unity is the result of exchanges, negotiations, decisions, and conflicts, constantly activated by actors but not apparent on the surface. These processes are not immediately visible, since the actors tend to conceal themselves and their fragmentation. Action, in fact, entails the unification of the field by means of some common representation and the force of ideology' (ibid.).

2. Rather than denying fragmentation, I wanted to explore the contradictions and incompleteness present within activist lifeworlds, always bearing in mind that:

'We should not forget, then, that when unification comes about it is already a product. The construction processes have outcomes of varying degrees of success, but when we observe actual collective action taking place, it should be assumed that such a process is active and is perpetuated through time' (ibid.).

3. Recognition of the insight(s) and support that is made available through the relatively uncluttered world of social movement study and its three core theories of **resource mobilisation theory, political process theory and new social movement theory.**

I found re-familiarising myself with these theories and connected methodological positions an extremely helpful starting point. Social movements are a complex formation of relationships, which are then reduced to specific facts, personalities and events. All too often this reductionism and 'pop-movement' approach can airbrush out crucial insights and learning opportunities (see Taylor's 1989 work on feminist movements and McAdam's 1982 work on black insurgency). I recognised that all of these approaches have their own specific way of reaching a 'social product', from living, changing contexts.

This, in turn, caused me to think seriously about the dynamics of insider/outsider research. Much has been written concerning the relationship and dynamic that exists between the researcher and his/her social positioning to the subject matter. Personally, I appreciate the 2005 work of Herr and Anderson – *Continuum and Implications of Positionality* – in which they consider six positions:

1. Insider – researcher studies own self/practice
2. Insider in collaboration with other insiders

3. Insider(s) in collaboration with outsiders
4. Reciprocal collaboration (insider-outsider teams)
5. Outsider(s) in collaboration with insider(s)
6. Outsider(s) studies insider(s)

As the authors suggest:

‘Positionality determines how one thinks about the criteria for quality or trustworthiness of the study. Insiders, outsiders, and insider-outsider teams all have different dilemmas to resolve in designing and carrying out an action research project’ (ibid.).

Furthermore, in light of the thoughts about partiality, construction and the fragmented nature of social phenomena, I think that the simple acceptance of solid positions (i.e. insider/outsider), should also be viewed with a strong hermeneutic of suspicion.

Nonetheless, in terms of my own subjective insider/outsider position within the research dynamic, I realised that I faced a harder task than I had originally imagined. The ‘different frames and different voices’ (McNiff and Whitehead 2009) needing to be considered created many challenges and questions for me as a researcher. I was left wanting to grasp the opportunity to expand, explore and reconfigure my learning and practice, while recognising the desire to investigate different ways of thinking about social movements and activists, and also wanting to dislodge my current practice to enable a further radicalisation of my subjectivity within the workplace.

The more I considered the existing literature, the more I developed a desire to branch out into the wider action research literature for inspiration and direction. In a sense, what emerged was a hybridisation of thought and research position, forged by a series of inter-connecting and unique personal reflections. All these developments were accompanied by the underlying recognition that I needed to produce a research project that was original or distinctive – which critically engaged my learning and produced technical and scholarship excellence (McNiff and Whitehead 2009).

I concluded that I needed a methodology that could embrace the nuances of individual activist’s lifeworlds, whilst simultaneously exploring webs of exchange in and between such spheres. It was at this point that I discovered Fuller-Rowell’s recent work (2009) comparing multi-site action research (MSAR) and coalition-based research. This work makes the distinction that:

‘[Coalition-based research] do generally seek to influence the functioning of involved organizations in systematic ways ... action research is taking place at the centralized level and is focused on meta-questions beyond the scope of any one organization’ (Fuller-Rowell 2009: 367–68).

Alternatively:

‘In MSAR, the action research processes are coordinated but not centralized, each individual [organization] stays primarily focused on its own development while also drawing upon similar development processes at other sites’ (Fuller-Rowell 2009: 367-68).

In terms of my research design, this left me in a conundrum for a period of time, as both methodologies had appealing attributes. A coalition-based approach would enable me to explore the issues, contradictions and incompleteness at a macro political level, whilst MSAR would enable me to consider these issues from and at a grass-roots perspective and level. I also concluded that there was a stronger value connection to be found between the coalition-based approach, resource mobilisation theory and political process theory, whereas the decentralised MSAR approach held more of an affinity with new social movement theory and the emergence and reproduction of movement identity.

In arriving at this point of deliberation, it is important to document that my final decision took a considerable period of time. During this period, I engaged in what Margaret Archer (2007) terms ‘internal conversations’ (i.e. mulling over, imagining, rehearsing, having imaginary conversations and budgeting). This proved essential in making what I believe to be the most appropriate choice but it also clarified for me the role that internal dialogue plays within my general ontology and reflective practice.

By the end of this period of ‘methodological gestation’, I decided that MSAR methodology held sufficient flexibility for my doctoral pursuit, being persuaded by the Fuller-Rowell (2009: 369) argument that:

‘Since MSAR does not necessarily contain a centralized action research process, cross-site interactions are focused on information exchange and learning rather than on collaborative decision making. The structure of cross-site coordination will vary based on the particular characteristics of an initiative and its involved organizations.’

Additionally, the combination of information exchange and learning, coupled with cross-site flexibility, enabled me to think creatively and innovatively when considering which research methods to use.

## **Methods**

Identifying the appropriate methods to use within an MSAR framework proved to be an interesting area of learning. I wanted to identify methods that would disrupt my subjective critical orientation outlined earlier. As with the methodology, I began within social movement studies and then broadened out to wider action research literature.

I found that Montagna 2005 thesis offers a helpful classification of the spectrum of research methods used within social movements:

1. **'Workerist co-research'**: political-sociological intervention where the distance between the researcher and the object of research should be progressively abolished.
2. **Content analysis**: empirical studies into the reported actions of protesters and their actions with the elites, opponents and allied groups over time.
3. **Contractual relationship**: the social research goes further than participant observation and enters into a relationship with the social movement itself.

I also suggest that two more approaches should be noted:

4. **Relational network approach**: exploring the 'webs of exchanges between groups and organisations who engage in coalition work while preserving their autonomy and specificity'.
5. **Movement narrative studies**: Studying narratives, their functions and conditions under which they are created. Illuminates the core features of identity building and meaning making in social activism.

Making note of these methods I then decided to view approaches outside of social movement theory. In particular, I made the decision to explore the asset-based approaches of appreciative inquiry (AI), instead of starting from my more natural disposition of critique and outrage.

'AI is a simple but radical approach to understanding the social world. Put simply, AI concentrates on exploring ideas that people have about what is valuable in what they do and then tries to work out ways in which this can be built on. The emphasis is firmly on appreciating the activities and responses of people, rather than concentrating on their problems' (Reed 2007: 2).

Various typologies of the appreciative inquiry process are outlined in literature. For example, Cooperrider and Whitney (2000) provide the 4D cycle: discovery, dream, design and destiny. Mohr and Jacobsgaard, cited in Watkins and Mohr (2001), provide the 4I model: initiate, inquire, imagine and innovate. All follow the asset-based position suggested by Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) in that, rather than seeking a problem to be solved, organisations are a mystery to be embraced.

In terms of the wider epistemological and ontological position of AI, Grant and Humphries (2006: 401) suggest that:

'Appreciative inquiry has its foundations in the conceptual/ontological positions of social constructionists, who work from the premise that language, knowledge and action are inextricably

linked. Organizations are considered as the outcomes of their members' interactions with historical, cultural, social, economic and political occurrences.'

I recognised that the balance suggested here between individual (identity) interactions and the wider socio-cultural context shared a similarity with social movement theories. Exploring the positive holds real opportunities to investigate human flourishing (NSM theory), within the wider organisational and political contexts (RMT and PPT). Nonetheless, AI has been accused of 'privileging the positive of organisational experience' (Pratt 2002) and is seen as failing:

'to value the opportunities for positive change that are possible from negative experiences, such as embarrassing events, periods of anger, anxiety, fear, or shame ... moreover, in privileging positive talk, it fails to engage with the emotionally ambiguous circumstances of the workplace, such as when individuals feel torn between competing possibilities and differing voices' (Maurer 2009: 275).

However, others have attempted to bridge this gap with the:

'application of a critical perspective with its attendant reputation for negativity to the paradigm of appreciative inquiry may appear paradoxical. Indeed our initial reaction was that the two approaches were almost contradictory. However, as our reading and reflection on the relevant theoretical foundations and applications matured, we began to both identify similarities and value apparent differences. We treated the apparent contradiction as a paradox. A paradox might be seen as an interesting and thought provoking contradiction ... The energy generated from working with/through the paradox may manifest alternative insights that one would not have reached by ignoring the paradox, or even working with just one dimension of it' (Grant and Humphries 2006: 407).

Thinking along these lines led me to consider a second critical stage of enquiry, which I thought might complement the findings from an AI stage. In their recent journal article, 'Appreciative Inquiry as a Shadow Process', Fitzgerald, Oliver and Hoxsey (2010: 220) develop Jungian investigation:

'The relationship of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) with the shadow, defined as censored emotional and/or cognitive content (Shadow), is explored via three varieties of AI-Shadow relationships: (1) AI as generating Shadow through both its "light" and the censoring effect of polarizing norms, (2) AI as an intervention into the Shadow, and (3) AI itself as a Shadow process.'

The idea of developing a similar approach was very appealing to me. However, because of my interest in contradiction and incompleteness I became more drawn to the work of Jacques Lacan (1992). In particular (as shown in my aims and objectives), my interest lies in the Lacanian ideas of lack and fantasy. Once again, Johnsen and Gudmand-Høyer (2010: 336) suggest these insights provide an opportunity to explore:

'the understanding of human subjectivity as a radical under-determined phenomenon dominated and scarred by the peculiar sense of *lack* that runs through it like a melancholic undercurrent. And secondly, an understanding of the role of *fantasy* in character formation as it shields the subject from the terror of living with the relentless sense of incompleteness' (Johnsen and Gudmand-Høyer 2010: 336).

Hence, I decided to formulate an approach akin to Fitzgerald, Oliver and Hoxsey (2010) but based within these Lacanian concepts. This resulted in a second stage of enquiry, which explores the relationship between AI and lack and fantasy, via two varieties of AI/lack and fantasy relationships:

1. Exploring AI as generating lack and fantasy via its ability to highlight asset base and censoring effect of critique base activities.
2. Using AI as an intervention into the lack and fantasy of activists' lifeworlds.

I would like to elaborate and clarify exactly why I was proposing such an approach and also raise areas of concern about taking such a direction. My decision to conduct stage one of this research through an AI investigation was not simply to draw out and appreciate the 'good'; I wanted to challenge my 'natural' disposition of critique. I also wanted to move beyond the accusation of propagating 'resentment and hostility' through 'accentuating the borders between insiders and outsiders and the wrong done by those outsiders' (Fitzgerald et al. 2010: 173). AI provides a space to explore common ground and agreement, a place to develop trust and consensus.

However, I recognise the faults that have been attributed to AI. Thus, a second stage of Lacanian analysis would aim to make the analysis more rigorous and robust. Žižek (2006: 57) comments:

'If what we experience as 'reality' is structured by fantasy, and if fantasy serves as the screen that protects us from being directly overwhelmed by the raw Real, then *reality itself can function as an escape from encountering the Real.*'

I wanted to explore (my) activist lifeworlds to appreciate and critique their 'realities', to gain sight of the 'Real'. However, I do also recognise the need for sensitivity and care whilst conducting such investigations. Once again, Žižek (2006: 55) writes:

'It is never possible for me to fully assume (in the sense of symbolic integration) the phantasmic kernel of my being: when I venture too close, what occurs is what Lacan calls the *aphanisis* (the self-obliteration) of the subject: the subject loses his/her symbolic consistency, it disintegrates. And perhaps the forced actualization of social reality itself of the phantasmic kernel of my being is the worst, most humiliating kind of violence, a violence that undermines the very basis of my identity (my self-image).'

I recognise the danger(s) and violence of this (self) obliteration and potential loss of identity and symbolic consistency. As I have discussed more within the ethical considerations of the proposal for this thesis, participants and myself would need to consider and therefore be fully informed of the research journey, before it started.

Theoretically, I also recognised that this second stage would raise questions of legitimacy, in terms of de-contextualising Lacanian thought within a psychoanalytical framework (Parker 2003, 2005). It

is important to note that any such move must be seen as a re-imagining and re-framing of the 'original' thought of Lacan. In doing so, my defence is based initially on calling upon the doubt, raised by Lacan, about all attempts of approaching reality and truth. Addressing a similar challenge of relating Lacan to organisational studies, Contu, Driver and Jones (2010: 308) write:

'Lacan, of course, does not exist ... when we say "Lacan", we are using a language, or more precisely a signifier, and that signifier is caught up in a chain of other signifiers. This might be obvious to us now, but this has not always been so. This is perhaps only obvious to us *because* of Lacan, or because of the things that we have condensed by the name Lacan. This calling into being of a single signifier that stands in the place of a subject, is one of the key illusions that Lacan shows us, again and again.'

As stated above, my use of Lacan was focused and specific to the processes of triangulation and analysis. I believed that this approach would produce a unique set of outcomes within the study of activists and it is to the explicit and specific intended outcomes of this study that I shall now turn.

## **CHAPTER FIVE – FINDING THE CONTOURS OF A COMMUNITY ACTIVIST**

*'By recognizing and accentuating localized knowledge, we become more aware of the multiple sites of knowledge production, perceptual differences, and competing truth claims. There is in this schema, no all encompassing Truth, no master plan, no singularity correct to arrange cultural, political, or economic institutions and their consequent social relations.'*

*Robert C. Schehr (1997: 18)*

This Chapter explores in detail the themes that emerged from the original filmed interviews; and the framing of these themes in what I have termed, **Contours of a Community Activist**. I present these contours as a composite of the participants rather than an innate, fundamentalist, fixed identity of a 'pure' community activist. My intention is to make sense of the multi-dimensional personalities that I have had the pleasure and privilege of working with on this project over the past five years. Thus, the following observations are drawn from their mindsets, public activities and tactics, messages, relationships, adversities, problems, dreams and hopes.

My approach, is to allow the data to 'speak for itself', thus offering little interpretation or analysis. The chapter breaks down into the four key themes of an activist (primary motivational factors; modes of engagement; resource mobilisation and political opportunities; and small world networks), which will aid navigation through the source data. These themes are constructed of sub-categories which were identified and coded within a thematic analysis (see representative example below) and then developed and ratified in the participant workshops. Thus they represent joint consensus making as well as my own analysis processes.

Before exploring the specific categories of a community activist, I present a representational example to demonstrate how I used thematic analysis to identify one of the themes (Primary Motivational Factors) and sub-categories. This example, will not only convey processes of identification behind all the themes, but will also be supported by reference to relevant research theory.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS REPRESENTATIVE EXAMPLE – Primary Motivational Factors: Passions and Giftings; Associations; and Violations.

Each of my core interviews were collected via filmed interviews, which were then transcribed and coded (see APPENDIX 2). Making this data in dual formats enabled me to proceed to processes of:

'...identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data...[which] minimally organises and describes the data set in (rich) detail.'

Braun and Clarke (2006:79)

Having completed the collection stage of analysis (flim making and transcriptions), I moved to a familiarization of data stage. This entailed a combination of several viewings and readings of each interview. In so doing I sought to 'walk in the shoes' of each participant, analysing and identifying patterns. The move between the films and written transcriptions allowed an intensive period of becoming accustomed, which led:

'...further that the [analysing and identifying stage], to interpreting various aspects of the research topic'.  
Braun and Clarke (2006:79)

Hence, this in-depth appreciation enabled me to tentatively identify key themes, but also start to formulate some early interpretation. I shall now demonstrate this process by giving an explicit account to the first of these – Primary Motivational Factors.

The initial sighting of this category came from something that was **not** being said by the participants, rather than something that they were saying. As explained in my methodology (Chapter Four) I used an Appreciative Inquiry (4D Cycle) approach to frame my questions. The first two cycles, (D)iscovery and (D)ream, explore issues such as identity; narrative; praxis and motivation.

It was while analysing the data for motivational factors and themes linking the participants that I identified something was missing. None of the participants made reference to or acknowledgement of any type of meta-ideological framework (i.e. feminism; Marxism; anarchism). Identifying this motivational vacuum, amongst a group of highly motivated community activists, left me with a question – If the participants are not motivated by ideology, then what are they motivated by?

I began to note in the margins of each interview, characteristics, words, phrases and expressions, which began to give shape to potential codes. Thus, the answer(s) to this emerging question began to surface through a matrix of attitudes which initially clustered within a code. At first I entitled this code as the 'Just Do It' attitude. Participants had shared a cocktail of attributes ranging from curiosity, desires, strengths, frustrations and talents, which began to feel like a set of musical notes which belonged together. Each time I watched or read their individual accounts I began to hear a series of notes and tones that enabled 'sense making' of the data.

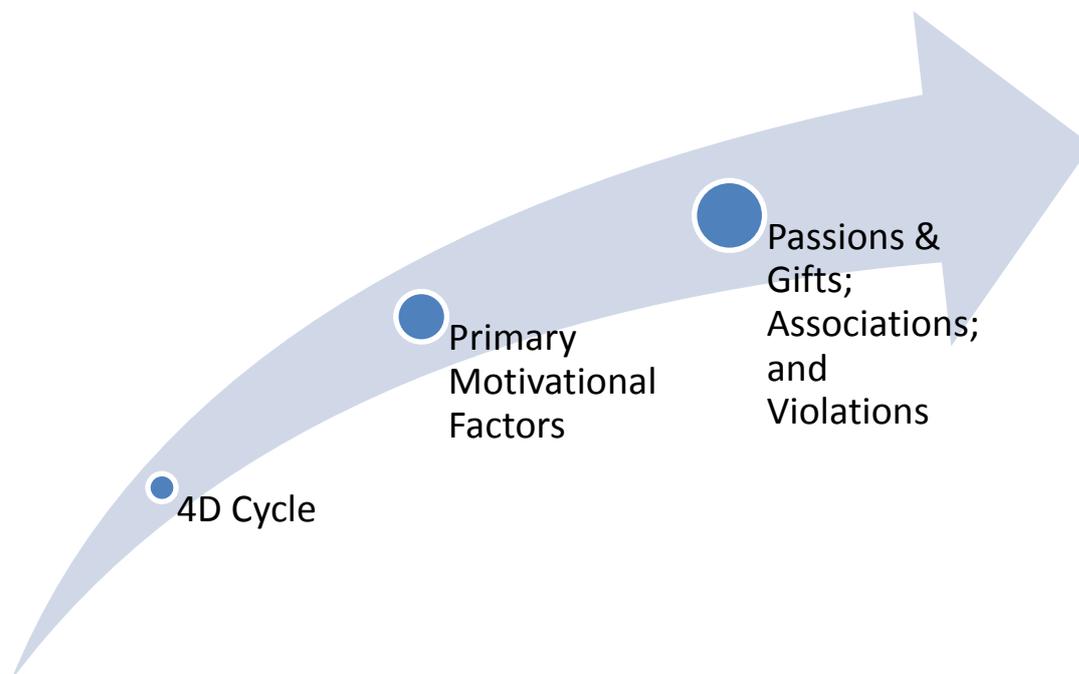
Obviously at first this initially seemed very subjective reading of the data but the triangulation between each of the interviews, emboldened my analysis and investigation. Hence, the initial birth pangs of this coding retrieval stage enabled the early formulations of sub-categories and themes.

Having said this, these sub-categories and themes were not fully birthed until the workshop stage; and the acknowledgement and (self) ratification by the participants. In fact it was while presenting

the 'Just Do It' code to the participants that it became obvious that it should be renamed as passions and gifts. This was due to two factors. Firstly the participants voiced an unease of being linked to a code, Just Do It, which is used by the multi-national sportswear company Nike. Secondly they felt that a better understanding of the codes essence of motivational energy would be the link of their passions and gifts. In other words, the identification of passions and gifts was an iterative process, which involved rigorous readings and re-readings of the data; and the contribution and collaboration of the participants.

At this stage it is worth stepping back to offer a slightly different interpretation of this thematic analysis process. In his 'Essential Guide to Qualitative Methods' Nigel Kings (2004:256-270), writes of using templates within thematic analysis. Essentially the suggestion here is that there are some *a priori* themes and issues carried into the analysis which then shape the dynamic of the emerging analysis process. Although this research is firmly rooted in a more 'bottom up' grounded theory approach the idea of a template approach is useful for description. Let me explain.

The fact that I used Appreciative Inquiry 4D Cycle to shape my interviews, created, albeit an extremely loose, structured frame (Discovery; Dream; Design; and Destiny) that influenced my analysis. Thus, the investigation and analysis, which led to me thinking about primary and motivational factors, was assisted by consideration and flow of the 4D's. In terms of analysis my findings could be understood as in the following diagram:



King (ibid.) would suggest that due to this *a priori* influence, (in this instance the 4D cycle) there is a hierarchical dynamic which emerges in the thematic process. This approach would suggest that the

4D's influence and role as a template, flowed to shape the question regarding primary motivational factors, and then lead to sub-categories (i.e. passions and gifts; associations; and violation).

I would dispute there being any hierarchical nature of this initial template, but do think it helpful to consider the thematic process through such stages. My argument being that the questions used within the 4D Cycle were catalysts that opened out the data gathering, rather than curtailed and prioritised its findings. Nonetheless, cross-fertilizing the idea of a template to clarify emerging themes and categories is still helpful. The modified template explains not only this theme and its subsequent sub-categories, but sets out the overall approach underpinning all the data gathering, analysis, interpretation and write up found below.

### **Primary Motivational Factors: Passions and Gifting; Associations; and Violations**

The first cluster of interconnecting issues and characteristics I would like to consider are what I have termed 'primary motivational factors'. As with all of the themes, they are my own constructions but were also ratified by the core participants at the workshop stage. I have separated these into three themes: passions and gifting; associations; and violations. I view these factors as the triggers and starting points from which participants reach the point of no return – the core energies that initiate the journey of community activists.

#### Passions and Gifting

My research found that each person reached a point of having to 'just do it', as their passions and gifting compelled them to engage in community activities. For example, commenting upon why she originally began developing a community arts network, L (30.27) states:

'I don't know, there is something about realising the ideas I think I'm addicted to ... kind of like actually giving birth to things. I absolutely hate bar stool dreaming and I have a lot of friends that do that and it is frustrating so I say DO IT DO IT, because everyone talks about how it will be so great if this happened. But who is the person doing it, if someone did this ... I don't know, I think it wouldn't be that hard to do, and I start thinking logically about each step and as soon as I have thought about it I have to do it.'

B (37.12), reflecting on the beginning of the Green Education network suggests:

'It's the environment you grow up in and everything, but I think it's something to do with you as a person as well and that's why I don't think, umm, I think because I left home quite early and I had to decide for myself quite early what I wanted to do with my life and how I was going to do it, I kind of had that tendency to be like that anyway.'

Discussing the birthing of the arts network that she is part of, K (05:41) elaborates:

‘At first, I thought it was my ego but it’s not, I realised that recently. At first I was really down on myself because I thought it’s all about you, it’s all about getting kudos for being a performer or being the best. But it’s not, I think it’s genuinely the artwork and having stuff going on and also if I don’t get up and do it, then who would do it? I know it sounds really awful, but I have been given this opportunity and I feel so passionate about the art I am doing and others people’s artwork that I think that is what motivates me. There are some days when I have given up two days of my life putting on an event and a national performer might have been a bit rude to me and I think why am I doing this? Then the moment the audience walks in, everyone is smiling and everyone’s participating, everyone is saying they’ve had a good night and isn’t it fantastic, the performer goes from being moody to being really happy, I feel like I’ve actually given people a really good memory. Giving people something to look forward to, giving them a memory, giving myself a good memory and the artwork and people, I think probably what I’m passionate about. I just love getting to know people, connecting with them, bringing out their talent, that’s what I’m actually really passionate about, that’s probably what motivates me. I did worry that it was more a personal ego thing, but I don’t think it is now.’

D (13.39), talking about the empty shops network, comments:

‘It is very much, there is a lot of curiosity-driven and desire-driven things within our ways of working and very often when people are doing things because they are led by desire. Very often the desire is to discover something, whether it is to discover something in themselves about their ability to do something; or whether it is more directly kind of to learn to do something they have never done before.’

### Associations

The second core motivational factor identified was associations – the importance of connections between individuals, friendships and groups. Associations offer individuals various levels of personal security, confirmation and identification to engage in community activism, as is evident from the following sample of testimonies:

B (44.11): ‘So, I think the very beginning to something like that is to have a bunch of people who believe in the same thing and are as dedicated as you are.’

A (18.23), discussing the development of a community estate-based network, remarks:

'I think I have thought about that in terms of the enjoyment side of things, I thought about it a few years ago and I think that might have been at a time when I was feeling a bit wary about stuff ... And I did kind of think I would be able to work with some of my mates ... kind of thing and I don't know if that is equal opportunities, like a few of friends have ended working with us at (R) and it has created quite a ... within the team it has been a bit of a laugh as well, as making things happen and doing stuff so that has been quite good fun. Working with friends I think is quite good.'

D (13.39): 'And then the kind of sociable culture of paying attention to working with people you enjoy working with and looking after each other and making it a good community to be part of, very naturally creates space as a reflection in which you are sitting round for a couple of hours after the end of day of working really hard together, talking it over and the things that you have learnt come up and get kicked around and also that is where some of the ideas I and other people are bringing in from the more abstract level of social thinking which actually feeds into something like (empty shop network) get. There is a forum for talking about those in a way that are quite accessible because you are talking about them in relation to very practical things you have been doing together and then you can kind of show people well the pattern by which you came to think of the idea of doing something like this and how that connects to something bigger.'

K (01:34): 'Well it was really strange, cause when I lived in all these amazing cities and towns I just didn't do very much creatively, I was writing sporadically but not as much, and then I didn't write anything for six years and then moving back to (P) maybe where my friends and family are from it just started off a new phase. I originally just looked to see what was available, thinking that there wouldn't be anything available in (P) because it doesn't really have a cultural flag attached to it. I found a night called 'Pint of Poetry', met other likeminded people that were just getting up performing their poems in a pub and from that built up my confidence as a performer and also as a writer and then kind of looked towards other things that I could do and before I knew it through Pint of Poetry there was a comedy producer there who was putting on a comedy night. He really liked my style so I went and did a comedy night that again built up my confidence and then I got to do other events and realised how other events were put on and then I fell upon the GO community and from that it was literally within a week they said "you were in charge of poetry". (*K laughs*). And it was just kind of up to me to get on and do it. I found that there was an open market; it wasn't closed off to me if I wanted to get involved and wanted to make something happen, and I could make it happen.'

D (24.39): 'It has been massively important and you know having a lot of friends who I have known over a lot of years and been kicking ideas around with having conversations with who ... some of whom have gone into their own phases of having a lot of attention on their work for a year or two

and others whom are just working away quietly on stuff but we have been collaborating for years so the kind of things I'm doing in body there ideas now dialogues as much as they embody me directly. That comes of being part of a very rich network of people who don't have a single ideological alignment but have a sense of common ground and of doing our thinking together and doing our working things out puzzling things through together that has been really important.'

D (47.15): 'In terms of the creativity I think that just having a very strong culture of 'it is not worth doing if we are not having a good time and enjoying working with each other' is a big part of it and it has been like that all along even though it has been completely mad and exhausting and stressful at times, the reason we do it is because there is a sense of being part of something special and getting to work with people you like and I think being really explicit, we are an organisation full of people with short attention spans, so we have to. We have to do interesting things and we have to keep it fresh and be constantly playing with what we are doing in order to make it the kind of place which we want to work in and hang out in.'

S (24.44): 'Well the things that we do ... Its quite a wide variety of things that we do, so you have the actual gardening on site, but then you might have a craft show or an art exhibition. Or your woodwork class, or you might have a party with DJs. And they are all totally different types of events. Um and so, it could be a lot of people all doing what they are good at, as long as that all feeds in centrally to the GBY and to what we are trying to do. And it all fits in with furthering our goals if you like. Then, it can be loads of people.'

### Violations

The final motivational factor I considered was the impact of violation(s). This can be linked in two ways, with individuals motivated by violations that they have experienced themselves (i.e. injustice, poverty, disempowerment, etc.) and by the way in which these personal experiences cause them to engage in community activism.

The main demonstration of this theme pulls together a narrative sequence from participant L. I decided to make this change of approach to create a more in-depth analysis; however, it is still reflective of the wider sample group.

But first I would like to start by using the words of M (40:02), talking about why he is involved in a youth participation network:

'Primarily I'd say umm ... I'd say primarily it's anger, I feel pretty annoyed, umm, a lot of the time because there are certain experiences I've had in my life, personally, umm, in terms of things you know, experiences connected to my family when I was younger, but then more recently things that I've read and kind of, I don't like to use the word very much, but sort of certain seminal things that I have read and certain critical experiences I've had where there is no way back from.'

L (10.35): 'I think you are quite catered for when you are in [mental health] treatment and most places have art therapist and most people come in, there is a period when you come out [of therapy] when there is very little you know ... most people come out on incapacity benefit without homes or a lot of the time without friends especially with addiction issues ... Then when you do meet people you are meeting other people that are in the same situation as you. So you are talking about how you are feeling, this is very difficult to integrate back into society and meet people that don't have your issues.'

L (34.10): 'I think it is feeling like you have absolutely no power. I think there is a moment where I realised, and most people realised that I think, I thought the world was there for the taking but I just hadn't taken it yet. It was almost as if I was saving it till I was ready, like "now let's get round to that successful acting career that I decided to have when I was eleven". And I think it was a moment where I realised that it wasn't in my hands and I think for me personally and for a lot of people that I know and have met I think there was a moment where I was felt absolutely bereft because I had absolutely put all my eggs into being an artist ... I think it is kind of intertwined, so for me defining the whole of LE with the *Expression of Depression* [first book published by LE] was obviously very personal for me because it was very confessional.'

L (27.13): 'I don't know, I don't know what it is but it feels like other people are coming in and it [the arts industry] is all about selling, selling and becomes less about the art. So we just thought, well even when we want those opportunities that haven't managed to get them because of all the artistic industry are just a mammoth lottery ... So we thought we will get all of those people together and we will just, we will be just be like a little artists' movement, so we will be like our own audiences and platform ... you know so the whole idea that art opens minds as well so I'm really interested in using LE for that but I think what it has grown into is the sort of empowering artists and also just sort of spreading the belief that arts for everyone.'

## **Modes of Engagement: Cultivating Outrage; Challenging Inevitability; and Developing Alternative Moral Communities**

The next characteristics are the modes of engagement used by the activists to initiate change. In reflecting on these and the emerging themes, I have been particularly inspired by Valerie Fournier's (2002) work *Utopianism and the Cultivation of Possibilities*. Fournier develops three categories – cultivating outrage; challenging inevitability; and alternative moral economies - which I have adopted to draw out the complex nature of engagement identified in this research. In making this decision I also hope to demonstrate the way in which my praxis engages academic thought with my work based learning, eclectically utilising and applying academic models within my day-to-day life.

### Cultivating Outrage

This particular characteristic dovetails directly with the previous attribute of violation; however, it builds further upon the collective nature of engagement.

A (22:43): 'I just got really angry and passionate about the fact that there are kids living on the street, in most time hundreds of them, and so like what we are doing in work in terms of going over there and like setting up a home for street children and taking young people to learn how to build homes and like fitting that all together into what we are doing [at home], something that has made me angry that thing then we have been able to use part of the work situation to go, right...'

K (07:48): 'I think politically at the moment, the whole, what's going on, everyone is really kind of frightened about cuts and their job and what's going to happen. And everyone is really depressed and I remember what it was like in the 80s with the Thatcher government, it brought forward just the most fantastic art work, people had something to rebel against. At the moment I feel like people are waking up and that's what I'm really excited about because poetry in particular is a real freedom of speech and they have a platform for their freedom of speech, I'm loving the poetry coming out at the moment and the art work...'

### Challenging Inevitability

This theme considers the attitudes and actions found within the participants that disrupt the status quo. Participants were found to have the ability to develop alternative mindsets and thinking that resist the mainstream hegemonic patterns found within society. Talking about SM's pop-up shop network, D (9.19) comments:

'Yes ... you can do traditional regeneration if you can find the millions of pounds to pour into the area, but you can also start from the social and cultural systems around it and re-grow it by re-

embedding it within other kinds of values that aren't immediately obvious in the economic terms, and at the same time it is not a utopian thing of ... we don't need any money because we do and we will fund it ... that we are doing at the moment and we are still working out how we make that sustainable and viable and able to pay us a living.'

D (34.16): 'I think when I was younger I struggled quite a lot with how the world seemed to be and then at a certain point found that the world wasn't the way it was because everyone thought it was great, but because changing things are hard and coming up with new models that actually work and putting them into practice. The only way you can get from the world is as you change it to something to which is closer to the place you want to live.'

Commenting upon the role that art has in challenging inevitability, K (12.55) states:

'I think it is absolutely integral, I think it is at the centre of it, because it is something that people can connect with straight away, they can't connect with somebody babbling on in a load of chat they don't understand, "you should do this", nobody likes to be told what to do, but art has opportunity to kind of just give you a mirror to look at where you can make a decision yourself and also I think that the opportunity for people to tell their own story.'

L (08.21) elaborates:

'I would just love to see some kind of artistic revolution, in the way that the industries are run. And I think what better than the talented people that are not given a look-in, on the dole, who better than them to just go fuck you, I'm just going to do it anyway, and you know put on shows, publish books. I would like to see proactive ... artists just reclaiming the artistic industries and obviously through that using what they know as a platform to announce things that they might be concerned about.'

Speaking about challenging mainstream organisational practices, B (5.03) comments:

'No, to be honest with you it is quite interesting because we are a small business and we do not have a business plan, but we do regularly sit down and also every few months and we are all going to sit down and have a bit of a think tank and go ... What we doing? What do you want to do? How we want to do it? And have we done this right according to what we want to do? I do it all the time. It almost seems unnatural if you don't. People get together once a year and make a plan I almost have the need to do that all the time, to kind of reflect and go I think that plans are good but plans also change all the time – we need to be flexible.'

She continues at a later stage of the interview:

B (10.52): 'I think that is the root of the problem to me personally because it takes away the responsibility. It takes away your responsibility, because if it is written somewhere on paper, then it is written somewhere on paper and it takes away you having to think about something and going, but it takes away some of the reflection, it completely strips people away on reflection because they don't have to reflect on it anymore because someone has written on that ... someone has really come up with that were as opposed to you going is this right is this really what we want to do or how I want to work? I think that is really against how we want to work altogether. I mean we have Lun policy and child protection policy, but not that I am proponent of that.'

### Alternative Moral Economies

It is important at this stage to reflect back to the words of Fournier (ibid.) at the beginning of this cluster. This theme is 'about journeys rather than destinations; it is about opening up visions of alternatives, rather than closing down on a vision of "a better society"'. Participants were not found to have some fixed utopian dream, but clearly felt they wanted to be part of 'movements of hope'.

Again, to demonstrate this connection I have pulled together a narrative sequence from one participant (D), which is reflective of the wider sample group. However, I would like to start by using the words of S (20.32), talking about the future development of the GBY environmental hub:

'Um, so really for me the changes that I want to see is more in terms of the group and the organisation and the number of events that we run, certainly. I'd like to see the group to be more established, with more people taking an active role in terms of the running of the project. With more people investing some kind of time, that's not weeding! It's kind of mental time as well. And actually buying-in to what we are trying to do ... So really just extend down that path and network.'

D (31.47) offers a strong account of emerging alternatives when talking about the empty shops network:

'Part of what we are doing ... we are setting up a community-owned company that will be led by some of the volunteers who have got involved in the project, so that as it becomes a commercially viable thing that makes money [this will be] routed back into the community rather than there being one or two people who are making all of the profits out of it. If we can show there is a way of doing regeneration in which you get far more in terms of outcomes for your money than the traditional ways that local authorities have funded regeneration projects. And part of our model is that we are there as a catalyst but what is there permanently is something that is owned by the community, then hopefully we can actually develop a sustainable model for re-growing local economies which ... it shows that something else is not just possible but has been done.'

D (34.16): 'We need to change the system into recognising the pockets of liveability and learning from people who have managed to create pockets in which other values than the values of the state and the market shape what it is like to be there, and then there is a kind of craft of bringing new things into reality and making them work and that just feels ... well ... the only reason it is worth getting out of bed in the morning is to bring about the future. I kind of guess ... yes that feels true to me.'

Furthermore:

D (3.39): 'Yes probably I think why I'm drawn to market places is because they are by nature just quite anarchic spaces, so they have never been fully captured by managerialism. Their sort of inefficiencies are part of, make you feel human, and not sort of been rationally planned in the way that a supermarket has. I think the answer is just that managerialism isn't that great, that if you can ... because this is where it comes back to people having fun. If you can show a way of doing things which is viable and fun then hopefully that has some lingering resilience rather than defaulting back to, sort of non-fun ways of doing things.'

D (7.49): 'Which is a bit like part of why there is the emphasis on giving in a lot of religious traditions. It's not just for the ethical value of the things which the money is used for but it is also for the way that it breaks the spell of money over us, because it's completely illogical according to mainstream economic logic to give away some of your money that you could be spending on things for yourself and so by doing that you sort of make a fool of that logic and call its bluff.'

D (11.19): 'Yes through the kind of the energy and the good will and the pragmatism that is unlocked when people are getting to get together to do things for themselves without either money or cohesion as the driving force. I always think that change comes when people make the distinction between the way they happen to do something and the thing we are trying to do ... [For example] when you realise that you know the social good which is at the heart of education is so far removed from the system which we happen to have inherited and so the task is not to sustain the system it is to make sure in one way or another there continues to be spaces of learning and of sharing of knowledge and of acquiring of skills and of passing things on from one generation to the next and those are two totally different ways of looking at a situation ... And I think that again you get a huge amount of energy unlocked when people let go of feeling the responsibility either feeling that the social good and the social institution are the same thing or feeling any deep responsibility to sustain or reform the existing social institution versus just starting something on a human scale that which happens to provide that social good and out of that all type of things can grow.'

## **Resource Mobilisation and Political Opportunities: Favours, Opportunism and Relationships; Patchwork Portfolios; and DIY – Spontaneous Ordering and Mutuality**

This cluster explores the diverse ways in which the interviewees identify, acquire and use resources in support of their community activism. It also considers what I have termed the ‘political opportunities’ that result from such mobilisations. To assist the reader in gaining a sense of the ontological profile linked to these areas, I have created three themes: favours, opportunism and relationships; patchwork portfolios; and DIY – spontaneous ordering and mutuality.

### Favours, Opportunism and Relationships

The findings reveal a strong organic and ad-hoc ethic within many of the participants’ approaches to resource mobilisation, as the following three contributions reveal.

D (10.08): ‘We have had a sort of opportunist approach to money and to resources in that sense of just being around and having these conversations about the stuff that we are interested in and then keeping an eye out for the moment where for some reason you can line the stuff that you have been wanting to do with the interest that someone who’s got some money there, and you can use that to be able to work more intensively on actually doing practical projects on the ground to get things happening.’

A (11.27): ‘Resources, people umm ... I mean it has been a bit little by little along the way so it is just using ... I think a lot of resources have come through connections and relationships. Umm so [for example] it is a relationship with a person that is a vicar of a little church that gives us space that we can then rent property off them, yes a lot of it is being in relationships, like getting to know people of the university getting volunteers from the university over the years got involved with stuff. One of the things that is most exciting is when more people who are more home grown on the estate here have got involved volunteering and things have really taken ownership on stuff and you know set up their own projects and stuff and they have just been trying to get alongside them and support them, so people have come to us and said oh I’ve got this idea to an event for the elderly people on the estate so we have got alongside them and helped them make up all the volunteers, they are the most ... That has been the most exciting stuff for me I think when people from the community, they are making a real difference in the community.’

And, finally, S (4:30):

‘Haha, pull a lot of favours. We’ve, I think for the size of the project we have got, we have done a lot of things on not much money. We’ve had some funding that’s come in through SB and small

amounts through the community fund from the council ... So there has been little pots that have come in, that have helped with running costs enormously and other things that have helped with getting materials to build a certain building for example. But a huge amount of material that we have got has been kind of scavenged or donated. So we've got windows in most of the buildings that are from a college. The wall panels are from a building site in (E). Um, and often we didn't go out and find this stuff. People kind of came to us and said "do you want this?" Or we were driving past and saw it and asked. And they were like "yeah take it". Um, the resources like the physical building material we have been pretty fortunate to have sourced them fairly cheaply. And obviously Dad has got a lot of contacts having been a carpenter for thirty years.'

### Patchwork Portfolios

As suggested in the last comment, the previous themes have shown the participants accumulating a wide variety of financial and physical resources. A (12.45) shares:

'In terms of resources, money and stuff, it has been funding applications and stuff like that, it has changed over the years, so we had some council funding for about the first five years for stuff with old people, then that stopped and then we got some money from the health authority, they called us up and said we like what you are doing, have you got any other ideas and we tell them, yes we wanted to reach isolated old people that aren't going out of their homes and they gave us money to do that. We have got about fifty people that support [the project] give money every month, so we get couple of grand a month from that. Buildings wise we have got a little juice bar, which was a derelict shop, it hadn't been open for twenty years so we got quite a good deal on that from the council and rent. Then bit by bit money came in towards the decorating and doing it up putting electricity in there.'

K (09:31): 'Well for SE events everything we do needs a damn good venue, a damn good venue that doesn't charge you for the night, so the GO never charged us because they understood we were going to bring in 100 people on a Tuesday night and they wouldn't normally have that unless it was something that they didn't have to worry about the publicity, the marketing, they didn't have to worry about who was going to compere that, we really just came in situ of an event and then we've moved to The Brewery Tap and it's exactly the same, we've got the VIP room, they don't charge us for the room, they just take the bar, they don't get involved in anything they don't tell us you shouldn't have 'Atilla the Stockbroker' you should have such and such, they respect us and I think those two venues were great for doing that, I think that's what you need, I think you need trust so I think the trust from a venue. We've also got trust from our audience as well, they understand the

'brand' now and it is a 'brand' they know that even if they don't really know the national poet that well that there is gonna be good or someone on the night's gonna be good.'

Similarly, L (16.10) states:

'Well at the very beginning I was actually well just working from a laptop whilst doing a part-time job to pay the rent. So that was actually just using their Wi-Fi and then we had the idea of doing a fundraiser when we knew we wanted to start up a website, we spoke to somebody who does events and things and she was telling us we need something like two thousand pounds to send out press packs and everything just for a fundraiser so I said no and Chris said no and he said he has a mate who was at the contemporary urban centre who said to me listen can we blag it for free, you take bar we'll pack it out they said yes and we got that for free. I printed out flyers at my work and we handed them out, we invited everyone in our phone book asked everyone to invite everybody else ... We just had buckets and we printed out the intention of what we were raising money for, so we wanted to build a website and we wanted to publish this ... it was one book at the time, and we raised enough money to do all of those things and we also had enough money for the launch of the next book, and at the launch of the book we just said we don't want this to be just a launch for this book we want to do two books a year and we also want to run monthly nights.'

#### DIY – Spontaneous Ordering and Mutuality

These next themes display the anarchic ontology found within the participants. My understanding of anarchic formulations are rooted in Gustav Landauer's idea that:

'The state (all forms of hierarchical systems) is not something which can be destroyed by a revolution, but is a condition, certain relationship between human beings, a mode of behaviour: we destroy it by contracting other relationships, by behaving differently.'

S (38.01): 'Yeah, no we do. Dad works in such an off-the-cuff way. He is so dynamic, which is brilliant, particularly when starting out. It was absolutely what we needed. If we had waited for all the permissions to come through and done all the planning properly, we wouldn't have grown a single thing ... but, as I said before, not very much planning happened at all, it was all an experiment, planting what and where, that was an experiment. We were all massively pushed for time. You know Dad's trying to run a business as well as doing this. You know you have suddenly got two and a half acres of ground to cultivate. So, it was a big undertaking, so I think fairly naturally a lot of it was ... I'm trying to think of a nice way to say it ... not slap dash, but yeah it went in the ground ... if it worked it worked and if it didn't. So not everything was thought out thoroughly and some of the

things that came out of that were great. And some things didn't work as well. But now we have got that experience we can work forward from it.'

A (34.06): 'I think we go we want to go down the route of people who have got vision and passion and the idea of them doing it. I think we have been still pretty kind of, we haven't been that fixed, we have been quite led. We have kind of moved with, what kind of need that is in front of us. Or a desire or a dream that is in front of us at different times so we kind of never know, when I went to Kenya the first time, one of the young people want to build a garage, so because of that we have gone back and we have gone back loads of times basically getting alongside him.'

D (15.38): 'The thing that I see that the internet is doing differently, is that it is making it massively easier for outsider thinkers to find each other and to get into the flow of conversation with each other. In ways that mean that we can keep being challenged, we keep meeting our, our peers, no matter how eccentric their particular interests ... and meanwhile the people inside institutions are stuck, because the institutions are so defensive and entrenched and resistant to the fluidity of networks.'

K (27.09): 'That is all well and good but look at the people around you, look at the people you go to parties with, look at the people you go to events with, you will be shocked that they will have all their own ideas as well. You don't know who you are going to meet you might meet somebody who does have a mate that works at the pub that will let you have a room; you need to firstly connect with the people around you, and then build up a base, a community that then reaches to bigger or smaller organisations and community groups. That is the number one thing I would do is just to connect with people.'

Talking about plans, D (1.47) comments:

'Um, they tend to be very provisional because improvisation and a certain awareness to opportunity and ... a willingness to change direction are very much a part of where all the stuff that I have been doing comes from. And at the same time there are responsibilities for the longer term effects of things that you do and so from that point of view with a particular project it is necessary to sit down and make plans and to do the long-term thinking around it. It is also kind of planning for a range of possible futures.'

B (4.48): 'Now ... well MR, I think we have expanded what we originally were which was it became really clear how useful this machine is that we've made in terms of communicating ideas, environmental ideas and ideas about climate change and energy but also ideas about independence and sort of human inspiration for change. So we kind of expanded that so we saw the real value of

what it actually was and now we do workshops and do screening and empower music as well so it has kind of got these branches and then we also teach people how we build the generators now. That's how we have got to today different branches of it. The ethos behind it is still the same, which it really kind of shows collaboration and community effort because you have all got to work together to make something happen so it a real collaborated thing – you find yourself on this machine with strangers and in order to have an outcome you have to work together to make it happen but also to have fun with ideas with future and inspiration and things like that.'

B (16.09): 'For me personally its breaking away the attitude which is we need to be told what to do, because as much as it is for, and this is quite personal to me but I think what I would like evolution to do is not just to come and do a pedal-powered gig, I'd like to show people that this is an organisation that was created by people, it wasn't like there was a lottery fund and someone decided, it was created out of people's needs, people's ideas.'

### **Small World Networks: Architecture and Development; Translation, Interpretation and Brokerage; and Connections, Creation and Change**

The following cluster takes a closer look at the environmental contexts developed by community activists and the techniques of network building employed within these landscapes. As explained previously, small world architecture explores the dynamic relational networks, which exists amongst people and their everyday life. Small world seeks to identify the edges of individuals' and groups' lifeworlds, so as to track how new opportunities and relationships emerge. Fenwick (2006) suggests that activists' subjectivity:

'is realised through enactment: articulations meshed with the boundaries defining the conditions, activities, geographic locations and positions that they find themselves negotiating in different work environments.'

In terms of this research, small world has enabled me to identify not only the core architecture and development milieu of community activists, but also the key characteristics of translation, interpretation and brokerage; and connection, creation and change, which shall be discussed in the proceeding chapters.

#### Architecture and Development

D (4.01): 'So we had artist and activists and architects, squatters and people from think tanks all kind of coming together for one evening a month to talk about this stuff and to share ideas and to talk about possibility of practical projects and what they were involved in and what they wanted to get started. We put a website for people to keep in touch in between meet ups and that quite quickly

grew into a national network with several other hundred people and sharing information about pop-ups and projects in empty shops and work spaces and all kind of things. Then we started to get contacted because we were effectively hosting this national conversation on the site and so when people from local authorities or property owners Googled art in empty shops or whatever it was they were looking for, they would find our site, they would see there was lots of people on there so they would get in touch with us.'

A (9.14): 'Yeah last year we started something, we had people coming to us saying oh we've got a group of people and we'd love to come and do something with your project or on your estate have you got something for us to do? We were racking our brains and it was always a bit inconvenient really and we wanted to help people and we wanted to engage but right lets organise this thing called CL, where people can come and we can do a bit of talking, training with them and stuff and then try to encourage them in why it's important to get involved and engage with people who are on the margins (funny word) but yeah and then we would organise little projects for them to get involved with around this estate and seven or eight other estates within the Borough of W, where we had connections with people who are living there who wanted to do things in their community. So we started getting all these volunteers along to this day, do a bit of training send them out they do projects and they come back for feedback reflection, how did it go and a meal together ... So we decided why don't we try and take our principles of why get involved and doing stuff and reflecting on it why don't we put something together where people can do it in their own spaces in their own communities.'

Reflecting on the development of a poetry network, K (05:06) explains:

'And we started off doing it in the GO and a lot of people were like thinking it's not going to last for very long, but what they didn't reckon on was that we have an audience here that want to see that kind of event. So we were bringing national poets to them to perform with local poets and it created its own economy where local poets would be paid to do a slot but not only that they would get to meet a professional poets as such and they get to kind of improve their own practice and it's a showcase, and we kind of encouraged the audience to have a stake in the night so they actually feel like they own the night so the participation from the audience is fantastic and the poets, the national poets love it and they started to really kind of talk about the night to everybody else in the [national] poet community. And it built up a reputation and by the first year, the end of the first year we were the most successful night because of not only figures but because of audience feedback and performer feedback, you know the venue were happy with what we were doing and as producers we were meeting new poets all of the time and linking with them correctly. So when we ended

taking over the programming of the tour, we were the headliners and we've been doing that for about a year and a half and now we're in our third year. So we went from being the night that people thought wasn't going to be successful and was gonna last a year and then probably die off to actually being like the flagship.'

Finally, D (11.19) reflects that a key is:

'Yes through the kind of the energy and the good will and the pragmatism that is unlocked when people are getting to get together to do things for themselves without either money or cohesion as the driving force. I always think that change comes when people make the distinction between the way they happen to do something and the thing we are trying to do. So when you realise that you know the social good which is at the heart of education is so far removed from the system which we happen to have inherited and so the task is not to sustain the systems it is to make sure in one way or another there continues to be spaces of learning and of sharing of knowledge and of acquiring of skills and of passing things on from one generation to the next and those are two totally different ways of looking at a situation. And I think that again you get a huge amount of energy unlocked when people let go of feeling the responsibility either feeling that the social good and the social institution are the same thing or feeling any deep responsibility to sustain or reform the existing social institution versus just starting something on a human scale that which happens to provide that social good and out of that all type of things can grow.'

L (28.12): 'The way that it is perceived is what got me so tongue tied at the very beginning because it is organically grown so that we have to keep readjusting, like I said I wrote two mission statements because trying to explain the kind of depression addiction that it grew from but then obviously you don't want to alienate people because the idea is to de-stigmatise but just by mentioning depression and addiction you are already blocking out the people you want to speak to a lot of the time. ... So using art, which is a lot more sort of, I don't know, palatable for people, I don't know. Yes so we have grown, we are getting our heads around what it is, it is very organic and the members have dictated as well kind of where it goes.'

#### Translation, Interpretation and Brokerage

This theme explores the skills of what I have termed translation and interpretation, held by the participants, were employed to broker opportunities of conversation, joint action and network building that previously didn't exist. Once again, to explore these issues in more depth, I have decided to follow the theme through the reflection of a single participant.

D (5.23): 'We ran a project that was initially going to be a three-month project putting sort of artists and community groups doing temporary projects in the empty shops and it got extended and extended until in the end we were there for a year and we were also bringing through new local businesses so that by the end of the year all twenty-two of those shops were let to new independent businesses – three of them actually to arts organisations that are now there as a long-term presence within the market and the place has kind of turned around. So now we are trying to take the same attitude and the same DIY approach to doing things and this idea that as an organisation we can kind of translate between that bottom-up grass-root energy and the way that local authorities or businesses have work in terms of the top-down structures and formalities that they have, and trying to take it elsewhere.'

D (11.42): 'The biggest recurring lesson that I found when I was looking back over all the different projects that I have done is don't allow a situation to be defined by the opposition present within it. People tend to go one way or the other, they either try and deny that there are real tensions and oppositions within the situation or they focus so much on those that the few and experience the situation as being totally deadlocked. So a lot of the translation for me is about how do we get beyond the situation in which different parties are just looking at each other as well yes ... something could just happen here if it wasn't for them ... and change people experiences of each other sufficiently that it opens up a space of possibility without being naive.'

D (14.50): 'I was always a little bit uneasy with the sort of the separation between the thinking and the doing and that we would go in and research other people's work and then present it to opinion formers and so on. And so part of SM for me has been about well how do you create a sort of "think and do tank", where you are posting conversations, getting people together, coming with new thinking and new ideas about the way you look at local economies, about the way you look at the spaces at which we spend our time, but you are not satisfied with outcome of that writing a place report, it is actually you take those ideas and work with people in a particular place to make things happen. And then step back at the end of that together and try and work out which bits of that were very specific to that place and which bits are transferable and go and try transferring them and using them somewhere else, and see what you learn from that process, so I think that opportunity to be heard as having real practical ideas about how you can do things differently, as been part of what has come out of it for me. It feels like very different situation when I go to talk about these things now.'

## Connections, Creation and Change

This theme considers the connections, links and processes used in the creation of community change. I start by looking at the initial access and modes of stimulus used by the GBY environmental hub:

S (18.18): 'Even just having this sort of open garden thing, you know, people know that they can come along. And that's definitely proved to be right. You know so many people have just turned up through the gate because they have seen us through the paper, or have walked past and always wondered what it is. There is definitely a curiosity there and so I think that people knowing that we are there is a good thing too. And then also there are the events that we have done outside.'

S (17.22): 'Yeah, yeah the local newspaper have been very good. Anything that we do, they are keen to put it into the paper. I think partly because it makes a nice picture, but yeah they have been really great. I think really thousands of people, definitely in single-day events we have had several hundred people come down sometimes. But I think that the thing is that we can't measure are the people that are aware of the project, they might not have necessarily come through the gates, but they have seen it they kind of know what we are about, um they walk past it on the way to work and stuff like that. And I think that's still a valuable thing. That they know that there is something that independent and positive going on, because there wasn't really anything going on like that before.'

Similarly, in talking about the estate-based networks, A (29.15) comments:

'We create space where it is just like people can come to like football clubs, juice bar drop-in and the bus and all that, but out of that we want. We get alongside people but then try and find what their passions are and their dreams and their goals then see them do it.'

A (7.37): 'Yeah so right now we um we've got a double-decker bus which is kitted out as a mobile youth centre and that goes to different areas around R and a few other areas around the Borough of W and that's like a starting point, where kids, where there is nothing really going on for young people there's no youth provision or whatever and there's young people hanging out we go there. Kids get involved with that then as a result of that sometimes we set up mentoring groups and trips and taking young people to Africa, young people to Romania, young people to Wales or you know Bristol wherever, we've just took a lot of young people out of their environment. On trips with people that are like kind of mentors, role models, with some of these positive role models for some of these young people, so we have the bus that goes round, we've got a juice bar which is like a little drop-in centre ... We've got the music studio in there so at the back of that, which basically it's working with young people not just young people – there's kids there's young people, there's old

people, we've even had the police lady come and record a track for her partner, her girlfriend, it's hilarious, but um she's done a track in there. We got the football club so we do football sessions on different estates we do football clubs here in R each week for different ages and we do a football club on another estate as well and I'm just about to start another one on a further estate at the beginning of May.'

Thinking more philosophically about building change, D (00.01) says:

'One of the problems that I saw both as a journalist and an activist, was that you would have all of this grass-roots energy and people wanting to do things and make things happen and you would have these top-down organisations, whether it was the council or regional development agency, or S University who own property in this part of the city, and there was no common language there, not even when there was potentially some desire and some overlap of interest there was no way of these things kind of talking to each other.'

D (11.42) reflects:

'I think one of the things is realising that we can work together without agreeing about everything and that we don't have to arrive at a shared complete model of the future or a shared ideological framing of a situation to get to a point where we agree on enough stuff for practical reasons to be able to take the next step forward.'

## **CHAPTER SIX – MAKING SENSE OF THE VOICES AND LIFE WORLDS**

*‘Unlike movements with an explicit focus on the state ... my stories have more fluid structures, and display direct activism towards far more diffuse and decentralised forms of social power.’*

*J. E. Davis*

As previously discussed within the methodology of this research, I embarked on appreciative inquiry (AI) amongst nine community activists because I wanted to avoid, in the first instance, my more natural disposition of critique and outrage. Reed (2007: 56) suggests:

*‘AI is a simple but radical approach to understanding the social world. Put simply, AI concentrates on exploring ideas that people have about what is valuable in what they do and then tries to work out ways in which this can be built on. The emphasis is firmly on appreciating the activities and responses of people, rather than concentrating on their problems.’*

Hence, this chapter will seek to appreciate the ‘activities and responses’ of community activists ‘rather than concentrating on their problems’. Hence, I must reiterate that this analysis is not only a combination drawn from the data derived from the AI process and primary participants, but also is shaped and influenced by two other factors:

- The interactions and engagements which took place in the subsequent workshops – in a sense a testing of the knowledge gained in the field of deeds of those not involved in the primary research; and
- My own ongoing practice and lived experiences via my own work-based learning and theoretical pursuits.

This is important to point out at this stage, as it marks in a sense, the joining and fusing of the multiple-voices that have contributed to this research.

What’s more, in approaching this chapter I will avoid painting a picture of idyllic utopia and focus, instead, upon the utopianism suggested by Fournier (2002: 192):

*‘From this perspective, utopianism is not a blueprint for a “perfect society”, but may be better conceptualized as a movement of hope. It undermines dominant understanding of what is possible and opens up new conceptual spaces for processes rather than better states.’*

Fredric Jameson (2004: 12) strengthens this approach by drawing attention to:

*‘The diagnostic interventions of the utopians, which always aim at the alleviation and elimination of the sources of exploitation and suffering, rather than at the composition of blueprints for bourgeois comfort.’*

In summary, it is also important to note that, in attempting to explore the activities and responses of community activists, I shall eclectically draw from the data, subsequent workshops and personal experiences, rather than use the linear fashion employed in the last chapter. The rationale of this is to draw nearer to the complexity found within the lifeworlds of community activists, which disrupt the very categories (regardless how helpful) that I have constructed to make sense of the data.

Nonetheless, I do split the first two sections of this chapter, to explore the individual and collective nature of community activism. This is a particularly important separation as, I suggest, it seeks to rethink the relationship between the psychological and political aspects of community activism. I then conclude the chapter by bringing these two sections together through the concepts of lack, fantasy, fetishisation, symbolism and hysteria developed by Jacques Lacan.

### **Dislodging the World Via the Self!**

The first area I would like consider is the way in which the participants develop individual meanings, interpretations and identities via their attempts to challenge the status quo of the dominant context and narrative of turbo-capitalism. Ranging from the desire to establish stronger artistic expression and networks, grass-roots journalism and sustainable environmental futures, the findings reveal a deep discontent within the activists regarding the way things currently are. These perceptions led to what I have termed a desire to dislodge the world via the self.

In particular at this point, I think it is important to focus upon the psychological processes of identity formulation and recognition, which were revealed within the individual narratives. In doing so, I journey through what I would term the 'dissolving processes' between the private and public lives of community activists. Participants are shown to begin to connect the motivational forces located within their own passions and gifts, emerging associations and areas of violation, which in turn produce collective social and political practices.

As I have attempted to disclose within my own journey and activism, the lifeworlds of activists envelop a search for the very understanding of reality – an emerging sense of finding not only meaningful terms of engagement but also spaces in which to be oneself. Davis (2002: 1) suggest that such actions reveal a cultural turn that brings about:

'New attention on the internal cultural dynamics of movements, leading to a greater recognition of diffuse expressions of social activism, and less programmatic and conventionally political agendas for social change.'

It seems of acute interest that, when asked about the motivational factors that caused the participants to initially engage in community action, none of them raised structural (class) or even

single issue (feminism, ethnicity, etc.) ideological frames that have historically shaped previous activism. Instead, the findings reveal a much more mosaic and diffuse expression of social activism, thus revealing complex and nuanced patterns and challenges to the dominant norms of society, mobilising change initially at the level of everyday life and cultural practices. These:

‘emphasize quality of life and lifestyle concerns over economic redistribution and challenge the structures of representative democracies that limit citizen input and participation in governance, instead of advocating direct democracy, self-help groups and cooperative styles of social organization’ (Chesters and Welsh 2006: 1).

Broadening this somewhat, within their work exploring the creativity, resistance and self-management of community activists, Jenny Pickerill and Paul Chatterton (2010: 475–90) find themselves agreeing with the earlier work of Carmen (1996), who suggests ‘four pillars’ of thought and action via:

‘political ownership and control; cultural and media literacy; the self-determination of organizational forms; and economic self-reliance.’

These pillars resonate with my own findings and particularly connect with the modes of engagement and resource mobilisation sections in Chapter Five, suggesting a strong desire to not simply cultivate outrage and challenge inevitability but also to develop alternative moral economies within localities. In contrast, these alternatives were unlike those to be found in the radical (Marxist) politics of earlier decades, but seem to hold a resistance and resilience expressed via spontaneous ordering, mutuality and DIY culture.

Hence, dissatisfaction with ‘the system’ was found to be balanced alongside the desire for creative and innovative expressions of self. That is not to say that community activists don’t want to institute collective change but they also want to explore and reclaim their own lives. Robert C. Schehr (1997: 3) writes of the:

‘rich caldron of cultural expression perpetually hovering at the level of the lifeworld where creativity, anxiety, anger, rage, love, compassion, confusion, mistrust, allegiance, dedication, violence, peace, awareness, and ignorance each comprise a complicated composition of cultural actors.’

This, I would suggest, is where the dissolving processes of private and public life are to be found.

Herein lay the seats of ontological development, which enable activists to forge identities that hold the ingredient of social protest and change alongside personal expression and desire.

Melucci (1996: 1) contends that:

‘Each and every day we make ritual gestures, we move to the rhythm of external and personal cadences, we cultivate our memories, we plan for the future.’

However, he challenges this (1996: 1):

‘Yet almost everything that is important for social life unfolds within this minute web of times, spaces, gestures, and relations. It is through this web that our sense of what we are doing is created, and in it lies dormant those energies that unleash sensational events.’

Thus, unleashing ‘sensational events’, via daily life and passions, associations and violations, are the key contours of initiating the road(s) of community activism considered in this research. This study has not so much concentrated on the key public targets and causes of mobilisation but rather the ontological and epistemological patterns that structure the change agents engaged in these activities.

The very lives of the participants embody resistance and the possibility of alternate futures. All of those interviewed were found, in a variety of creative ways, to be harnessing the formation and orientation of their own lifeworlds in such a way that was causing them to challenge and change the wider culture. As I discuss in later chapters, this is not to suggest some kind of community activist essentialism but rather a (sub)conscious construction of identities rooted in alternative visions of the future and, more particularly, alternative ontogenies.

Nonetheless, in making sense of these identity and cultural formulations, Melucci (1996: 3) suggests that this places the individual and social apparatus within an acute tension:

‘On one side, the social and individual capacity to intervene in human action as it is produced increases; on the other, the generation of meaning is marked by the requirements of systemic control and regulation.’

For me this is an important point of reflection, as it takes away any ‘heroic frame’ from the participants, and reveals that community activists’ lives are no different from those of everyone else.

These narratives point to, among other things, the complicated interplay of external economic conditions, power imbalances, and struggles for control at the point of production and identity.

Chesters and Welsh (2007: 18) suggest that:

‘Our best sociological theorizing on social movements ... has been unable to capture the full dynamism of subaltern modes of resistance. This has occurred, despite a rich and continually growing database, which ethnographically documents the various modes of resistance carried out by the poor, marginalised, women, production and service workers, peace and justice organisations, environmentalist, and anti-nuclear activists.’

This research has entered into the ‘subaltern modes of resistance’, exploring the favours, opportunism and relationships of individuals who, like everyone else, are ‘making our way through the world’ (Archer 2007). This stands in complete opposition to the ‘immaculate conception’ (Taylor 1989) of social movements and change.

However, the very fact that the lives of those chosen for this research were not on the result of a random sampling of the general public does suggest that, although they are same as everyone else, community activists make alternative decisions that lead to alternative lives outside mainstream society.

Before looking at how this develops beyond individuals and into more collective expressions, I want to conclude this section by trying to understand these divergent patterns through turning to Margaret Archer's (2007) work on human reflexivity and social mobility. I quote at some length Archer's work as I believe it shows aspects of human behaviour that may bring further light to the full dynamism, seen as missing by Chesters and Welsh (2007), in the social theorising of activist lifeworlds and wider social movements. Archer (2007: 1) writes:

'At its most basic, reflexivity rests on the fact that all normal people talk to themselves within their own heads, usually silently and usually from an early age.'

She names this our 'internal conversation' and these activities:

'range a broad terrain which, in plain language, can extend from the daydreaming, fantasising and internal vituperation; through rehearsing for some forthcoming encounter, reliving past events, planning for future eventualities, clarifying where one stands or what one understands, producing a running commentary on what is taking place, talking oneself through a practical activity; to more pointed actions such as issuing internal warnings and making promises to oneself, reaching concrete decisions or coming to a conclusion about a particular problem' (ibid.: 2).

Archer (ibid.: 6–7) suggests that internal conversation:

'is what makes "active agents", people who can exercise some governance in their lives, as opposed to "passive agents" to whom things simply happen. Being an active agent hinges on the fact that individuals develop and define their ultimate concerns: those internal goods that they care about most, the precise constellation of which makes for their concrete singularity as persons. No one can have an ultimate concern and fail to do something about it. Instead, each person seeks to develop a concrete course of action to realise that concern by elaborating a "project".'

My findings concur with Archer's sequence of events that lead people to become 'active agents'. The role of identity and internal conversation, which then leads to activism, is rooted in their psychological passions and gifts, associations and violations. The idea of 'no one can have an ultimate concern and fail to do something about it' echoes what I found in the 'just do it' attitude of the core participants, which then led to their various 'concrete course[s] of action'.

As already shown within the research workshops, the first activity was to ask people to devise their own timelines. These were then considered in groups via the lenses of the three core motivational factors: passions and gifts, associations, and violations. Not only did this help people retrace the development of their community engagement but, more importantly, it also allowed them to reflect

on their identity growth via their life story and original sources of inspiration. In doing so, participants journeyed from private concerns to public conquests:

‘The answer to why we act at all is in order to promote our concerns; we form “projects” to advance or protect what we care about’ (Archer 2007: 7).

The skills of interpretation, translation and brokerage, needed to create projects, had some of their starting points within the internal conversations of community activists. The compulsion to then speak and act out these emotional elaborations marked their lifeworlds clearly. Additionally, what needs to be appreciated here is that such attributes and characteristics did not come without a personal price.

‘Free speech [and action] implies speaking frankly and truthfully. This is a necessary practice, but it can be dangerous because sometimes people do not want to hear the truth, which often amounts to criticism, so they try to silence the speaker’ (McNiff and Whitehead 2009: 164).

The initial stages of deciding whether or not to engage in such danger takes place within ‘the underpinning ontological, spiritual values, and transforms into social and political practices’ (McNiff and Whitehead 2009: 164). Community activists are, in the first instance, interested in the questions of what shall we do and how shall we live – searching for spaces of free expression and diversification from the mainstream interpretation of life. Nikolas Rose (1999: 260) suggests that this presents individuals with the challenge of self location:

‘In freeing many questions concerning the proper conduct of life from the authoritative prescriptions of political, religious, and social authorities, it pluralizes the answers that can be provided, opening up a field of diversity within which each subject is obliged to locate themselves.’

Again, this reflects the lifeworlds of the participants, who were found not to be guided by external authority in the same way as they were found not to be guided by ideological frameworks. The reliance, in the first instance, on the ‘inner’ rather than the ‘outer’ world for guidance and orientation is a unique deliberation area of this study. The individuals involved with this research were found to have a strong hermeneutics of suspicion regarding fixed, total ideas concerning their own understanding and wider theories of life, which compelled them to explore the politics of possibility rooted in Fournier’s utopianism discussed earlier. Terry Eagleton (2011: 131) suggests that this can be due to the sense that individuals are in a state where:

‘The body is always in a sense unfinished, open-ended, always capable of more creative activity than what it may be manifesting right now.’

Participants were found to be continually honing skills that enable them to consciously (re)negotiate fields of experience through which they can navigate the ever-moving cultural landscapes. These negotiations are as much about blocking out information as acquiring it. Individuals use their

personal motivational factors to filter information as well as construct identities that enable them to engage in cultural change. Melucci (1996: 47) suggests:

‘In contemporary systems, the site where the meaning of action is constructed shifts to the individual, who thus becomes a social actor in the true sense of the word.’

He goes on to say that:

‘In the societies of the past, the meaning of individuals’ behaviour was always sought on some plane or other of reality lying above or below the individual – gods, nature, the kinship system, the state, class, or Society itself as a metaphysical entity’ (Melucci 1996: 47).

The participants of this research were found to be fully engaging in developing their own articulations and meanings. This may be best understood in hearing from the counterpoint of what Archer (2003: 342) calls ‘passive agents’:

‘Passive agents are the opposite of those taking a “social” stance; they are people to whom things happen rather than people who exercise some governance over their lives by making things happen.’

In coming to the end of this section, and its focus on the internal world of the individual activists and the fluidity and partiality of thought and action present within the data, attention shall now turn to the ‘projects’ that result in collective social and political practices. In particular, if the above quote does hold some sense of shift in contemporary societies, we seem to be left with the question of how the collective change manifests itself and also finds cohesion and coherence.

### **Rewiring Political Change**

If it is the case that this research has found that the individuals involved ‘tend to structure themselves in a fluid, decentralised style, to emphasise the reflexive construction of collective identities and the moral meaning of everyday life and to rely on cultural and symbolic forms of resistance at least as often as more conventional political activism’ (Davis 2002: 8), then the collective ontologies and epistemologies found within the lifeworlds of community activists seems to be the next area that needs to be considered and understood. The old feminist slogan that ‘the personal is political’ seems a good starting point in attempting to pursue this goal. The findings expand upon this position rather than being simply rooted in gender identification and emancipation, or any other single component of identity for that matter. The passion and gifts, associations and violations found to motivate activists had their sources in far wider springs of desire and concern. Chapter Five reveals a series of collective tactics and processes that had their origins in the personal internal worlds of participants but were used to mobilise, in some cases, thousands of people in community activism.

Before looking at these collective dynamics, it is important to restate the desire to avoid reductionism and the potential pitfalls, highlighted in the methodology, of this next section presenting a coherence and unity within social actors that is beyond the reality of truth. In other words, the analysis that is to follow is itself to be regarded as a composite, partial and 'tiny corner of the world'. Nonetheless, in balance, it should also be noted that this should not negate the real cultural, political and social change produced through the core narratives in question and the roles that those interviewed played in these changes. Although much of what shall be looked at took place within local contexts, the repercussions and impact, in many cases, stretched far beyond those directly involved.

'Locally grounded autonomous projects allow an unpacking of the power working at different levels through governments, corporations and local elites, and the building of extra-local solidarity and resistance' (Pickerill and Chatterton 2006: 7).

Collective action was found to develop through a series of intricate and negotiated sequences constructed from values, grievances, emerging strategies and experiences, which then dislodged and disrupted existing cultural beliefs, mindsets and symbols. The primary key theme I would like to consider, in seeking more understanding about how this collectively takes place, is the primary role that relationships play in many of the participants' narratives.

Fine (2002: 229) writes that:

'In most groups – and in social movements in particular – participants share accounts of their lives and activities within the movement organisations. These discursive practices are shaped in light of the goals of the group and the characteristics of the individuals.'

This dual connection creates a space in which individual motivations and collective participation gain the potential for relational development and growth. This study has steered away from activists who are socially positioned at the forefront of the more headline movements of its day (i.e. UK Uncut, Occupy, etc.) and has instead focused more upon those that can be understood to occupy the 'abeyance' structures and spaces of emerging movements (Taylor 1989 – see Chapter Eight).

In this sense, the focus is placed upon the more hidden aspects of cultural change, that which take place far nearer to the day-to-day, step-by-step moments of cultural transformation. Hence, friendships and wider relationships are seen as being essential requirements for ongoing community action, ensuring that individuals could continue to do what was necessary to maintain focus and momentum, regardless of the chance of immediate success appearing. These are the sites in which the collective 'dwelling places' can be identified, albeit housed within very temporary structures.

The fragility and liquid nature of the collective action considered found its coherence through the values, beliefs and identity connections of the various networks and projects. The associations were found to be very varied, but there was a clear sense of friendship running through the majority of the activities. In a sense, this echoes and connects with the earlier reflections concerning working-class youth subcultures which:

‘emerged as a response to the disintegration of traditional working-class communities, which was brought about by post-war re-development and re-housing policies (cf. Young and Willmott 1957). However, they did this symbolically. In other words, they “express and resolve, albeit ‘magically’, the contradictions which remain hidden or unresolved in the parent culture”. Working-class youth subcultures did this through their style’ (Martin 2002: 75).

Although this research takes this beyond ‘style’, there was enough similarity to draw attention and reflection, particularly in the roles of symbolism and mutuality found within the collective passions and gifts and associations that brought many of the key narratives together. What’s more, it would seem no mistake that the majority of the core participants (and many of those who attended the workshops) found artistic expression a key tactic as well as a central aspect of identity expression.

The skills and experiences used in developing such relational contexts also connect with these subcultural spaces. The characteristics of translation, interpretation and brokerage were found to flourish within contexts that embraced anarchic philosophical principals of DIY and spontaneous ordering. Once again, people were found to be relying far more on their relational ties, rather than the strength of functional organisational structure(s), although obviously this was not simply an either/or situation.

Robert C. Schehr (1997: 16) contends that:

‘A postmodernist and chaos analysis will contend that the defining characteristics of society and social structure are flux, heterogeneity, diversity, orderly disorder, chance and spontaneity. These dissipative structures are the antithesis of functionalist theorizing since they are only relatively stable and always interacting with their environment, producing perpetual change.’

Hence, in the same way that individuals were found to be making their way through the world via nuanced internal conversations, the same was found within the various collective projects and networks considered in this research. To ensure the ongoing openness of emerging ‘projects’, groups were found to be having to create and interact ‘with a light touch’, in an ever-changing world; these modes of action and thinking led to the emergence of complex levels of cohesion and relational webs within the projects.

In attempting to stretch this relational component even further, I now want to turn to the consideration of collective learning. Olsen (2006: 55 in Billet et al. (eds) 2006) states that:

'Learning is seen as the gradual inclusion in a community of practice, i.e. the group of people whose shared practice also forms a cultural framework and meaning making.'

He builds upon these insights by:

'generalizing the notion of community practice so that it is not, necessarily a concrete social context ... learning is connected with the trajectory of the learning individual across and between a number of communities in which (s)he participates and negotiates meaning and identity' (2006: 55).

Consequently, I believe that, to consider the collective cultures of community activists, one must always recognise the heterogeneous nature of the components that 'make up' such contexts. This marks a break with the traditional subcultural position shown above (i.e. mods and punks).

Participants were found to operate within a context of 'multiple selves' (Eteläpelto and Saarinen 2006 in Billet et al. (eds) 2006), rather than the single dynamic of class, subculture etc.

Work-based learning, in such spaces, was found to increase gradual inclusion in projects, whilst participants were moving through identity formulation to emerging collective cultural constellations.

'Culture exists in socially articulated practices, meanings and symbols that are sometimes attached to artefacts or stabilised in social institutions, but they are also embodied in the agents of the culture, and (re)produced in their agency and consciousness' (Olesen 2011: 59).

The skills, methods and theories found within the lifeworlds of the participants, which enable them to traverse such landscapes, truly need to be appreciated. In a sense, participants were not attempting to 'build a movement' but to simply 'keep on the move'. Or, as Montagna (2005) thesis title, suggests, 'questioning while walking'. Creativity and innovation fused with the key motivational factors were found to enable the participants to journey as 'nomads of the present' (Melucci 1996). I suggest that these characteristics can be better understood as 'guerrilla' rather than 'guardhouse' tactics.

This is not to suggest in any way a lack of depth within the thinking or activities layered within the lifeworlds of the participants. Instead, what was found was the ongoing ability to (de)territorialise (Deleuze and Guattari 2004). Although it could be said that ideas, approaches and projects were found to be housed in temporary shelters, rather than institutional 'heritage centres', this should not belittle the depth of dedication, friendship and commitment found; on the contrary, due to the lack of structural security, the bonds of solidarity, although complex and multiple, were found to be strong.

I believe that something of what can be understood and learnt from such guerrilla mobilisations is the prioritisation of ontologies, which are littered with traits that create habitats in which:

'the notion of experience aligns with the notion of knowledge and points to the subjective aspect of this knowing, and especially the question of how the media of symbols, meanings and language connects cultural meanings with the individual emotional and relational experience, informed by a socialization process' (Olesen 2006: 63 in Billet, et al. (eds) 2006).

This then brings us to another aspect of learning within the collective behaviour of community activists – ongoing reflective practice. The cultural constellations show a strong need, commitment and value placed upon the ongoing ability to change tactics as a result of reflection and environmental adaptation.

'Identities are assumed to be constructed and negotiated through participation in and engagement with subjects' practical activities and experiences in communities. Learning and identity construction is understood as taking place through a subject's participation and active construction of meaning in socially formed local communities of practice' (Eteläpelto and Saarinen 2006: 158–9 in Billet et al. (eds) 2006).

Much previous research in social movement and community development studies has negated to see these processes at work, concentrating instead upon tangible targets, protest and campaign issues, etc. This research has navigated around these defaults and focused more upon the 'sinews and arteries' found within community activism, regardless of the environmental causes or impacts. As so often has proved the case during this action research, the methodology, ontology and findings all seem to be resonating from a very similar place of complexity; in fact, it is as if this whole research is a series of Russian dolls, albeit in a much more organic form. The focus on identity and learning is understood as being in constant flux; this results in identities continually being re-negotiated in relation to experiences, situations and other community members and contexts. In their research amongst teachers, Eteläpelto and Saarinen (2011: 164) concur with this dynamic, although in more formally professionalised situations:

'Teachers' professional identity formation has been recently understood as an ongoing process of interpretation and re-interpretation of experiences in professional learning contexts (Beijaard et al. 2004). Such an interpretation includes taking an active agency and a reflection on experiences and situational conditions.'

The emotional elaborations and interpretations that emerged as themes from the core interviews and subsequent workshops portrayed a high level of (sub) conscious praxis movement within the lifeworlds of community activists, thus bearing witness to the continual transition between personal motivational factors and the public face(s) of collective community activists.

I would argue that the activities considered within this research find themselves at the interface of what Manuel Castells (2009: 356–7) terms resistance and project identities (see Chapter Eight).

Resistance identities:

'are not limited to traditional values. They can also be built by, and around, proactive social movements, which chose to establish their autonomy in their community resistance as long as they are not powerful enough [to mount major social change] ... protecting spaces before engaging in the conquest of time.'

Whilst 'project identities' are:

'Potentially able to reconstruct a new civil society of sorts, and, eventually, a new state ... aiming at the transformation of society as a whole, in continuity with the values of communal resistance to dominant interests enacted by global flows of capital, power, and information.'

This then leads to the final area collective action in need of consideration within this section – networks. It should come as no surprise that participants were found to develop networks that embraced their core motivational factors, relational connections, translation-interpretation-brokerage skills, and DIY, spontaneous ordering and mutuality characteristics. Thus, it would seem pointless to bring this to the attention of the reader again through the frame of network development. Rather, attention shall now turn to the connected issues of 'resource foraging' and 'small world' dynamics.

The research found that in addition to and as an extension of the relational reliance discussed above, community activists were extremely adept at securing resources as and when they were needed. These 'foraging' skills were held by all those I talked to and had been acquired through ongoing experiences (in some cases spanning decades), which had produced an almost 'faith' perspective in 'things turning up'. Although there were also more strategic approaches found within resource mobilisation, there was much more of the guerrilla 'beg, borrow and (sometimes) steal' approach present.

Despite this being interesting in its own right, it is the way that such ontogeny transpires that is more compelling. Participants became competent and dextrous community foragers by stretching beyond strong relational ties. In other words, in the terms of small world dynamics, participants were continually found to be creating and connecting with weak-tie relationships. This not only produces a greater likelihood of 'things just turning up' but also increases the possibilities of cultural connections, creation and change. Thus, the symbiotic relationship of individual narrative, collective action and mobilisation, and network development were identified as creating a (potential) virtuous circle of development.

Furthermore:

'At the heart of this transformation are changing environments, requirements and technologies that are a product of evolving history' (Billett and Smith 2006: 152 in Billet et al. (eds) 2006).

The role of word-of-mouth, relational and community networks were found to be supported and extended via social media and a variety of other communication systems. The point being that these extensions seemed very 'natural' adaptations of community activists' ontological and epistemological outlooks. In his seminal work on the relationship between social movements and network theory, Diani (2003: 306) writes:

'In order to build such a theory, an important task is to define parameters to identify the structure of movement networks, and then elaborate appropriate theoretical models to explain certain network patterns and certain actors' incumbency of specific positions.'

Even though, as already mentioned, this research has sought to explore those that inhabit the 'places of abeyance', rather than identifiable movement leaders, the dynamics of certain actors and the relational non-hierarchical models that have been found are without question.

Diani and McAdam (2003: 306) go on to suggest that:

'An informal network may indeed range from being totally decentralized to totally centralized. Although the extent to which differences in centralization correspond to differences in influence and possibly power remains to be seen, organisations most central in movement networks have been found to play a greater role in external exchanges to powerful actors, which suggest something about their potential leadership.'

Without simply disregarding these comments, this research does suggest that the decentralised, partial and, in that sense, less identifiable networks plays a huge role in the ability to formulate cultural and structural change within the dominant social order. Furthermore, if the appreciation, role and dynamic of internal conversations, relationships, spontaneous ordering, translation, interpretation and brokerage at the level of the informal and day-to-day were overlooked and downplayed, it would be disastrous. Networks have no clear starting point, but those that make them up were found to have these commonalities, which need to be nurtured, understood and propagated to see flourishing community activism.

### **Jacques Lacan and Community Activism**

This final section signals the beginning of the core area of discussion of this thesis and shall find its completion within the first section of the next chapter. In beginning this, I need to acknowledge my awareness of entering potentially terrifying ground. This may seem a strange reflection for a section that is the culmination of appreciation of the lifeworlds of community activists. However, the world of Jacques Lacan can never be entered without the promise of disruption. Commenting on Lacan, Slavoj Žižek (2006: 55) writes:

'It is never possible for me to fully assume (in the sense of symbolic integration) the phantasmic kernel of my being: when I venture too close, what occurs is what Lacan calls the *aphanisis* (the self-

obliteration) of the subject: the subject loses his/her symbolic consistency, it disintegrates. And perhaps the forced actualization of social reality itself of the phantasmatic kernel of my being is the worst, most humiliating kind of violence, a violence that undermines the very basis of my identity (my self-image).'

Although the full impact of this statement is not totally considered until the next chapter, I do want to begin to confront the effects of Lacan and his disintegration and violence now. As stated, my use of the French psychoanalyst is focused and specific to the processes of triangulation and analysis within this research. I believe that this approach will produce a unique set of outcomes within the study of activists and it is on this explicit aim that I remain focused. This section employs Lacanian thought to understand more fully how participants attempt to 'turn the world upside down', via their ontogeny, community engagements and tactics.

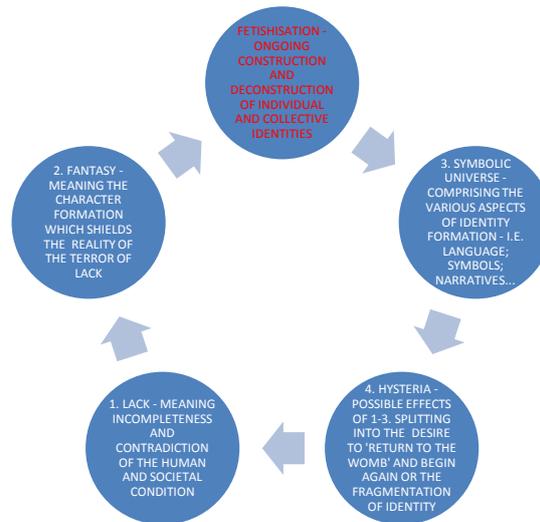
However, before embarking on this, I recognise theoretically that I need to address questions of legitimacy, in terms of de-contextualising Lacanian thought from a psychoanalytical framework (Parker 2003, 2005). It is important to note that any such move must be seen as a re-imagining and re-framing of the 'original' thought of Lacan. In doing so, my defence is based initially on calling upon the doubt, raised by Lacan, surrounding all attempts of approaching reality and truth. Addressing a similar challenge of relating Lacan to organisational studies, Contu, Driver and Jones (2010: 308) write:

'Lacan, of course, does not exist ... when we say "Lacan", we are using a language, or more precisely a signifier, and that signifier is caught up in a chain of other signifiers. This might be obvious to us now, but this has not always been so. This is perhaps only obvious to us *because* of Lacan, or because of the things that we have condensed by the name Lacan. This calling into being of a single signifier that stands in the place of a subject, is one of the key illusions that Lacan shows us, again and again.'

Consequently, I obviously want to avoid falling down an abyss of psychoanalysis thought and debate, which could lead to utter distraction. Notwithstanding the importance of the fluidity of signifiers, as I shall show, in understanding the actions of community activists, I do see the need to show my specific interest in the works of Lacan. Therefore, to clarify, my focus lies in the way Johnsen and Gudmand-Høyer (2010: 332) discuss Lacan's two central insights – lack and fantasy:

'Lacan's theory of subjectivity is dominated by a fundamental ontological traumatic sense of *lack* (1991, 2006). Yet, Lacan's theory is characterized, on the one hand, by an enigmatic structural dimension of fantasy and, on the other hand, by the perhaps provoking intuition that there remains something artificial at the core of humanity itself. Lacan finds at the heart of what it means to be human an ethical fiction that works to cover up a more radical lack and monstrosity as the ontological undercurrent of human existence.'

In attempting to make sense of these theories, and for use within my workshops, I devised the following schema (Fig.1):



The remainder of this section now gives explanations and applications of this schema in appreciating the skills and tactics of community activists, whilst challenging mainstream Western consumer epistemologies and ontologies.

Although this study has employed multi-site action research to create a helpful and creative separation between and appreciation of each of the participants, their ability and desire to identify incompleteness and contradiction within turbo-capitalism can be read as deeply unifying.

Regardless of their individual passions and gifts, violations and associations, all of the participants were found to be engaging in activism because of their deep convictions and beliefs that change is needed within mainstream culture. This may seem like stating the obvious, which it is, but this displeasure and identification of lack within society can be tracked from the internal conversations, to the messy explorations of initial engagements, to the development of ‘projects’ and networks.

Herein lies the birthing spot of the ‘just do it’ mentality – the centre of unwillingness towards the dominant narrative(s) and lifeworlds of mainstream society. Here is the seat of a thousand questions and a thousand actions. Each of the participants was found unwilling to accept the ‘taken for granted’ representations of life portrayed in turbo-capitalism and its cultural/media outlets. The disruption of lack within the mindsets and worldviews of the participants created alternative tastes, desires and possibilities, and ultimately shaped their imagination to produce alternative moral economies.

Although none of the participants used (or even showed awareness of) Lacanian theory, they clearly displayed strong awareness of the ‘made up’ nature of dominant culture and a strong skill set to

show that such positions are simply modes of signifiers, interpretations and embodiments that cloak the vested interests of the rich and powerful.

‘Ideological space is made of non-bound, non-tied elements, “floating signifiers”, whose very identity is “open”, over determined by their articulation in a chain with other elements – that is, their “literal” signification depends on their metaphorical surplus-signification’ (Žižek 1989: 95).

Exploring the lifeworlds of community activists, via the ideas of incompleteness and contradiction, has proved exceptionally helpful. The skills of translation and interpretation were not only found useful in developing projects, mutuality and networks but also in destabilising ‘narratives of domination’. Herein lay the multi-faceted frontiers of cultural exchange and confrontation, the challenge of who holds the power to name and give meaning to wide-ranging issues such as democracy, artistic expression and the welfare state.

‘The multitude of “floating signifiers”, of proto-ideological elements, is structured in a field through the intervention of a certain “nodal point” [i.e. consumerism] ... What is at stake in the ideological struggle is which of the “nodal points”, *points de captation*, will totalize, include in its series of equivalences, these free floating elements ... But this enchainment is possible only on condition that a certain signifier – the Lacanian “One” – “quilts” the whole field and, by embodying it, effectuates its identity’ (Žižek 1989: 95–6).

To pick up on Žižek’s ‘quilting’ analogy, community activists were found to be not only pulling the stitches apart, but also re-imagining the very idea of being covered! The research is littered with numerous efforts to construct reflexive praxes within the participants’ identity formations and project constructions, which were strengthened by the development of counter-nodal points from which to create safety and opposition. This echoed the thoughts of Chatterton and Pickerill (2010: 480) in the:

‘recognition of local, subaltern voices typically drowned out by dominant rhetorical positions and grand theory ... encouraging us with the advocacy of the “marginalized, disenfranchised, disempowered, and otherwise excluded voices”.’

Here is found the appreciation of community activists ‘pulling back the curtain’ on the incompleteness and contradiction of turbo-capitalism, which in turn enables them to move to the exposure of fantasy within the current order(s) of things. In his exploration of lack and fantasy, Bailey (2009: 35) suggests that the French word *meconnaissance* is of use in:

‘encompassing non-recognition of and obliviousness to something; it is sometimes translated as “misrecognition” – a translation I find wide of the mark. “Misrecognition” suggests that something has been recognised, only wrongly. In my preferred translation of *obliviousness* or *non-recognition*, the subject is completely blind to the object.’

Keeping this in mind, I suggest that community activists are well equipped to not only disrupt the everyday lives of themselves and those around them but also to continue to drill into the spaces of

oblivion and non-recognition that people experience in their own day-to-day lives. In this sense, their activities are not simply made up of alternatives but are also warnings of the current state of affairs. Such 'acts of apocalypse' create a cocktail of analysis, reflection and provocation, which contributes to the endless cycle of fantasy exposure.

Žižek (2006: 57) comments:

'If what we experience as "reality" is structured by fantasy, and if fantasy serves as the screen that protects us from being directly overwhelmed by the raw Real, then reality itself can function as an escape from encountering the Real.'

In seeking to make sense of this, Böhm and Batta (2010: 347) write that:

'Lacan's realm of the Real and "*jouissance*", is the set of libidinal drives that cannot be symbolized. They describe the realm beyond socially sanctioned enjoyment, or rather, pleasure (Lacan 1998). Hence, these terms point to those libidinal mechanisms that are non-symbolizable and therefore never fully attainable or even understandable.'

So, the suggestion here is that the activities and effectiveness of community activists are governed, in part, by their ability to reveal the fantasies that construct Western turbo-capitalism. This is:

'how people take an active part – through processes of desire, pleasure and consumption – in the constitution and reproduction of capitalist social relations' (Böhm and Batta 2010: 347).

In other words, that which is considered and treated as being reality is simply a construction of fantasy, which is continually being fuelled by the surrounding symbolic universe comprising the various opportunities of identity formation, i.e. language, symbols, narratives etc. To elaborate this exchange further, there is a need to understand the use of what Lacan terms the processes of fetishisation. He argues that the role and power of fetish within culture should not be underestimated, the:

'fetish is an object that is believed to have magical powers and thus attracts excessive and irrational investments' (ibid.: 348).

'For Lacan, the subject ... is dependent on signifiers which make up our symbolic order including language ... this allows him to conceptualise the subject in relational terms' (ibid.: 351).

However, within a Lacanian landscape, language is not seen as the only source of signification; in fact, it is the elaboration of language in objects that triggers and releases the role of the fetish.

Lacan and Granoff (1956: 272) argue that fetishism occurs:

'when language is transferred to an image ... This is exactly what permits the emergence of desire; a desire which is structured around the unending quest for the lost/impossible [Real]. Impossible because if the subject does not have it, neither does the big Other, the socio-symbolic system. Both subjective lack, the lack in the Other are lacks of *jouissance*.'

Thus, the transactions between individuals and society are seen as activities that seek to *make up* the sense of incompleteness and contradiction. This scene is not a new thing, however:

‘What contemporary consumer capitalism has arguably achieved is that it has provided a symbolic system onto which the subject’s constitutive anxieties (lack) can be transferred, creating a set of fantasies for people to believe in’ (Böhm and Batta 2010: 354).

My key argument is that, despite the achievements of turbo-capitalism, community activists realise that such symbolic transference remains incomplete and contradictory. Or to put it another way – it still lacks! This sense of incompleteness and contradiction, experienced by citizens, holds the potential to subvert the ideas and processes by which societies and groups exclude ‘Others’ whom they want to subordinate or exclude. Community activism not only challenges these processes but also seeks to imagine and incubate alternative futures and cultural change. David Harvey (2000: 195) contends that:

‘There is a time and place in the ceaseless human endeavour to change the world, when alternative visions, no matter how fantastic, provide the grist for shaping powerful political forces for change.’

However, although this:

‘introduces contingency and possibility of change right at the heart of the symbolic order, on the other hand, this change is the very stuff that keeps the marketing machine going, introducing ever more fantasies for the consuming subject to believe in’ (Böhm and Batta: 354).

The challenge faced by community activists is to lift the consumption fantasies that the mainstream culture wants to be seen as being reality. Bailey (2009: 35) suggests that:

‘One of Lacan’s most important maxims is that human beings are very largely oblivious to their own Subject; the ego is what a person says of him/herself; the Subject is the unrecognised self that is speaking. Psychoanalysis is about accompanying the patient towards his/her subjective truth, or towards the point where the object “me” and the subjective “I” can be united.’

In this sense, I am suggesting that community activists somehow replaces collective psychoanalysis in seeking to bring about contexts and habitus in which people can reflect and ultimately engage in life choices that will create more equitable and just spaces for the issues that they hold important.

This then leads us to the final component of Lacanian thought – the crossroad of hysteria! As the above schema displays, my understanding of Lacanian hysteria separates in two potential stages. The first is the fragmentation of identity, which may be encountered when an individual approaches their ‘subjective truth’. If we were to consider capitalist consumption as an addiction, then this is the place where confession and exorcism take place.

Prior to this point, according to the schema, individuals are deeply embedded within their private *meconnaissance*; the terror of lack is shielded by the fantasy of symbolic fetish consumption.

Hysteria is the site of subjective disruption, where worldviews and mindsets are sufficiently disrupted that fragmentation of trust and stability takes place. Due to the sense of dislocation experienced by individuals and groups, this is also the period in which the alternative moral economies of community activists are potentially most appealing. In other words, this is the flip-side of hysteria – the desire to return to the womb and begin being *born again*.

The research shows that such moments of change are experienced at different levels and degrees. However, the point being made is that, regardless of the type of change, it is the ‘place of hysteria’ that gives birth to such redirection. Once again, here is the transition from being ‘passive agents’ to taking a new social stance, which is embodied by ‘people who exercise some governance over their lives by making things happen’ (Archer 1988.).

In summary, this chapter has sought to track and appreciate the lifeworlds of community activists; this has led to the plotting of various locations, starting with the inner worlds of motivation, identity formulation and internal conversation, and leading to the external landscapes of relationships, learning cultures, networks and reflective praxes. Finally, coherence among these journeys has been sought through the reflections on the theories of Lacan.

It is with the same Lacanian framework that attention shall now turn away from the appreciation of community activists to the critique of their actions and impact. Once again, this starts with the their inner worlds and spread to the complex questions of being part of cultural change whilst being implicated and situated in the very heart of the problem. In other words, the next chapter explores the experience of living with incompleteness and contradiction in a global age of turbo-capitalism.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN – INCOMPLETENESS AND CONTRADICTION IN A GLOBAL AGE**

*'In disoriented times, we cannot accept the return of the old, deadly figure of religious sacrifice; but neither can we accept the complete lack of any figure, and the complete disappearance of any idea of heroism. In both cases, the consequences will be the end of any dialectical relationship between humanity and its element of inhumanity, in a creative mode. So the result will be the sad success of what Nietzsche named "the last man." "The last man" is the exhausted figure of a man devoid of any figure. It is the nihilistic image of the fixed nature of the human animal, devoid of all creative possibility. Our task is: How can we find a new heroic figure, which is neither the return of the old figure of religious or national sacrifice, nor the nihilistic figure of the last man? Is there a place, in a disoriented world, for a new style of heroism?'*

*Alain Badiou (2012)*

This chapter seeks to bring the whole premise of community activism into question. Having listened, reflected and pondered the voices of the core participants in Chapter Five, and sought to celebrate and appreciate the 'Contours of a Community Activist' in Chapter Six, I now seek to dislodge and disrupt the very ground community activists occupy and from which they seek to 'change the(ir) world(s)'.

If the last chapter was seen to consider and celebrate the delicate and nuanced micro aspects of the lifeworlds of community activists, then this one shall begin with a full-scale macro assault upon any actions that would be perceived by the activists, or be perceived by others, as representing the 'audacity of hope' within such specific forms of community resistance and intervention. Make no mistake – this is not only an attack concerning the effectiveness of community activism but also an accusation that such acts are compliant with turbo-capitalism and the preservation of its authority.

In taking this direction, I seek to dislodge the personal identity of community activism via the use of the lack-fantasy schema and my own personal narrative. The aim is to leave no stone unturned (notwithstanding the partiality of insight already named as my 'tiny corner of the world') in the rigour of this interrogation. Therefore, this analysis takes a philosophical, political, social, legal and individual approach to demonstrate that all in the world of community activism is 'vanity, vanity all is vanity' (Ecclesiastes 1: 2).

I shall address this task with the following four sections:

- *Unleash the Hounds – The Slovenian Hamlet and Friends!!*: A consideration of the work of Slavoj Žižek (the Slovenian Hamlet) and some of his contemporary thinkers regarding the futility and compliance of community activism within the context of turbo-capitalism.
- *The Criminalisation of Resistance – An Investigation of Surveillance and Policing*: Explores the links between current policing policy, direct and community activism, and the social control of citizens.
- *Tripping Down Memory Lane*: A reflective analysis of my previous (work-based) experience, mapping out the early footings of entrapment in turbo-capitalism via structural responses to needs and individual lifestyle consumption patterns.
- *We Are Family – Big Society and Big Brother*: Starting with an analysis of the current coalition government's 'Big Society' and austerity measures, this section develops an autobiographical account of the fantasy of a community activist living in the UK. In this section, I seek to de-mask my own fantasy as a change agent, using personal insights and reflections gained whilst engaged in this action research and previous work-based experiences.

Before I start this onslaught, I think it is important to create a base level of cohesion with my approach to the previous chapter. As with Chapter Six, I shall continue to explore the activities and responses of participants by eclectically drawing from the data (Chapter Five). Once again, the rationale for this is to seek closer exposure to the complexity found within the lifeworlds of community activists and challenge further the very 'categories' that I have constructed in the data chapter.

### **Unleash the Hounds – The Slovenian Hamlet and Friends!!**

In his recent book, *Capitalism's New Clothes*, Colin Cremin (2011) seeks to lay bare some of the embedded fantasies (and uses of the symbolic universe that shields such fantasies) located within the worlds of community activists and the wider global capitalist system(s). Of particular interest, at this juncture of the research, are his observations regarding what he terms a 'virtuous circle', in which capital absorbs, reconfigures and then rebrands critique [and community activism], turning it into a everyday commodity.

Cremin's suggestion – that any action, critique or resistance that takes place within society is seamlessly amalgamated and domesticated by turbo-capitalism – needs further consideration. These mechanisms of co-option are seen to be sat, paradoxically, in the very *core of the individual* – located within the anxieties produced by the sense of incompleteness and contradiction identified in

the system, and in the *complex web of globalisation*, in what Anthony Giddens (1990: 64) describes as:

‘worldwide social relations which link distinct localities in such a way that happenings are shaped by events occurring miles away and vice versa.’

In this landscape, forms of resistance and community activity give the impression of offering some semblance of solution and response to cure such instabilities and confusion; but such feelings are ultimately considered as futile and a perpetuation of consumption processes fuelled by the wider worldwide social relations.

In considering the lifeworlds of community activists, these tensions offer a substantial challenge to what have, to this point, been previously identified and appreciated as strengths and seats of motivational engagement. The passions and gifts, associations, and violations – identified as initiating internal conversations within the research participants – are here seen not as components leading to cultural change but rather the beginnings of fantasy constructions. Actions, previously located in the cores of individuals, are here seen to be continually reshaped, absorbed, transformed and then rebranded as commodities within the complex web of globalisation.

In other words, it could be argued that these ‘community activist fantasies’ offer a sense of change and cure – a shield from the terror of lack – without fundamentally bringing any real challenge to the dominant culture. In his groundbreaking book, *Violence*, Slavoj Žižek (2008: 23) writes:

‘What if the true evil of our societies is not their capitalist dynamics as such, but our attempts to extricate ourselves from them – all the while profiting – by carving out exclusive self-enclosed communal spaces.’

Žižek – ‘The Slovenian Hamlet’ (Critchley 2012) – suggests that celebrations of dynamic intervention and activism should be seen as offering individuals and groups ‘exclusive self-enclosed communal spaces’ is a serious retort to the findings of this research. Rather than standing outside and against the dominant patterns of turbo-capitalism, community activism is seen as simply offering alternative constructions of identity within the dominant system, which merely give the impression of potential extrication from this system.

It could be argued that Žižek’s statement seems to echo previously rehearsed and considered critiques concerning the real impact and challenge of working class subcultures: ‘a tendency to romanticise working-class culture’ (Turner 1996: 164) and ‘elevate delinquents into the vanguard of the revolution’ (Cohen 1987: xxvi):

‘Working-class youth subcultures emerged as a response to the disintegration of traditional working-class communities, which was brought about by post-war re-development and re-housing policies

(cf. Young and Willmott 1957). However, they did this symbolically. In other words, they “express and resolve, albeit ‘magically’, the contradictions which remain hidden or unresolved in the parent culture’ (Martin 2002: 75–6).

He concludes:

‘Ultimately, though, their solutions were no real solutions at all. In short, working-class youth subcultures offered no solution to the problems of being in a subordinate structural position.’

In place of particular subcultures (i.e. punk, mod, etc.), the judgement unleashed here is that the actions and resistance of community activists hold no real challenge to the hegemony of the dominant system(s) and their subordinated structural positions. Cremin (2011: 30), almost tauntingly, states that:

‘We have for a long while been in the midst of a kind of deconstructive pseudo-activity of micro-struggles that respond to the symptoms of capitalism though without ever challenging the totality.’

This caustic challenge of ‘pseudo-activity of micro-struggles’ cannot be easily side stepped or silenced. Again, the lives under consideration within this research are seen as symptom solvers, rather than tackling totalities – a generation of people who speak and live in the fantasy of wanting ‘revolution without revolution’. Rather than initiating change from within, via outrage, challenge and DIY cultures, activism is reduced to creating self-enclosed communal spaces, which shield participants from the terror of themselves. These criticisms lead to a consideration, if Žižek (2009: 23) is right, that:

‘The external threat the community is fighting is its own inherent essence.’

Placed within such a landscape, it may be more appropriate to think of the examples within this research as representing and better understood as stories of the First World, inhabitants of which:

‘find it more and more difficult even to imagine a public or universal cause for which one would be ready to sacrifice one’s life. Indeed, the split between First and Third World runs increasingly along the lines of an opposition between leading a long, satisfying life full of material and cultural wealth, and dedicating one’s life to some transcendent cause’ (Žižek 2009: 25).

Despite the difficulty in naming the dynamic and complex character of ‘turbo-capitalism’, it does seem necessary, at this point, to push deeper into understanding more of this global landscape.

Manuel Castells (2009: 359) writes:

‘Power ... is no longer concentrated in institutions (the state), organisations (capitalist firms), or symbolic controllers (corporate media, churches). It is diffused in global networks of wealth, power, and information, images, which circulate and transmute in a system of variable geometry and dematerialized geography.’

The picture conjured here is helpful in recognising the complexity of hindrances faced by any individual or collective actor seeking to engage in social change. In times past, the task of emerging social actors and movements (i.e. the working class) in identifying their opponents (the ruling class) was a much more straightforward process. However, the post-Fordist working arrangements, coupled with the hyper-capitalist consumer landscape now blur (at first sight) many of the previously identifiable boundaries of social position(s) and centres of control. Chesters and Welsh (2007: 4) write:

‘The fundamental problematic confronting all social theory [and praxis] involves coming to terms with the global ascendancy of the neo-liberal capitalist axiomatic ... [nation states are required to] conform to structural adjustment packages, [and are] powerless over the images broadcast in their space [where] turbo-capitalism ... reigns.’

Žižek and friends argue that it is vanity to suggest that localised action and resistance actually make any difference. In particular, Žižek believes that this leaves us in a space in which it is better to do nothing rather than to engage in localised acts (such as providing space for the multitude of new subjectivities), the ultimate function of which is to make the system run more smoothly. Pushing the argument to his conclusion, he writes, from within a ‘Trojan ridicule’:

‘The era of grand explanations is over; we should no longer aim at all-explaining systems and global emancipator projects; the violent imposition of grand solutions should leave room for forms of specific resistance and intervention ... If the reader feels a minimum of sympathy with these lines, she should stop reading and cast aside this volume. This book is unashamedly committed to the “Messianic” standpoint of the struggle for universal emancipation’ (Žižek 2008: cover).

Even the far more optimistic (and supportive of localised action) writings of John Holloway (2010: 52) acknowledge that there are many reasons to take heed of such conclusions:

‘There is certainly plenty of room for all those who maintain that the only way to change the world is by taking state power (or indeed those who say that there is no possibility at all of destroying capitalism).’

Alain Badiou (2004: 119), in agreement with Žižek, suggests that non-involvement needs consideration, as engagement simply results in homage being paid to the very powers that are seen as in need of change:

‘It is better to do nothing than to contribute to the invention of formal ways of rendering visible that which Empire already recognizes as existent.’

This non-engagement is seen as providing a direct threat, caused by the ominous passivity and disengagement of citizens – ‘those in power often prefer even a “critical” participation, a dialogue, to silence’ (ibid.) – in that such inattention unmasks the fantasy of democratic involvement and buy-in.

Again, looking at these realities from a global perspective, Simon Critchley (2012: 81) concurs that, when neo-liberal capitalism is unmasked, its fantasy of democracy and all that is right is left naked:

‘So the situation we’re in is one where other regimes have to accept the logic of capitalism, accept the ideology of democracy and human rights – and if they don’t accept that, they’re going to be bombed. That’s the logic of military neo-liberalism. The world is in a state of permanent war, in a state of chaos.’

The crux of the argument being considered here (without response at this stage) is that, if this ‘logic’ is true for entire regimes, then what chance is there for localised struggles and those individuals that are embedded and rooted in the very environs of capitalist architecture?

However, this lack of effectiveness is not where this critique ends. Cremin suggests that community activists can be seen as being the agents of a double-handed strategy (regardless of whether they are hypocritical or sincere, Žižek (2009: 14) points out, contributing:

‘to something that is necessary, if not indispensable, from a purely economic standpoint: they enable the capitalist system to postpone its crisis by allowing an ad hoc “redistribution of wealth” among the most needy and miserable.’

Hence, rather than community activists being seen as initiating agitation about the ‘way things are’, they are here depicted, at best, as being a social mop within a system of inequality. An argument recently played out in a paper by Lambie-Mumford (2013), regarding the effectiveness and implications of the recent rise of foodbanks with the UK, explores:

‘the nature of Foodbanks as *emergency* initiatives, providing relief and alleviation for the “symptoms” of food insecurity and poverty ... [and how] those who run the projects navigate the tension between addressing symptoms rather than “root causes” of poverty and food insecurity.’

Nonetheless, not all is doom and gloom from the Slovenian Hamlet and friends. It is important to note that the scrutinising glare being placed upon the lifeworlds of community activists has not been unleashed by aggressive nihilistic men (sic.) without any hope. No, their challenge is far more complex. Alain Badiou concludes his recent book *Philosophy for Militants* (2012: 79) with the hope that:

‘it is possible, possible, possible, it must be possible. Perhaps. We hope we must hope that it will be possible to find the possibility of new fiction.’

In conclusion of this section I shall focus on one more idea from Žižek, concerning spontaneous acts. I have chosen this area, as spontaneity – alongside DIY culture and mutuality – proved not only to be a clear characteristic of the participants but is also a central area of interest in terms of my own anarchic political position. Ed Pluth (2010:15) writes:

Žižek's suspicion of spontaneity is also motivated in part by his take on the psychological appeal of good old fashioned repression. Whether in the form of a totalitarian state or an authoritarian father, Žižek claims that the psychological appeal of such figures is that one could fairly easily carve out a subjective space in opposition to the repressive authority, thus constructing for oneself a fantasy of transgression and spontaneity as liberation. But the command to transgress is linked to the preservation of the authority being transgressed. Authority and transgressive spontaneity form a happy couple, as it were.'

In direct application to this research and the lifeworlds of community activists, the suggestion being made here yet again exposes fantasy. Rather than being involved in acts that seek to 'turn the world upside down', all of the actions identified are potentially reduced to transgressions linked to the preservation and acknowledgement of authority and status quo. Instead of being sites of incubation for alternative moral economies, community activists are seen more as pain relief to the onslaught of the 'war-machine' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004) that is turbo-capitalism. They are narratives that harbour psychological needs and desires and that ultimately want to see the preservation of authority.

Chapter Six approached the findings in the context of appreciation, in which the contours of an activist were seen to emerge from the internal passions and gifts, associated networks and experiences of violations, causing departure from the mainstream ethic(s) of society. Here the accusation is that all of these acts are simply a sophisticated series of articulations and events, which shield the individual and mask compliance, participation and real appreciation for turbo-capitalism. The critique of spontaneity not only raises deep suspicion(s) regarding the ability to disrupt and dislodge mainstream cultural patterns, it is seen as conjoining further localised acts within the matrix of the system.

This leads me to share what I found to be the most disturbing 'silence' of this action research: the total lack of reference within the data towards what could be termed a meta-narrative. When asked about motivational factors for being engaged in acts of cultural and social change, not one of the participants referred to an ideological narrative. I conjecture that if I were to have conducted this research in the 1970s–1990s, part of the data concerning motivational factors would have been connected to clearer ideological positions (i.e. feminism, Marxism, etc.).

Placing this silence in the current context could support the charge of Žižek – that the actions of those interviewed are not seeking real change but are simply acts seeking 'a long, satisfying life full of material and cultural wealth'. I must admit, this does leave me with the metaphoric reflection that these acts are the decorative shop window of a store rooted in the back office of tax havens and sweat-shops, with no trace of what Alain Badiou (2012: 61) calls for when he suggests 'we must find a new sun – in other words, a new mental country'.

However, there may be other explanations, rather than saying that community activists are in a sense narcissistic – simply trying to make a better life for themselves. The imagination and creativity identified in this research may not shine like a new sun, or depict a new country, but neither can it be explained as having no light or hope. So is it possible to identify external and internal forces that may be contributing to the lack of resistance identified in this section? Can the lifeworlds of community activists be seen as more complex than simply ‘pseudo micro-struggles’?

The remainder of this chapter shall seek to consider what then may cause incompleteness and contradiction within community resistance. In doing this, I shall first turn my focus to direct activism and modern-day police surveillance tactics and then reflect back on some significant related issues within my own career development.

### **The Criminalisation of Resistance – An Investigation of Surveillance and Policing**

Although I stated in the introduction that the focus of this research does not seek to focus on individuals and groups engaged in direct action or global justice struggles, I do feel there is a need to make some connection between those involved in this research and such social phenomena. In a sense, this is due to knowledge of my own and some of the participants’ continual crossover between these two types of activism. But, more importantly, I believe such a pursuit will offer insightful answers to the questions of lack identified at the end of the last section.

In his recent paper exploring the views of activists connected to ‘autonomous urban social centres’, Chatterton and Pickerill (2010: 1205) attempt to show how:

‘the everyday lives, values and practices of participants within them give shape and meaning to the idea of anti-capitalism. This is done by reference to five areas: a politics of place, where local space constitutes anti-capitalist practice; political identities based on impure, messy identities; social relationships which prioritise emotions and collective working; organisational practices based on self-management and experimentation; and political strategies which stress the need to cross boundaries beyond the activist ghetto.’

These areas seem to blur the lines of community activists and direct-action actors. The importance of identity formation, non-hierarchical practices, mutuality and strategic mobilisations between individuals and groups all create strong commonalities. Furthermore, contemporary academic thought (Martin 2011) suggests there are strong associations between policing strategies, anti-globalisation protests, and the development (sic.) and protection of ‘global-urban’ consumer spaces and lifestyles. These issues of policing and surveillance further cross over the engagement arenas and lifeworlds of both types of activist. Chapman (1991: 3 in Vromen 2003 ) writes:

‘The rule seems to be that whatever the individual is committed to, politics will conflict with it and the more important the commitment, the more likely the conflict is. The relationship works the other way too: the greater the commitment to politics and the nearer that one gets to power ... the greater the personal cost will be; public winners are private losers.’

Hence, any escalations, regardless of activist mode, that lead to frustrations, reactions and increased involvement would seem to point to confrontation with the dominant stakeholders of the status quo, and the surveillance and policing regimes employed by them to protect their vested interests.

Fernandez (2008: 92–3) comments that:

‘law enforcement agencies have devised several strategies to deal with social movement challengers, such as securing space, building barricades, creating security (or frozen) zones, and conducting mass pre-emptive arrests.’

Furthermore, Greg Martin (2010: 28) suggests that:

‘policing space ... has become highly politicised, as a premium is placed on promoting host cities as safe places to attract investment from nomadic capital.’

He continues (2010: 27–8):

‘Since the Battle of Seattle in 1999 and especially since the terror attacks of 2001, the policing of protest [and wider activist activities] has come to entail a complex combination of “hard” and “soft” techniques, including the potential use of powers formerly reserved only for the security services. Under these circumstances civil liberties are threatened ... [and] increasingly, power resides in the executive branch of the state and policing becomes politicised as a consequence.’

Hence we observe, from these thoughts, a mixture of policing and surveillance techniques, which are responding to the day-to-day need to keep cities safe for ‘nomadic investment’, and escalations of techniques that pre-empt, disapprove and deter challenges to the current forms of turbo-capitalism.

Again, Martin (ibid.: 30) reflects on:

‘the emergence of new social control techniques (e.g. off-limits orders, novel applications of trespass law, and parks exclusion statutes) that “represent a significant extension of the State’s authority and dispersal of its surveillance capacity throughout the urban landscape” (Beckett and Herbert 2008, p. 16) ... [resulting in] a political-economic account, attributing the intensification of urban social control measures to the ascendance of neoliberal global capitalism and the associated transformation of urban economies.’

Although the tactics of engagement may be different between community activists and direct-action activists, the role of surveillance and policing regimes clearly cross over all areas of activism. This in turn leads to the strong possibility of what I would term *the fear of resistance criminalisation*. These developments result in an operational, tactical and strategic enforcement regime, which surely must influence engagement in public life. Keeping these observations in mind, I shall now examine the

effects that such regimes may have within the individual's internal world and how this may affect forms of resistance.

The motivational factors in the Contours of an Activist (passions and gifts, associations, and violations) were previously found to have a strong relationship with the internal conversations of individuals. Therefore, in turning to think about the internal influence and impact of policing and surveillance, this would also seem a good place to begin. Archer (2003: 5) suggests that, within the internal conversation landscape:

'There are no constraints and enablements *per se*, that is as entities. These are the potential causal powers of structural emergent properties, such as distributions, roles, organisations, or institutions, and of cultural emergent properties, such as propositions, theories or doctrines. Yet, to constrain or enable are transitive verbs; they have to impede or to facilitate something ... For anything to exert the power of a constraint or an enablement, it has to stand in a relationship such that it obstructs or aids the achievement of some specific agential enterprise.'

Hence, in the same way that the data of this research showed the liberating influence, via internal conversations, of motivational factors, this quote is suggesting there can also be relational obstructive forces that influence an individual's thinking and choices. Fernandez (2008: 4) identifies the relational triplet of 'fear of violence, overzealous police action, and the unwillingness to allow peaceful protest' as playing such an influence. Cremin (2011: 34) elaborates upon this further, suggesting that such circumstances construct:

'regulatory technologies, reminiscent of those employed by governments to manage institutions, as a means for acquiring a normalised social character. It is through knowledge of ourselves, that we are able to adapt to social change and renounce those parts of the self that fall out of line with social norms. A technology of the self is the means by which we acquire knowledge of how to conduct ourselves.'

The idea that citizens face orchestrated impediments that seek to groom a 'technology of the self', which in turn jettisons actions that 'fall out of line with social norms' is very alarming, but helpful. The importance of the increase in external legalised deterrents to the challenges of turbo-capitalism being linked to internal relational dynamics of control and denial cannot be understated. As I shall show in more detail in the next section, these regulatory technologies stretch far beyond the fear of criminalisation. However, before discussing this, I believe it is worth considering the recent civil case brought against the 'No Dash for Gas'<sup>10</sup> (NDfG) campaigners by the French energy company EDF.<sup>11</sup> In

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<sup>10</sup> No Dash for Cash (NDfG) campaigners (n.21) occupied West Burton gas-fired power station, currently under construction by EDF, and shut it down for a week as a protest against this hugely retrograde step.

<sup>11</sup> EDF Energy is a subsidiary of the state-owned French nuclear power company Électricité de France. Having purchased British Energy in 2008, the company now owns all the currently functioning commercial nuclear

doing so, I shall explore how the vested interests of turbo-capitalism can defend itself via legal authorities, and reflect on how this relates to individual and group willingness to engage in change making in the future.

George Monbiot (28<sup>th</sup> February 2013) recently wrote in the *Guardian* newspaper:

‘Scarcely a human freedom has been obtained without the help of public protest. Scarcely an inch of social progress has been achieved without the same. Scarcely any effective movement in pursuit of this progress has remained within the bounds of the law. Avoiding unlawful actions, especially under the current draconian restrictions, which allow the police to shut down any protest they please, means committing yourself to failure.’

It would seem that if the critiques of the previous section are to be accepted (something I shall go on to challenge in Chapter Eight), and community activists desire to move beyond ‘pseudo micro-activities’, then the path of criminalisation must be considered.<sup>12</sup> Dave Cullen (2013) recently commented concerning the EDF/NDfG case:

‘You might say that’s just the risk they take for what they’re doing and that protest of this kind is the only option when traditional politics is failing so visibly. You might also think that if “No Dash For Gas” were doing something wrong they should be taken to a criminal court and put before a jury. But EDF, the police and prosecutors don’t want to take the risk that a jury of ordinary people in possession of the facts might acquit the protestors, as has happened before.<sup>13</sup> Instead, charges against “No Dash For Gas” which would have had to be heard by a jury were dropped so that the case was heard in a Magistrate’s Court. And EDF has adopted an altogether more insidious strategy. They are attempting to sue the activists for £5 million, betting that the risk of losing their homes will scare them off from protesting in the future, that the risk of paying EDF back a portion of their wages for years to come will scare people into not taking direct action.’

This case not only held the potential for the NDfG protesters to lose their freedom, houses and all other assets; in light of the external and internal dynamics of social control, discussed above,

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power reactors left in the UK, with the exception of one that is due to close in 2014. They also own three gas- and coal-fired power plants.

<sup>12</sup> <http://m.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2013/apr/04/where-are-the-activists-austerity>

<sup>13</sup> ‘Six Greenpeace climate change activists have been cleared of causing £30,000 of criminal damage at a coal-fired power station in a verdict that is expected to embarrass the government and lead to more direct action protests against energy companies. The jury of nine men and three women at Maidstone crown court cleared the six by a majority verdict. Five of the protesters had scaled a 200-metre chimney at Kingsnorth power station, Hoo, Kent, in October last year. The activists admitted trying to shut down the station by occupying the smokestack and painting the word “Gordon” down the chimney, but argued that they were legally justified because they were trying to prevent climate change causing greater damage to property around the world’ (*Guardian*, Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> September 2008).

regardless of its outcome this case holds much larger implications for the future and costs of activism. This approach would not only aim to bankrupt individuals but would also raise the stake in all subsequent actions that seek to mobilise change. Returning to the thoughts of Žižek (2009: 25) regarding the difficulty of finding public causes in which First World citizens would be ready to sacrifice their lives, instead of simply working for a long, satisfying life full of material and cultural wealth, here the Rubicon would surely be crossed (at least in an economic and social context). In the long term, this case may strengthen two diametrically opposing positions within the general psyche of activism, as discussed below.

In one sense, such a case strengthens the argument that Western citizens will need to make substantial sacrifices in order to usher in social change. Rather than preventing increased mobilisation, the actions of EDF, via internal conversations, may actually cause an outpouring of outrage, stretching beyond the already considerable manifestation of unity being shown through the support for the NDfG protesters. We may be at a tipping point, in which we would see revolution actually igniting.

However, before rushing to the barricades, the fact does seem to be that there is no sign of a social movement within this country with significantly enough concern or energy to push for this level of social change. I suggest that the impact of policing and surveillance offers a more nuanced reason as to why this may be the case for so much contemporary activism in the UK. It would seem that, bringing real and meaningful challenge and protestation, at the root of many of the causes of (community) activists, comes at a high price. So where does this leave us (community activists)? David Graeber (2013: 103) suggests:

‘We have come to a point where it is impossible to even imagine projecting ourselves forward in time in any meaningful way ... The Future has become a kind of hidden dimension of reality, an imminent present lying behind the mundane surface of the world, with a constant potential to break out but only in tiny, imperfect flashes ... The Future has become our Dreamtime.’

Regardless of the outcome of the EDF case, the impacts cases like this have had on personal freedom, identity and property all need reflecting on. The incompleteness and contradiction located within and without community activism regarding these reflections are in clear need of further understanding and exploration. In seeking to do so, and rather than positioning myself in an ivory tower of judgement, I shall, via the next section, turn these questions and this investigation upon my own being.

I want to explore further how such levels of incompleteness and contradiction can develop within a person’s life, by considering previous and current (work-based) learning experiences. I revisit the

past, alongside the present, restating my belief alongside Misztal (2003) that memory has the potential of constructing reality from the bottom up, enabling a way of remembering and forgetting that can be initiated from the local and the particular. In doing so, I seek to identify commonality between themes I have struggled with over the past two decades.

### **Tripping Down Memory Lane**

To lay myself bare, I think it is important to make some additional reference to my past, particularly in terms of political development and examples of (work-based) learning experiences.

As explained in Chapter One, I grew up in a working-class, single-parent household, which had seven children, and many of my earliest memories related to themes connected to access and opportunity. I also inferred that another central factor to my development was growing up in the environment of pubs and social clubs – recognising that this period offered continual opportunities to be part of groups and explore what I would now term ‘bar-room politics and community’. Specifically, I recognised that these rich oral contexts were almost completely barren of any formal education, written material or what may be termed middle-class signification. I concluded that these early environs resulted in a life lived amongst narratives played-out, in the cracks and holes of the structures of official society (Presdee 2000) and dwelling within the margins of historically determined and structurally unequal contexts. These and other circumstances developed my initial interest in issues concerning class, resource distribution, representation, (self) advocacy and cultural politics.

I spent my early working years in jobs that simply provided wage packets, whilst developing an identity within a matrix of working-class politics (of ‘the Left’), street protesting and campaigning, and exploration of illegal drug substances. I reached a crossroad when I started working alongside people with learning disabilities (mainly in residential and self-advocacy contexts). On reflection, this turned out to be one of the most significant shifts in my (working) identity. On leaving school I had considered work, at best, as a means to pay the rent and give me financial release to do the things ‘in the world beyond work’ (Rose 1999: 10); yet here I found myself embarking on work that would affect my entire lifeworld.

Ironically, starting to work alongside people with learning disabilities not only strengthened my critique and challenge of the dominant norms but also offered me a new subjectivity and identity within ‘the workplace’. I recognised, albeit in a fairly rudimentary way, that there were similarities within the challenges faced by (learning) disabled people and those that I had experienced in my

own life. In particular, access to housing, education, social acceptance and meaningful work opportunities were all issues that I could make a connection with.

The next key junction, in need of restating, is the time of my life in which I began to engage with the narrative of Jesus. This resulted in an extremely disruptive period, in which I ostracised myself from most of my previous habitus (Bourdieu 1990) and my old identity – i.e. working-class political protest and my subcultural identity. It was against this backdrop that I started to work alongside other individuals and groups who were marginalised within society (volunteering within a homelessness shelter and mental health drop-in centre). I had a true and real experience and belief that to follow the Palestinian Jew meant being willing to lay down my life and deal with all that that entailed.

This is important to note in terms of lifeworld, as I rapidly started to feel like I had been left between ‘a rock and a hard place’. My working contexts were bringing me closer to engaging in activities that could be termed vocational, whilst I very quickly started to question the ontological outer workings of my new-found faith (church attendance; personal redemption; ‘safe and clean’, middle-class orientated lifestyle), despite experiencing a clear worldview shift.

Although there were many characteristics within my previous lifeworld that I was happy to move away from, there were a variety of lifestyle practices that still seemed to make real sense – the desire to live a non-materialist and ‘greener’ lifestyle, a commitment to those most marginalised in society, and non-hierarchical relationships in work and community. Also, it seemed ironic to me that, in considering the various narratives about Jesus, many of these characteristics seemed really valued in scripture but not within organised church structure(s).

Looking back at this time I recognise that I was beginning to develop an internal conversation that Margaret Archer (2007) names ‘meta-reflexive’ – being critically reflexive about my own internal conversation and critical about effective action in society. I quickly reached a point in which I wanted to seek a deeper alignment between my way of being, work-based learning and understanding of faith. I did not want to go to church and listen to stories about the poor being fed, the marginalised being included, and the last being first and first being last. Nor did I simply want to work for the weekend – I desired a lifeworld that had greater alignment in its praxis with my new-found faith but also with the world in which I dwelt. I shall now apply closer scrutiny and interrogation to this desire, for signs of lack and hypocrisy.

All these points offer a way to understand my identity formulation through my early years as a community activist. More importantly, on reflection, the contours identified via this research offer a real *sense-making* to my identity development and praxis. In seeking to display these links even

further I shall now give an overview of two previous working environments, before turning to consider the impact of this particular research. I sense it is important to provide more context for my work-based learning because I believe it holds insights into some of the key areas of incompleteness and contradiction unearthed within the current research project and my life.

I recognise that exploring these experiences at this stage of writing may be taking an unorthodox twist, but I also note that this continual looping back upon experience is a core part of my ongoing ontology, praxis and sense-making. In addition, I recognise the potential re-making of history involved in such actions could simply be a tactic to strengthen the trajectory of the argument I'm pursuing at this point. Nonetheless, my aim by the end of this section will be to show the importance of identifying the links and connections between seemingly unconnected events and experiences.

In 1993 I started to live and work amongst (New Age) travellers. It was here that I really started to explore what I would term now the quest for an 'integrated lifeworld'. In my mind, this is something different from the more commonly used term 'work-life balance', seeking instead an existence that seeks to identify ways:

'of grappling with those real, immediate questions that emerge from a transformative project' (Graeber 2013: 9).

Within six months, I had established a community house, started an advice service to New Age travellers; and a mobile youth club on a single-decker bus. These activities resulted in the development of a relational/volunteer network, a grass-roots fundraising strategy and basic research and multi-agency working skills.

Paradoxically, these developments also meant that I needed to take on responsibilities and tasks of management and facilitation that I had always understood as the territory of 'the boss'. It became very evident that an ongoing 'critique from within' (McNiff and Whitehead 2009) was essential to any meaningful community activism. Consequently, in addition to the ongoing relationship-building running through the work, I sought to create collaborative decision-making spaces, including weekly community house meetings and a youth forum in the bus.

Much of my life was being driven by the raw energies of faith, injustice and violation, whilst all the activities emerged from a context of there being no meaningful structures or safeguards (Ward 1982). Within eighteen months there were seven people (including my then-wife and myself) living in the community house and about twenty people visiting the house on a weekly basis for food; the youth bus was visiting two estates once every two weeks; and I had established contact with most of the traveller sites within a twenty-mile radius.

The following year brought another twist when a friend, who was a traveller, decided to leave the country (because of the increasing pressure being put on travellers via the newly instated Criminal Justice Act). This resulted in me moving into her vehicle for a three-month period. Just before going 'on the road', I was approached by a student who was researching New Age travellers for his sociology doctorate. This request and my acceptance proved to be a pivotal, critical incident, as it gave me my first real insight into academic thinking, via social movement studies and ethnographic research.

The combination of 'living on the margins', exposure to key social movement and anarchic texts, and ongoing reflective dialogue and periods of deep reflective silence proved to be very interesting. By the end of 1994, my epistemological worldview was clearly deepening; although still routed in my spirituality, it was highly suspicious of dogma, structure and misuse of power, media representation and the cult of perfection. I had begun to fully embrace fallibility and the emerging challenges of post-modernity, and was left desiring deeper spaces of learning, creativity, innovation and also grace.<sup>14</sup> This example leads into the second work context that I would like to share.

I had been left with a strong desire to enter the world of academia and attempt to make further sense of my thoughts and the world that was opening before me. As previously reported, I had already spent time working alongside people with learning disabilities before starting to work with travellers. This had been within a residential house for three years and the national self-advocacy centre on a twenty-week placement. All this had taken place in the ongoing statutory context of 'care in the community'. This fast-growing movement brought the closure of large institutional establishments and the relocation of people with learning disabilities to 'normal' community, work and home settings. I had an immediate value connection with this emerging agenda, recognising the centrality of dignity, choice and individuality within its framework. I was particularly drawn to the self-advocacy movement for people with learning disabilities and the key campaign to see 'people first' (rather than their impairments). I began a BSc in Learning Disabilities whilst taking the role of self-advocacy coordinator in town. This work consisted of two main components – a self-advocacy discussion group and an employment/education signposting service.

My new job role was to develop a network that would enable people to voice their concerns, develop their choices and explore their individuality. The idea had grown from a larger citizens' advocacy service situated within the town, and I was the first appointed coordinator. Having had exposure to the issues developed within the national centre, I felt like I was being given the chance

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<sup>14</sup> The knowledge that strength is made 'perfect' in weakness.

to develop a similar facility at a local level. Alongside this, I had already begun to focus most of my university study upon the wider disability movement within the UK. At the heart of this movement was the reframing of disability within a social rather than a medical model. Here, disability was a social construction that had been erected through de-humanising language and social barriers (segregated housing, education and work opportunities), not a set of medical conditions that deemed an individual as abnormal or unfit.

Once again, I found myself working alongside people who had been denied or restricted in their ability to construct their own lifestyles. The challenge was to open social and cultural spaces and opportunities in which individuals could take control and live independently – a politics of identity.

However, I was also becoming more aware that my identity was developing a ‘shadow-side’ whilst developing new frameworks of interpretation and insightful experiences within these political terrains. I would name this shadow-side either professionalisation or identity employability. Cremin (2011: 33) writes:

‘The subject is in a state of permanent mental insecurity ... [needing to] operate according to the logic of employability, gaining experiences illustrative of certain values, the cultivation and conscious projection of a kind of a personality and so on, to gain competitive advantage over workers in the labour market. Employability is the object of enterprise, a calling of a kind.’

In other words, I was developing vested interests, which were, and are, beyond trying to make sense of the world or engaging in activities that seek to make the world a more just place. These interests were clearly connected to ‘private life’ commitments and responsibilities (marriage, kids, house ownership, etc.) and also marked a clear departure from my previous social positions into what I would call post-working class but what many others would (probably more accurately) term middle-class aspirations. My own identity had truly entered the ‘virtuous circle’ discussed earlier, in which turbo-capitalism absorbs, transforms and then rebrands critique [and community activism], turning it in a commodity.

Remembering this period of learning and development through my subsequent life/work encounters is a challenge. On the one hand, I had become increasingly critical of processes that seek to ‘govern the soul’ (Rose 1999) but, on the other hand, I had engaged in a career path that sought to ‘normalise’ people, and myself, within a Western lifestyle.

Again, I recognised a commonality of experience between myself and those that I worked with – but the situation had become far more complex. I felt like we were all in a position of being given a choice but only within financial, legal and culturally accepted frameworks. In terms of work, care in the community also had to equally care for the fiscal policy of central and local government. People

with learning disabilities were being supported by multi-agency teams to live a life within Western consumerism. Clearly this was all being done against the backdrop of the 'dark ages of institutions', which no one wanted to see return.

Nonetheless, I was continually wrestling with the knowledge that the alternative lifestyle promoted didn't seem to allow a meta-critique of the wider system; even within the disability movement the push was for a Disability Rights Act – access to housing, education, leisure, work and consumption. At the same time, I felt like I was losing the sight and meaning of many of my own motivational factors to the onslaught of personal consumption patterns and commitments.

Adding further complexity to the situation, I had begun studying the impact of diversity and difference within social movements and how this can create issues of inclusion/exclusion within decision making etc. (Melucci 1998; Diani 2004). The disability movement was no exception to these issues. There were clear challenges brought to disabled people by the distinct needs of each individual/group. For some the issue was access to buildings, others access to information, others access to communication. Incongruously, this created potential places of privilege within the movement for those least (intellectually) excluded from processes of protest and engagement.

It could be argued that this was an echo of my own life and the wider population, who find they are negotiating spaces of identity formation within the hegemony of turbo-capitalism. Thus, it would seem the attempt to bring change in power and status, and the subsequent reconfiguration of self, will always have to negotiate the social hydraulics of the wider system. In this sense, Billett and Smith (2010: 22) suggest:

'Identity as a personal concept is aligned with how individuals present themselves to the social world and with which social practices they might aim to be associated. As a product of subjectivity and manifested through a sense of self, personal identity will direct intentional activities.'

Personally, I again found my subjectivity, epistemology, ontology and praxis all being challenged within a textured, changing and contradictory landscape. In part, I saw much of my work as enabling people who had previously been denied the opportunity to engage in 'life-making' decisions.

However, I also recognised that this could be seen as offering people a better hand in a game that would always place some people in the margins – a world in which wealth, beauty, intelligence and success separates the powerful from the powerless.

I helped support individuals to have their say in decisions of work, home, leisure and relationships. The self-advocacy group explored issues that arose in people's lives within mainly group living. This resulted in strategies people could use to try and gain more opportunities to have their voices heard and representation made within the decision-making processes of their homes. The employment

and education signposting service developed into a placement matching service between local employers and people with learning disabilities. In some cases, this resulted in full-time employment (the Holy Grail), whilst for most it was part-time relief while working in these environments away from the local day services. However, I was also encountering a series of interrelated dilemmas and questions regarding my work within the human service industry.

Within both of these examples I see that the contours of a community activist, developed within this current research, would have been helpful in gaining understanding of my work-based praxis. For example, these experiences are marked by personal motivations (passions and gifts, associations and violations), and translation, interpretation and brokerage in and between groups, movements and ideas. I also recognise the processes of identity formulation and internal conversations running through all aspects of these experiences, whilst also acknowledging a strong relationship with and influence from the wider political, policing, surveillance and legislative contexts.

However, more importantly, I believe that these previous experiences echo and reflect deeper and more challenging commonalities of incompleteness and contradiction. Placed within the wider context of perpetuating turbo-capitalism, it is true that much of my work-based experience could be framed as playing the role of a wolf in sheep's clothing – hiding behind the guise of identity politics whilst grooming people into Western lifestyles and personally prospering. Obviously, for countless reasons, this is not an easy perspective to accept but it clearly must be considered. In my defence, this does not fully explain my subjective experience at the time. Despite the sense of compromise, I also sensed a level of importance and impact (i.e. in terms of enabling my voice and others' voices to be heard) within my work, life and activism – something I shall try and make sense of in Chapter Eight.

I now move to consider and interrogate further my personal ability to be a change agent whilst being embedded within a socio-political context. In doing so, I look to establish an overview of the current political context(s), paying particular attention to the austerity cuts and the Big Society agenda.

### **We Are Family – Big Society and Big Brother**

It is a well-documented fact that the last election, ushering in the current coalition government, took place within a context of recession, the like of which has not been seen for sixty years. All the major parties had stood on an election platform that was over-shadowed by this reality, each stating their intention to fixing the deficit mess, but with non-substantial policies that were vague about as to how this would be achieved.

Hence, the formation of a coalition between the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats was met with some surprise and unknowing. Nonetheless, within a relatively short period of time it was clear that the emerging framework and requirement to ‘fix things’ would call upon the private sector to become the engine room of job creation, whilst instigating cuts to public spending and huge reconfigurations of the welfare system. The Labour now-shadow government warned of too much speed and not enough haste, suggesting the strategy would trigger a deeper recession (due mainly to withdrawal of infrastructure programmes and the inability of the private sector to create jobs) and fragmentation of public services (resulting in further marginalisation and rises in poverty levels). From the midst of these developments, David Cameron launched the ‘new’ idea of the ‘Big Society’:

‘The Big Society was the flagship policy idea of the 2010 UK Conservative Party general election manifesto. It now forms part of the legislative programme of the Conservative – Liberal Democrat Coalition Agreement. The stated aim is to create a climate that empowers local people and communities, building a “big society” that will take power away from politicians and give it to people’ (Wikipedia 2013).

However, despite the claims of this idea being new and innovative, ushering in a different relationship between government and citizens, as Lambie-Mumford (2013: 78) states:

‘Presented by the government as novel, it has been observed that this is not necessarily the reality; it can also be cast as a further pursuit of policies instigated by New Labour (Kisby, 2010; Smith, 2010). Whilst thirteen years of successive Labour governments saw a “considerable expansion in the size and functions of the state” (Smith, 2010: 820), it also brought moves towards increasing diversification in terms of welfare service delivery and an emphasis on user “choice” (Smith, 2010: 829).’

She goes on (ibid.):

‘The role of the voluntary sector – as in the Big Society rhetoric – also became of increasing importance during these years. An emphasis on individual responsibility, the importance of voluntarism and promoting the role of voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations within the welfare system were all features of the New Labour policy programme (see Kisby, 2010 among others).’

I do not point this out to in any way whatsoever show any alignment with any of the mainstream parties (heaven forbid!!); rather, I think it important to show the similarities between the UK governing elites. In a sense, each mainstream party could be viewed as a different management team, with extremely similar business plans presented in different fonts and colours.

Nonetheless, Lambie-Mumford (2013: 78) does suggest that the distinction between the parties can be found in the coalition government’s programme of spending cuts and welfare restructuring:

‘The wider economic situation plays an important role in framing this distinction (seen either as prescribing particular policy approaches or as a way of legitimising them). Beyond the Big Society idea, the coalition government’s social policy agenda is arguably dominated by the pursuit of

widespread spending cuts and welfare restructuring. The government spending cuts planned are significant not only in relation to the amount but also the timescales in which they are to be implemented: the government plans to cut public spending by £110.3 billion by 2014–15 (Taylor-Gooby and Stoker 2011: 5). As well as cutting the budgets of government departments, savings are being pursued through changes to welfare benefits. Those affected include housing benefits, child benefits, tax credits, disability living allowance and council tax benefit; a cap on benefit-levels according to family size has also been introduced.'

As I have already acknowledged, the opposition have called for more haste, and these calls are seen within the government as naive and political opportunism from those who do not have to make the hard decisions. Nonetheless, I would argue that the major parties are still talking about a similar strategic response to the current austere landscape (albeit with differing emphasis on timing and areas of cuts). Taylor-Gooby and Stoker (2011: 9) identify three interrelated issues arising from these commonalities:

'An emphasis on local decision making and budgeting; a shift in responsibility for outcomes from state to citizens; and the consistent promotion of the expansion of private and, in some areas of third sector provision.'

Regardless of the origins and originality of the Big Society agenda, coupled with these three elements, it is extremely important in thinking about some of the links between my previous work-based experiences, community activism and ability to be a change agent whilst embedded and entrapped within the current turbo-capitalist arena.

Again, placing to one side my internal Left-leaning political compass, I have to acknowledge the strong value connection and creation between and of my previous work-based experiences, the data of this research, and this emerging policy framework. The rhetoric of devolution away from centralised politics to local decision making, from state to citizens, and the increased involvement and (potential) voice of the voluntary sector can't be easily overlooked. These themes have undoubtedly played a prominent role in my life, running through most of my experiences of work (and childhood) life, and the connected stages of personal identity formulation.

As shown, I think it fair to say that I have been on a search for authentic praxis, engagement and ontology, seeking to unlock the patterns embedded within the construction of social and cultural positioning that shape all our lives. However, as I have also shown, during this search I have met various areas of incompleteness and contradiction within my own personal lifestyle and work contexts, and within political policy frameworks and wider societal norms. All these are being offered here as potential samples of issues that face the wider community activist network within the UK. What I now seek to demonstrate is that the current political topography echoes and coordinates these themes and (work-based) dilemmas.

I find myself facing a series of situations in which my personal principles, issues and practices are resonating with some of the (current) political rhetoric, just as I experienced whilst working with people with learning disabilities within the Community Care Act and subsequent Disability Discrimination Act 1995, dealing with the issues of independent living, rights and (self) advocacy. But I also recognised the potential activist fantasy being constructed, which was shielded behind this progressive rhetoric of decentralisation.

As with my previous experience, the component lacking within this agenda is the critique of the totality. Whilst much of the Big Society agenda resonates with an agenda of valuing and empowering citizens, this is all taking place within an ideological context in which all areas of life are ultimately valued and ordered within a framework of turbo-capitalist reductionism. In such contexts, Graeber (2012: 100) suggests:

‘Capitalism, which is reduced increasingly to simply realizing the value created by such communistic practices, is thereby reduced to a purely parasitical force, a kind of feudal overlord extracting rent from forms of creativity intrinsically alien to it.’

This ‘feudal overlord’ function assists in the acquisition of lifeworlds and citizen empowerment (i.e. the Big Society), whilst the repeated referencing to the economic inevitability of the cuts is used to silence any attempts of dissent to the shrinking of state provision or more radical alternative futures. In such contexts, those engaged within what could be termed projects of emancipation<sup>15</sup> are either co-opted or marginalised.

Let there be no illusion – the context that I’m attempting to explain is extremely complex. The paradoxical government agenda that purports to support devolution of power, equality, freedom of speech etc. alongside fiscal policies that secure the vested interests of banking systems and private investments, via the taxpayer’s resources, is not easily understood. It is for this reason that I thought it necessary to call upon past working experiences alongside my current research and working environment(s). The levels of incompleteness and contradiction present within these experiences are simultaneously obvious and opaque. I find myself being (re)visited by the ghosts of the past, present and future, facing tensions of rhetoric and reality. Thomas Barfuss (2011: 846) suggests that:

‘People certainly are encouraged to be agile and clever and to break up Fordist conformity for their own individual benefit ... [while] neo-liberalism is ... able to offer new spaces for such a development. But the individuals trying to take advantage of this eventually get caught in their individualism, which did not allow them to develop their faculty to act any further.’

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<sup>15</sup> Projects of emancipation – exploring the ability for individuals and groups to determine their own social, economic and political futures without the mediation of representational structures or ciphers.

These thoughts provide a line of analysis that captures some of my memories of working with disabled people, my increasing personal development, and my current community activism. Although I experienced the opportunity to be 'agile and clever' in my own life, and in the lives of those I was working alongside, in and at the same time I also experienced (and participated in) forces that normalised these activities within the consumerist patterns embedded within a turbo-capitalist society. As shown in the beginning of this document, Barfuss (2011: 847) goes on to suggest that:

'It makes sense to speak of neo-liberal policy as a passive revolution. The new subject is agile and clever, but this agility is confined to personal life and private profits, thus severing the experience of how to bring ... the struggle for a better [collective] life.'

I find this conception of passive revolution<sup>16</sup> helpful and insightful at this point, as it suggests a series of processes that domesticate individual development and struggle within history-making acts, which seem to be progressive but which ultimately serve the dominant turbo-capitalist agenda. Here we can witness revolution in reverse – grass-roots mobilisation(s) being commodified within a top-down counter-reformation – a counter-reformation that simultaneously appreciates and shows partial support to the emancipation of its citizens, whilst strengthening a:

'culture in which the supreme goal is to have ... and to have more and more ... and in which one can speak of someone as "being worth a million dollars", [therefore] how can there be an alternative between having and being? On the contrary, it would seem that the very essence of being is having; that if one has nothing, one is nothing' (Fromm 1976: 3).

Hence, this raises an acute awareness of being part of societal patterns that perpetuate this consumer culture. Not only do I recognise that I, and others, face the dilemmas set out above, but I'm also entrapped in terms of lifestyle choices (i.e. mortgage repayments, single-parent responsibilities and so on). Thus, attempting to negotiate the complexity of passive revolutions, whilst engaging in community activism, draws attention to the hindrances caused by the embroilment of living in a consumption lifestyle.

In conclusion of this chapter, and as a transition to the next, I return now to the Lacanian framework.

I have not until this point really elaborated upon the role of *hysteria* within this model. This withholding has been very purposeful as I consider that its application is potentially the most personally terrifying and illuminating aspect of Lacan. As shown in the diagram, I regard hysteria as holding two interrelated dynamics – the fragmentation of self and a desire to return to the womb. It

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<sup>16</sup> The term passive revolution was previously used by Antonio Gramsci in his *Prison Notebooks*.

is the former of these dynamics with which I shall be engaging within the following findings of this chapter.

What is more, I address hysteria from a subjective space (thinking it appropriate to apply it to no one other than myself) and use it as a *tool of judgement*. In doing so, I'm also minding the caution of Latour (2005: 63), aimed at critical sociologists, to:

'begin mapping the many contradictory ways in which social aggregates are constantly evoked, erased, distributed and reallocated. For scientific, political and even moral reasons, it is crucial that enquirers do not in advance, and in place of actors define what sorts of building blocks the social world is made of.'

Having celebrated the actions of community activists in the previous chapter, in this one I have attempted to identify the areas of incompleteness and contradiction that need most consideration. I have sought to log a path that displays the contemporary lack within my own life as a community activist. In doing so, I have clearly sought to face the fragmentation of self that is ever-present in my life – I have come face to face with hysteria.

The *fantasy shield* of community activism, standing against the evils of the world, has truly been tested on numerous accounts. Firstly, the work of Žižek and friends has had a somewhat apocalyptic impact upon the participants' (including my own) actions in the face of turbo-capitalism forces. The complex, contradictory and compromising environments of work-based learning considered here reveal deep fault lines of meaningful social change. Secondly, observation has shown that all of these events take place within the context of the external and internal surveillance and policing gaze – protecting the vested interests of 'the powers' (Wink 1984). Thirdly, questions have been raised as to the employment of the *symbolic universe* to conjure a sense of empowerment, devolution, grass-roots democracy and alternative moral communities. Again, my personal journey has been used here to plot the incompleteness and contradiction acquired whilst taking such a route.

In culmination, community activism (at least in my own life) has been placed under my scrutiny via Lacanian *lack*, *fantasy* and *symbolic fetishisation*, leaving in its wake the fragmented body of the *hysterical self*. Complete agreement with these arguments seems to have no other logical consequence than inducing either a burn-out or sell-out – a fragmentation of the self. In using these critiques I have sought to displace not only many of the findings of the previous chapters but also the legitimacy of my own work-based learning. I have been 'sitting in the fire' (Mindell 1995), alongside all that I hold dear to me. This has been an extremely helpful part of this journey, but has also brought with it much pain, doubt and questioning.

Before turning to the next chapter and attempting to identify whether there is life to be found in the ashes of this assault, I would like to make two concluding reflections:

- Despite the discomfort of this part of the journey, it has been a route that I would not have chosen to avoid. Previous parts of this study have drawn attention to social movements, anarchic formulations and subjectivity within work-based learning. In a sense, all of these themes have connectivity through the demand of self-management. This chapter has identified some of the major shaping influences, through which anyone wanting to engage in community activism may need to navigate and self-manage. Without coming face to face with these challenges we would all be *fighting in the dark*, or open to being continually outflanked and ambushed.
- Regardless of the intensity of this chapter, it has not entirely felt like unknown territory. My meaning here is that I believe, and have attempted to show, that the wrestling with ‘the powers’ explored here is something I have been doing all my life. What is more, when discussing these powers and the related incompleteness and contradiction within the workshops, participants also resonated with these struggles. This is part and parcel of what it means to be engaged in community activism – if there are no areas of compromise, no areas that motivate people to bring change, build associations and fight violations, there can be no community activists.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT – CAN LOCAL VOICES BE HEARD IN A GLOBAL AGE?**

*'If we can extricate ourselves from the shackles of fashion, the need to constantly say that whatever is happening now is necessarily unique and unprecedented (and thus, in a sense, unchanging, since everything must always be new in this way) we might be able to grasp history as a field of permanent possibility, in which there is no particular reason we can't at least try to begin building a redemptive future at any time.'*

*Graeber (2013: 105)*

Having established the triangulation of listening and connecting (Chapter Five), mapping and celebrating (Chapter Six), and critiquing and challenging (Chapter Seven), the data of this research, this final chapter, reconfigures and reclaims the lifeworlds of community activists.

Before embarking on this part of the journey, it is necessary to make a series of introductory comments. Firstly, in reaching this final stage of the research, I must acknowledge the growing sense of appreciation I have towards my understanding of *weakness*. As I have shown in the descriptions of the origin and focus of this research (Chapter One), I initiated this study from an epistemology, ontology and praxis that are rooted in my *tiny corner of the world*. Nonetheless, this investigation has paradoxically strengthened my awareness of respect I have in the *weak things of this world*. In fact, if I had to highlight any one thing (which would be almost impossible) I have gained most understanding of from this deep exploration into my work practices, rationales, communities and approaches, it would be to the role of *weakness* as it provides:

'a conception of the human being defined by an experience of enactment that exceeds the limits of potency and strength and in which authenticity is rooted in an affirmation of weakness and impotence' (Critchley 2012: 14).

In other words, this has not been, and was never intended to be, a study of the strong things of this life – of the dominant, wealthy or victors of social struggle(s). The seats of power of the dominant paradigm of turbo-capitalism are not to be found within the spaces that have been explored, although their influence is a constant presence. No, what this study has enabled me to clarify is that there is a conception of humanity beyond the limits of potency and strength, which is rooted not only in all the lifeworlds of this research but also in all my previous life experiences that I have considered in this entire document.

Although I am still not entirely comfortable with the use of the word authenticity, this research has made me entirely at home with an understanding of *weakness*. This is not to suggest that the narratives of this research should be viewed as the accounts of captives or victims. The *weakness*

uncovered through this study is dynamic, creative and imaginative. It is true that the lifeworlds explored here are not located in associations, connections or support rooted in economic or influential networks. However, the experiences of passions and gifts, translations, interpretations and brokerage, small world networks, mutuality, etc. provide unique insights and energies that may seem weak in the face of turbo-capitalism but which, as I shall seek to show, should not be underestimated. Hence, this research has undoubtedly unearthed resistance and subversion, albeit in small and beautiful ways, which are seeking to build alternative moral economies.

Weakness holds the potential of reconfiguring, in my view, the very understanding of success and social impact. If viewed through the totems of turbo-capitalism, community activists and the narratives they create can be easily overlooked, undermined and misunderstood. However, it is my contention that these small seeds hold the potential for unique work-based learning and significant social change.

This leads to the second point of reference and co-ordinance. The stories of this research create unorthodox vantage points that expose the vested interests of mainstream society. This comes from their social positioning, which enables them to offer up fresh and heretical readings of society and its various components. These heresies not only challenge the dominant, orthodox reading of history and culture but also have the audacity to suggest fragile, incomplete and contradictory alternatives. The subtle and frail nature held in these narratives produces inbuilt collective struggles with dominant patterns and lifestyles of turbo-capitalism. Again, Holloway (2010: 257) writes:

‘There is no single correct answer, but this does not mean that all these struggles are atomised. There is resonance between them, a mutual recognition as being part of a moving against-and-beyond, a constant sharing of ideas and information ... the constant weaving of a We, the shaping of a common flow of doing and rebellion. This resonance does not mean that we all agree: on the contrary, disagreement and discussion are crucial in the formation of the resonating We.’

It would be unwise and also untrue to suggest that the participants of this study should be seen as utopian. Nonetheless, it would also be as suspect to suggest that they are settled within the current order, or at peace with the status quo. On the contrary, the participants of this work are without doubt ‘nomads of the present’ (Melucci 1989), having left, in part, the land of their mothers and fathers, not knowing where they are heading but searching for a land they have not yet seen. In other words, these stories are attempting to take back and rethink lives at the multi-layered points of epistemology, ontology and praxis.

‘This is not a question of local versus global or micro versus macro, it is rather a question of understanding that the strength of the social flow ... depends finally on our ability to reappropriate. The big events are important but they cannot take the place of the constant search for ways of doing against and beyond [capitalism]’ (Holloway 2010: 259).

This chapter represents me putting my cards on the table – not in some dogmatic, fixed manifesto but rather, as I stated in Chapter One, to explain my very understanding of reality. In attempting to identify paths of reconfiguration and reclamation, it becomes necessary for me to share my subjective internal conversations regarding what I would term the ‘spiritual dynamics’ of community activism. To do this I need to articulate the least externalised elements of my own being – for words to become made flesh, the external manifestation of the internal being.

Thus, the culmination of weakness, nomadic, subversive narrative(s), and spiritual dynamics within the lifeworlds of community activists are the keys to framing this final chapter. Although such a blend of ingredients will not provide a straightforward reading and conclusion, this in and of itself is the very point this research is making. There is no Real Politick, just fantasies, symbolic representations, hysterias, and lack, which ultimately, I suggest, open possibilities of rethinking what it means to love one another.

Section One – **Looking Through the Eyes of Abeyance** – considers how community actors can continue in non-receptive political climates to remain active and survive. Particular attention is given to Verta Taylor’s (1989) research of the development of feminism, between the Suffragettes and the 1960-70 women’s liberation movement. The suggestion being made here is that the participants of this research are best (re)conceived as narratives of abeyance, rather than the vanguard of a revolution. In part, this is a response to the last chapter, and an explanation as to why I cannot fully agree with Žižek and friends’ call to disengagement.

Section Two – **Don’t Believe the Hype** – then moves on to explore the lack of consistency and totality within the dominant narrative of turbo-capitalism. Working closely with the work of Michel de Certeau (1984) and Margaret Archer (1996, 2007), questions are raised about the internal cohesion and coherence of (dominant) cultural narratives. This, in turn, leads to further reconfiguration of the findings of this research and the lifeworlds of community activists.

Section Three – **In Search of Living Parables** – seeks to rethink the day-to-day impact and engagement of community activists. This task is assisted by a historical anarchic analysis of the teachings of Jesus and the early church.

### **Looking Through the Eyes of Abeyance**

Verta Taylor wrote her seminal paper *Social Movement Continuity: The Women’s Movement in Abeyance* in 1989. Her theory of abeyance sets out a context in which social movements, alternative narratives and (community) activists establish ways to continue their engagement(s) in non-amenable political climates, depicting how to survive the lean years of political struggle. She writes:

‘The term abeyance depicts a holding process by which movements sustain themselves in non-receptive political environments and provide continuity from one stage of mobilization to another’ (Taylor 1989: 761).

Rather than concentrating on the moments in which specific demands of social, political and cultural change break through into the visible social fabric of society, Taylor investigates the hidden stories between such eruptions. She suggests that these periods of abeyance provide organisational and ideological bridges between different upsurges of activism by the challenging groups:

‘If insufficient opportunities exist to channel their [activists’] commitment in routine [social movements] statuses, then alternative structures emerge to absorb the surplus people. These structures both restrain them from potentially more disruptive activities and channel them in certain forms of activism. In short, a movement in abeyance becomes a cadre of activists who create or find a niche for themselves. Such groups may have little impact in their own time and may contribute to the status quo. But, by providing a legitimating base to challenge the status quo, such groups can be sources of [future] protest and change’ (Taylor 1989: 762).

In light of the critique and deconstruction of community activists in Chapter Seven, this work offers a contrasted and more hopeful reading of the lifeworlds under consideration, albeit within contained and restricted settings. Although acknowledging the potential lack of impact and contribution to the existing status quo, it is, for the purposes of this research, important to not overlook that Taylor offers enclaves of personal political continuation for activists, and potential contribution in providing sources of protest and change in future upsurges of activism.

This framework of interpretation is very appealing, as it brings together the incompleteness and contradiction of community activists, whilst also giving opportunities that may not reach celebration but do, in part, legitimatise their current lifeworlds. Admittedly, gone is any clear or immediate sign of radical, and some may say romantic, life changes at a more systemic level, but present still is the wrestling with the powers that be – and even contribution to change in the future.

Hence, this may not offer the material for a radical manifesto of change, but it does seem to be a more honest reflection of the current state of community activism being studied here. The contours celebrated in Chapter Six require a reconfiguration and reclamation and, in a sense, become contours of survival and resistance, rather than revolutionary breakthrough. These are spaces and attributes of people trying to withhold total colonisation by the dominant ideologies of turbo-capitalism.

Here we find pockets of pain and pressure alongside the incubation of insurrection and faith. In a sense, the contours of an activist become a kind of survival kit, with the concept of abeyance re-drawing the ‘frontline’ and cultural change away from the iconic revolutionary barricades, to the more complex nature of day-to-day decisions and choices. John Holloway (2010: 257) writes:

‘We are all involved in the re-creation of the social relations we are trying to overcome. It cannot be otherwise in a capitalist society. The movement of doing is not a pure movement, but a moving in-against-and-beyond ... There is no purity here: we try to overcome the contradictions, we rebel against our own complicity, we try in every way to stop making capitalism, we try to direct the flow of our lives as effectively as possible towards the creation of a society based on dignity.’

This approach and understanding would seem to highlight the importance of Archer’s (2007) internal conversation discussed previously. Mulling over, reflections and deliberations move from being introspective, self-indulgent activities to being crucial components of continued engagement as well as future change. The brilliance of the analysis offered by Holloway, in which he describes how activists must rebel against their own complicity to stop making capitalism, offers a real breakthrough in this argument. The challenges faced by all those who would want to see social disruption and movement require endurance, patience and long-suffering through the period of abeyance:

‘assuming our own responsibilities, reappropriating our own lives, pushing aside the capital that is the constant expropriation not just our products but of our doing and thinking and deciding and living’ (Holloway 2010: 258–9).

Furthermore, it also requires an ongoing analysis of the wider context for signs of potential opportunity for greater disturbance, whilst tarrying in patient hope and even embracing the terror of incompleteness and contradiction in the present. Thus, we find a much more measured type of activism – one, as we have seen, that can be easily mistaken as sell-out and compliance, rather than picking the right battles and openings. It is, nonetheless, an activism that still has its eye on things that are not yet seen – a faith in seemingly insignificant acts of kindness, subversion and love.

‘Our responses to this tension are always contradictory ... Fight from the particular, fight from where we are, here and now. Create spaces and moments of otherness, spaces and moments that walk in the opposite direction, that do not fit in. Make holes in our own reiterative creating of capitalism. Create cracks and let them expand, let them multiply, let them resonate, let them flow together’ (Holloway 2010: 260–1).

The work of Taylor and Holloway combined offers a far more nuanced series of translations, which assist and signpost community activism in its personal and collective lack; but it also provides perspectives that counter the idea of all community activism located in Western nations being made up of ‘pseudo-activities’. Žižek and Badiou’s call to do nothing are challenged by the admitted *weakness* of seemingly insignificant ontology and praxis. Once again, the honest, patient and pragmatic approaches being explored at this point not only provide refuge but also harbour hope in the fragile things of this world. In other words, the argument being made here is for what could be understood as a coalition of the Other – dispersed narratives that are wrestling in the current world to bring about realities that are not yet seen.

Such tactics, I believe, open up possibilities of new futures of community activism and social change. These theories create feedback loops, through the exposed powerlessness identified in the lifeworlds of community activists, in the potential propagation of spaces of abeyance, in which activists can re-group, reflect, re-articulate and reform – all of which may then lead not only to further challenge the inevitability of Neoliberalism but also to the development of alternative moral economies, which may in time lead to significant upsurges of activism.

These subterranean movements only find their believability within the framework of *weakness*. However, as I shall show in the final section, such readings and perspectives should not be mistaken for fragmentation of identity but more as explorations of death, new beginnings and marginal stories or – within my heretical Lacanian framework – an exploration of hysterical parables (see final section). Here we can witness the subjectivity of individuals being:

‘produced by power and acted on by power. And usually the subject exercises power, sometimes to resist the very power that is shaping it, but always from within the socio-psychic forces and resources that constitute it’ (Fenwick 2006: 21 in Billett et.al. 2006).

These, often hidden, motions of subjectivity are crucial in understanding the genuine struggle taking place within community activists’ lives. Once again, Fenwick (2006: 21) states:

‘Agency ... is articulated in the subject’s recognition of both the processes of its own constitution, and of the resources within these processes through which alternate readings and constitutions are active, agency finds openings for resistance and subversion of these discourses.’

However, I want to first push back further against the non-engagement arguments of the first section of Chapter Seven (Unleash the Hounds – The Slovenian Hamlet and Friends!!). I predicate this with an appreciation of what has been brought to this research by these thinkers. I acknowledge the acute possibility that those who call for a more radical revolutionary overhaul of the system may still be correct, despite my inability to reach agreement with their arguments.

### **Don’t Believe the Hype**

In a sense, the challenge that follows is not directly aimed at the work of Žižek et al. In fact, my attention and focus is more on the narrative and impact of turbo-capitalism and counter-narrative responses. It is my argument that one of the key desires held within capitalism is that its internal consistency and coherence are sometimes believe in a blind faith. Presenting systemic unity thus creates a culture of inevitability regarding its logic, which then causes an inability to imagine life beyond its borders. Here, it would seem that Žižek and I are in agreement:

‘Neoliberal hegemony is clearly falling apart ... Today’s neoliberalism, on the contrary, “only imagines that it believes in itself and demands that the world should imagine the same thing” (to quote Marx)’ (Žižek 2012).

The point of departure is not this imagined sense of cohesion but rather the tactical response level. Rather than agreeing on a call for disengagement, Messianic leadership and second-wave socialism, I advocate a faith in the weak things on this earth. I shall return to this again but first I think there is a need for a closer interrogation of completeness.

Michel de Certeau (1984: 179–80) writes:

‘The powers in our developed societies have at their disposal rather than subtle and closely-knit procedures for the control of all social networks ... [are] administrative and ‘panoptic’ systems of the police, the schools, health services, security, etc. But they are slowly losing all credibility. They have more power and less authority...[Thus] [b]elieving is being exhausted. Or at least it takes refuge in the areas of the media and leisure activities. It goes on vacation; but even then it does not cease to be an object captured and processed by advertising, commerce, and fashion. In order to bring back some of these beliefs that are retreating and disappearing.’

The picture being painted here seems to be far removed from one of capitalist totality, fixed in its victory and superiority over all other alternatives. Rather this depiction is of a system that is continually seeking to (re)establish its authority via the redeployment of its powers. The crucial point is that, all the time, in seeking to position itself for administration over people, its credibility is seen to be retreating and disappearing. In other words, there are aspects of capitalism that continually need to (re)write their presence in the lives of us all.

The importance of such movement is that, firstly, it uncovers the partial, although still impressive, ability of turbo-capitalism to rule lives. Secondly, it gives hope to the spaces within social networks that can be occupied by alternative epistemologies, ontologies and praxes not fully governed by turbo-capitalism. Simply put, these insights encourage the suggestion that there are holes and cracks to be found within the matrix of capitalism, in which unconventional identities can emerge, for example, the previously explored spaces set out above by Manuel Castells (2009: 356–7) – resistance and project identities. Both of these cases need there to be what I would term ‘decolonised space’, from which to create, reflect and cultivate alternate stories. Further still, the fact that they have already been identified and placed within models must indicate that the social phenomena they represent exist, in part at least, and have established a level of autonomy from the dominant narrative.

I do not, however, want to give the impression of underestimating the power and control of the principal narrative within the lifeworlds of all of us. The attempted all-pervasiveness of the current order must always be respected and understood, as shown in the following observation:

‘Captured by the radio (the voice is the law) as soon as he awakens, the listener walks all day long through the forest of narrativities from journalism, advertising, and television, narrativities that still find time, as he is getting ready to bed, to slip in a few final messages under the portals of sleep. Even more than the God told about by theologians of earlier days, these stories have the providential and predestining function; they organize in advance our work, our celebrations, and even our dreams’ (de Certeau 1984: 186).

Full escape from such influence is all but impossible for the Western citizen. Nonetheless, my argument is that, although these powers are undoubtedly reproducing and transforming, they also stimulate a sense of reality that is not entirely true, beyond the fabrication of appearance. More importantly, due to the work-based practice of community activists identified within this research, these constructed appearances are being read, reinterpreted and rethought, via the stories of land, art, grass-roots journalism, cycled-powered cinemas and so on.

The point is that Neoliberalism has multiple inconsistencies, and is increasingly displaying huge contradictions within its very own discourse. At the same time, it needs to be acknowledged that we are all Neoliberalism, or at least carriers of its narrative. History surely tells us that, even within the most extreme circumstances, people find decolonised spaces – be they within personal relationships, households, organisations, prisons or nation states. For example, writing of Viktor Frankl’s account of his Holocaust ordeal, Trystan Owain Hughes (2010: 75) notes:

‘Viktor Frankl surprisingly claims to have experienced the “beauty of art” as never before ... He recalls with fondness, for example, the cabaret that the prisoners would occasionally improvise. Temporarily, a hut would be cleared and wooden benches pushed together to form a makeshift stage. The prisoners then gathered to “have a few laughs or perhaps cry a little” ... and their hearts would be lifted as they enjoyed songs, jokes, satires and poems. “All were meant to help us forget ... and they did help”.’

Although I would not want to suggest too much similarity between this account of extreme alienation and the data, I do want to acknowledge the connection of aesthetics, humour and love for one another. The living parables of this research show multiple cases in which the acts helping people to forget the challenges of turbo-capitalism, as well as the tactics and development of social action initiatives, are facilitated by aesthetics, humour and love. Such acts of creativity and innovation were found to enable people to engage further in identity formulation, and further imagination of alternative futures.

I also think that the triangulation of aesthetics, humour and love offer much more opportunity for connection, creation and change. As Alberto Melucci (1996: 226) suggests:

‘A world of information cannot in fact be the result of omnipotent will of a handful of manipulators. It is the work of the constant adjustments of the cognitive frames, motivational choices, and learning processes of a large number of social actors, both individual and collective. Obviously, the imbalance of power and its inherent violence – more subtle and pervasive than physical – will not disappear;

but it yields the analytical centre stage to the profound ambivalence of processes, and surrenders to the different notion of responsibility.'

It is my contention that such ambivalence of processes, despite the imbalance of power and its inherent violence, raises even further questions regarding the dominant narrative, its origins, and its future. I suggest that our creative connectivity with the narrative provides the potential for a Trojan subversion capacity. The more people question its capacity to control, via lifeworlds, the more chance of mobilising alternative futures. Challenging the inevitability of capitalism, and avoiding the default of conspiracy theories of a hidden global ruling elite, in my view brings hope, along with huge responsibility. Rather than building opposition on the premise of such conspiratorial agents, or even comprehensive social theory frames from the Left or Right, this study has found activist parables that grapple with the complexity of the situation that we all face on a day-to-day basis. Hence:

'This is not a naive request to view the control room where the indoctrination programme was hatched and monitored but a serious question about how we are to interpret the manifest ideological disputes within key stakeholders' (Archer 1996: 58–9).

Let me make myself clear, my argument is that it is not only possible to make change from within whilst being manipulated by turbo-capitalism, but that this is the very thing the participants of this lifeworld study are doing. Yes, these actions are weak, compromised, incomplete and contradictory, but they carry a 'below the radar' impact. What's more, the lack of capitalism, in the Lacanian sense, itself shall assist in the ongoing loss of faith in the dominant system(s). Here we reach a crucial point of disagreement with the thinking of Žižek, who recently wrote:

'It is this myth of non-representative direct self-organisation which is the last trap, the deepest illusion that should fall, that is most difficult to renounce ... Yes, there are moments of intense collective participation where local communities debate and decide, when people live in a kind of permanent emergency state, taking things into their own hands, with no Leader guiding them. But such states don't last, and "tiredness" is here not a simple psychological fact, it is a category of social ontology' (Žižek 2013).

Hence, to escape this 'myth of non-representative direct self-organisation', he advocates:

'The [Socialist] Master is needed especially in situations of deep crisis. The function of a Master is to enact an authentic division – a division between those who want to drag on within the old parameters and those who are aware of the necessary change. Such a division, not the opportunistic compromises, is the only path to true unity' (Žižek 2013).

In direct response to this article, Roos (2013) wrote:

'This seems like a strange approach to radical politics indeed. After all, the word radical refers to roots, and radical politics have historically implied an attempt to break with the paternalistic top-down process of political decision-making that characterizes bourgeois democracy. Truly radical politics have therefore always been practiced collectively at the grassroots level without the interference of hierarchical power structures or the imposition of outside leaders.'

Although I sense an oversight of the incompleteness within the radical politics being advocated by Roos, I still find this retort holds much more connectivity with the findings of this research. As long as such suggestions are placed within a context of utopianism rather than Utopia, then the praxis at grass-roots level without hierarchy holds the signs of hope. The phenomena I am seeking to address cannot and do not simply fit within the discursive spaces of subcultures (pseudo micro-struggles) or full-blown social movements. In fact, due to what I understand of the far more anarchic tendencies of community activists, I suggest that this is not even their current desired sense of destination.

My meaning here is that both of these categories – subcultures and social movements – hold a clear sense of cohesion, the former in identity making and the latter in cultural reconfiguration, whereas the lifeworlds under question are simply not that fixed or thought through in terms of either position. These participants represent a much deeper level of fluidity in terms of character and articulated purpose.

In making such claims, I recognise that in some ways I am entering into the age-old binary of agency and social (de)construction. Obviously, the level to which I can explore such frames, choices and learning processes is limited at this stage of the research, but I do recognise the need to think this through a little further. Therefore, I shall conclude this section by investigating and rerouting these discussions along two lines of enquiry – cultural consistency and impact upon the everyday activities of individuals and groups.

Margaret Archer (1996: 2) suggests that society and systems are held together by what she terms the 'Myth of Cultural Integration'. Within this myth, she argues, is the assumption of a high degree of consistency, which suggests, far too easily, oneness and internal cohesion. She then subsequently embarks on a process to dislodge what is seen to be so strong a view of culture:

'that it scored the retina, leaving a perpetual after-image, which distorted subsequent perception.'

Hence, if the incomplete and some would say insignificant narratives of this research hold any meaningful contribution to social change, it would seem that questions regarding the high degree of consistency of not only turbo-capitalism but also counter-narratives (i.e. neo-Marxist) may provide insight and advancement.

Archer (ibid.: 2) suggests that the myth of cultural integration originates at the descriptive level, creating an archetype of culture(s) seen to be:

'the perfectly woven and all-enmeshing web, the intricate construction of which only added to its strength. Today, instead of analogy, one would simply say that the Myth portrayed culture as the

perfectly integrated system, in which every element was interdependent with every other – the ultimate exemplar of compact and coherent organization.’

In seeking to trace the origins of cultural integration, Archer focuses on the work of anthropologists, in which she sees:

‘The most proximate and powerful origins of the Myth ... Despite definitional wrangling over the term “culture”, there was substantial concord amongst anthropologists about its main property – strong and coherent patterning’ (Archer 1996: 2).

She continues:

‘Two features of this heritage should be underlined. On the one hand its strong aesthetic rather than analytical orientation, which led to an endorsement of “artistic” hermeneutics as the method for grasping the inner sense of cultural wholes. On the other hand this approach, based on the intuitive understanding of cultural configurations, entailed the crucial prejudgement, namely the insistence that coherence was there to be found, that is a mental closure against the discovery of cultural inconsistencies’ (Archer 1996: 3).

Although I do think that, at points, Archer may be guilty of throwing the baby out with the bath water, and overlooking the far more nuanced perspectives found within anthropology (i.e. Dunne 2008; Graeber 2012, 2013), I do think she offers a helpful counterpoint by highlighting the presence of cultural inconsistencies.

Further still, in terms of the focus and particular interest of this research, her work is of specific influence when she considers how the myth has been reinforced:

‘by its adoption in Western humanistic Marxism. The notion of “hegemonic culture” and its offspring, the “dominant ideology” thesis, embodied the same assumption about cultural coherence ... generally it distorted the nature of reality and undoubtedly the consensus it generated was the product of manipulation’ (Archer 1996: 3).

She even suggests that these processes result in the:

‘dominant ideology [being] presented as having a unity which far exceeds the coherence which Marx attributed to it. The independence, inconsistency and pluralism that could characterize the “ruling ideas” for Marx are entirely eliminated from the modern thesis ... Western Marxists who have immersed themselves in the intricacies of bourgeois culture have served to intensify belief in consistency at the Cultural system level.’

Obviously, the foundational connection within so much (community) activism and Marxism would in and of itself be disrupted by identifying and challenging some of the internal coherence of its developed frameworks of interpretation, as well as the tactics and approaches developed from within such frames. At the heart of her thinking, Archer attempts to separate the *logical consistency* of culture, which is represented by the internal compatibility of various elements of culture, and the *causal consensus* of culture, which is represented by the social conformity gained by the imposition

of a dominant (counter)narrative (i.e. turbo-capitalism or neo-Marxism) by one set of people on another:

‘The former concerns the consistency of our attempts to impose ideational order on experiential chaos; the latter concerns the success of attempts to order other people. Logical consistency is a property of the world of ideas; causal consensus is the property of people’ (Archer 1996: 4).

Whereas the previous chapter embarked on a trajectory that dismantled and dislodged the contribution of the community activist, due to the lack of engagement with the real problems of turbo-capitalism, Archer turns this argument back upon itself. She highlights the way in which the internal inconsistencies of all narratives can be placed to one side, to enable the onslaught of any resistance that challenges the logical consistency of cultural narratives. In other words, she calls for all social actors to return back to the experimental chaos of life. Without wanting to fall in an epistemological contradictory trap, I do feel weakly confident in suggesting that such spaces offer insightful understanding to the contours identified in the participants’ lifeworlds – including motivational factors, resource mobilisations, small world networks and so on.

The inclusion of inconsistencies of narratives opens up fresh opportunities to rethink the locations, actions and thoughts of everyday life. Sarah Pink (2012: 141) suggests that:

‘both place and practice should be treated as abstract concepts that might be engaged to understand a range of human activities and environments in such a way that does not predetermine our analysis of what type of outcomes or experiences should be associated with them.’

Hence, rather than paying homage and bowing to the great behemoth of capitalism or critical Marxism, I believe the lifeworlds of activists represent (partial) unconventional departures, which open up this discussion to the consideration of the everyday aspects of community engagement. In doing so, I am in agreement with Pink (ibid.: 141) when she suggests that such approaches offer:

‘a route through which to understand how experiential elements of both the activities and environments of everyday life might be implicated in activist processes and sustainable agendas.’

Such routes seem to me to be potentially ones that not only resist the Myth of Cultural Integration but also offer the excitement of reclaiming, renaming and redirecting our lives. Once again, the combination of activities and environmental experiments seem to afford a clearer reading of the lifeworlds of activists. Due the ongoing *lack* present within all of our lives, all alternative expressions must always be seen as *fantasies* held together by symbolic representations. These abeyant expressions of day-to-day resistance offer a slow erosion of the way things are, rather than a volcanic eruption of social change.

The recognised weakness of such activities does undoubtedly provide a platform of critique against such lifeworlds. Nonetheless, the argument here is that such stories also provide testimonies against the *must-have-now* culture of turbo-capitalism. It is the pursuit, reflection and articulation(s) of these paths to which I now turn in the final section of this chapter – and in doing so I shall be making a theological twist!

### **Section Three – In Search of Living Parables**

I must acknowledge from the outset that taking a theological turn offers, I believe, a unique epistemological, ontological and praxis-based set of reflections.

In the context of lack, spirituality is often evoked as that which gives meaning to life. My linking spirituality to activism is not about morphing activists into some band of modern-day saints, nor is my foray into the theological about fantasies of housing some alchemic essential inner truth, waiting to save and liberate this world from darkness. My primary task is to investigate spaces, ideas and experiences that will assist the lifeworlds of activists.

With this in mind, I shall now explore some of the recent thoughts of Simon Critchley and his pursuit of the seemingly contradictory idea of the faith of the faithless and the belief of unbelievers.

Whilst investigating the life of the Apostle Paul and the early church, Critchley (2012: 139) identifies what he terms a ‘creative disintegration’ within individuals, which brings:

‘an undermining of its authority that allows a new form of subjectivity to stand in the place inhabited by the old self ... where it is no longer organized around individual identity and its self-regarding acts of will, but is rather orientated towards that which is unconscious in the life of desire ... a transformation of the self through the act of love.’

It is my contention that an idea such as ‘creative disintegration’ leading to the transformation of the self through acts of love holds much learning and insight (for people with or without faith). I termed this elsewhere as a ‘perpetual anarchic-exodus’ (Erskine 2008) – not only an ongoing, unreachable struggle and desire to live in a different, more equal world but also a hunger after an ontology of love as reflected in patience, kindness and long-suffering beyond the individual.

To be clear, I’m not at this late point introducing a transformation via a radical utopian love ethic.

My suggestion here should be read in light of the following reflections of Bell Hooks (2000: xxvii):

‘Everyone wants to know more about love. We want to know what it means to love, what we can do in our everyday live to love and be loved. We want to know how to seduce those among us who remain wedded to lovelessness and open the doors of their hearts to let love enter. The strength of our desire does not change the power of our cultural uncertainty. Everywhere, we learn that love is important, and yet we are bombarded by its failure. In the realm of the political, among the

religious, and our families, and in our romantic lives, we see little indication that love informs our decisions, strengthens our understanding of community, or keeps us together. This bleak picture in no way alters the nature of our longing. We still hope that love will prevail. We still believe in love's promise.'

I state this to avoid defaulting into a Lacanian *archetype of love*, which would somehow be seen as holding the ability to overcome, once and for all, humanity's *lack*. In other words, love should not be seen as triumphant but rather watchful and observant. In the *New Testament*, Paul writes:

<sup>4</sup>Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. <sup>5</sup>It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. <sup>6</sup>Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup>It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

<sup>8</sup>Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. <sup>9</sup>For we know in part and we prophesy in part, <sup>10</sup>but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears.'

Hence, the relationships of self-managed reflective ontology and praxis suggested by Critchley, coupled with an external metaphysical force – love, in a sense à la Paul/Bell Hook – in my view is helpful. Such acts of discerning love signpost a desire for alternatives that cannot be simply located internally or externally. In summary:

'What is at stake here is the creation of new forms of life at a distance from the order of the state – which is the order of visibility – and cultivating largely invisible commonalities ... linked with experimentation with different forms of small-scale, communal group collaborations' (Critchley 2012: 143–4).

Reflecting back to the Contours of an Activist identified in Chapter Six, via these disruptions and rewiring, enables fresh interpretations. The processes of identity formulation previously discussed are not in this sense seen as individuals simply trying to 'find themselves' but show them trying to disentangle themselves from the ego, which has been heavily constructed, entrapped and defined by the dominant powers of turbo-capitalism – processes, in terms of the Lacanian framework discussed earlier, of throwing off the dominant fantasies and constructions made via the symbolic universe.

The buried treasure to be found in the lifeworlds of community activists are here identified as acts of love, which would inhibit the creative disintegration, talked of above, to head off in the direction of self-obliteration. These acts of love are not only the outcomes of community activism but are also the processes through which acts are engaged, despite continually being commodified within turbo-capitalism. It is no coincidence that the lifeworlds of the participants – particularly in terms of thinking, connection, creation and change, and translation, interpretation and brokerage – can be seen as displaying acts of love.

This combination allows a creative and some would say spiritual dynamic, previously unnamed in this research. This creative spirituality can be identified in acts that cause the ego to be disintegrated and via the adoption and pursuit of love (aesthetics and humour). Such activities, it is argued, can only be understood by embracing and celebrating internal conversations, weakness and Otherness; however, paradoxically, this is seen as being their very strength!

Interestingly, this stands in stark contrast with de Certeau's (1984: 183–4) observations regarding the similarities between Christian movements and parties of the Left:

'In both cases, similar functional characteristics can be discerned: ideology and doctrine have an importance that is not given them by those in power; the project of another society results in discourse (reformist, revolutionary, socialist, etc.) being given primary role over against the fatality or normality of facts ... the techniques of "making people believe" play a more decisive role when it is a matter of something that does not yet exist.'

This study has not found the functional characteristics of ideology and doctrine to have importance in the techniques of 'making people believe'. Obviously, heed must be taken of the potential over-reading of the participants in this context, but the role of spontaneous ordering, mutuality and DIY acts seems to offer far more cohesion and traction with the data. Thus, the findings seem to suggest a stage prior to ideology and doctrine, which, I argue, is better explained as a complex exploration guided by acts of love.

This alternative insight is strengthened from a more radical theological perspective concerning the early church:

'There has been a huge and persisting gap in the analysis of the evidence [exploring the origins of the early church]. I refer to the repeated failure to take seriously the fact that in the initial stages of the traditioning process the tradition must have been *oral* tradition; and thus also failure to investigate the character of the tradition in its oral phase, or to ask what its orally must have meant for the transmission of that material' (Dunne 2003: 192).

I believe this to be of utmost importance in terms of investigating community activism. The suggestion being made here is that, prior to the written ideology and doctrinal stage of development, there is an oral tradition that cannot be overlooked – a period that I see as the time of 'living in abeyance', in which we can witness the birth of *parables of hysteria*. My meaning here needs explanation.

The idea of *parables of hysteria* should be viewed here as encapsulated within the Lacanian framework and an embracing of weakness. Located in abeyance, hidden from mainstream view, but bursting with creative impulses for change. The stories explored here, as yet, have not been written about – they are embodied and incarnated in the lives of community activists. Connection is made

through relationships, networks and word-of-mouth directions – pub, estates, pavements and carnivals are their dwelling spaces.

Therefore, hysteria needs to be approached from a two-fold perspective. Its more orthodox reading, explored in the previous chapter, would suggest a fragmentation of identity that, at its extreme, would lead to a negative/nihilistic-orientated self. In terms of community activism, that would be most easily understood as selling out or burning out. The second reading of hysteria, on the other hand, seen through an entomological link with the womb, is more optimistic and could be seen as connected with birth (and death), new beginnings, and protection of developing narratives. Neither of these alternatives of hysteria should be seen to be the direction or preferred reading of community activists. Rather, they offer an ongoing challenge and set of coordinates for any who would search for alternative counter-narratives.

Thus, as I have previously stated, I don't think the participants of this research are offering or possess meta-frames of interpretation in these times of abeyance. Rather, the findings of this research have unearthed lives of those who are literally wrestling for their souls. The themes and contours located should be seen more like articulations of close (internal) combat, instead of strategies of open war:

'What such a demand does is to expose our imperfection and failure: we wrestle in solitude with the fact of the infinite demand and constraints of the finite situation in which we find ourselves. Otherwise said, ethics is all about the experience of failure – but in failing something is learned, something is experienced from the depths, *de profundis*' (Critchley 2012: 7).

This brings me to my final theological twist. In her recent investigations into the socio-political implications of Paul's biblical writing, 'when read against the background of the Caesar cult', Marijke Hoek (2010: 50) writes:

'Against the background of a powerful empire, it appears that the activity of the Spirit applies not only to religious, but also to social and political aspects of life. While the worship of the emperor and Rome was the fastest growing religion at the time and the imperial cult constructed a definition of the world, Paul's gospel and his redefinition of concepts such as "weakness" and "victory" construct a challenging ... [counter] worldview.'

Hoek's suggestion here is deeply interesting, as the 'activity of the Spirit' is seen to be manifesting a challenge to the dominant powers through *weakness* and *hysteria*. Her argument extends to a call for a reshaping of worldview, in which Paul 'calls attention to our responsibility to exercise' lifestyles that would create 'a new community, a new social and ethical order in the existing structures of society', thus emphasising the major reorientation Paul envisaged as putting all former social distinctions assigned in society into the shadow, despite experiencing 'corporate weakness that was of a numerical, socio-political, judicial and economic nature' (Hoek 2008: 52).

The historical example of living in the shadow of an empire that constructs the definitions of the world not only suggests that there is hope but also offers food for thought in terms of work-based learning. The ontogeny of these early faith communities resulted in the experience of marginalisation and all that entailed. Hoek (2008: 52) concludes:

‘Poverty and food shortages were significant economic aspects of first-century life. Considering that the church included labourers, slaves and recent immigrants, some would have had citizenship, while others would have encountered the discrimination experienced by non-citizens, which characterised the Roman judicial system. Yet, despite their experience of powerlessness and hardship ... Paul is thus calling into being an entire new identity, a new morality and structure of society.’

There is much to compare with the living parables under consideration within this research and these historical contexts. Critchley (2012: 143), pointing to the work of Gustav Landauer, takes this further by making the connection between ‘self-annihilation and anarchism’:

‘It is not enough for us to reject conditions and institutions; we have to reject ourselves. “Do not kill others, only yourself”: such will be the maxim of those who accept the challenge to create their own chaos in order to discover their own authentic and precious inner being and to become mystically one with the world.’

However, thankfully, he is quick to disqualify any utopian romantic completion to such pursuits:

‘We are living through a long anti-60s. The various anti-capitalist experiments in communal living and collective existence that define that period seem to us either quaintly passé’, laughably unrealistic, or dangerously misguided. Having grown up and thrown off such seemingly childish ways, we now think we know better than to try to bring heaven crashing down to earth and construct utopias’ (Critchley 2012: 144).

Instead he suggests a:

‘politics of love, in which love is understood as that act of absolute spiritual daring that attempts to eviscerate (to remove the entrails from; disembowel) existing conceptions of identity in order that a new form of subjectivity can come in being ... Faith is understood here as a declarative act, as an enactment in a situation of crisis where what is called for is a decisive political intervention’ (Critchley 2012: 12–13).

I believe that in the weak, incomplete and contradictory post-ideological landscape of social engagement, a politics of love and faith such as that articulated and explored in this chapter connects with the findings of this research. Further still, Heike Hermanns (2008: 78–9) writes:

‘This change from organised activities to actions based on personal views is also visible when people are enticed by personal networks to participate in protest activities or to join a political group. Personal views are more likely to be shared with people with similar interests, their personal network.’

The fluid, some may say reactionary, modes of engagement set out in Chapter Five seem to make more sense when not demanded to offer complete alternative counter-narratives to turbo-

capitalism. However, Melucci (1996: 223) does point out one of the binary dilemmas that arise from such social positioning:

‘The organisation of permanent interests constantly runs the risk of corporative bureaucratization, while the organisation of mutable interests is in danger of becoming dispersed and fragmented. Thus one provides organisational continuity, memory, and capacity to generalize; the other continuously generates energies of anti-bureaucratic mobilisation.’

Clearly the participants of this research are firmly located in the second group and in that sense take the hit of wrestling with the tension of being continually dispersed and fragmented – without ideology or doctrine. Nonetheless, the survival tactics and experiences found once again offer a sense of *weak hope* rooted in a politics of love and faith. Paul Chatterton and Jenny Pickerill (2010: 7) point out how:

‘Locally grounded autonomous projects allow an unpacking of the power working at different levels through governments, corporations and local elites, and the building of extra-local solidarity and resistance.’

As I stated earlier, David Harvey (2001: 195) takes this even further (and beyond the data of this research) by suggesting:

‘There is a time and place in the ceaseless human endeavour to change the world, when alternative visions, no matter how fantastic, provide the grist for shaping powerful political forces for change. I believe we are precisely at such a moment.’

The conclusions reached through this research can be only appreciated when placed within contexts of perpetual change. It is my contention that the subject matter is often misunderstood, because it is either required to hold more clarity of purpose, or is undermined due to its complicit relationship with turbo-capitalism. Robert C. Schehr (1997: 16) contends we should move to a place of a:

‘reflexive or constitutive analysis of actors and their interaction with social structure. Here the emphasis is on recognition of local, subaltern voices typically drowned out by dominant rhetorical positions and grand theory ... encouraging us with the advocacy of the marginalized, disenfranchised, disempowered, and otherwise excluded voices ... contending that the defining characteristics of society and social structure are flux, heterogeneity, diversity, orderly disorder, chance and spontaneity ... that dissipative structures are the antithesis of functionalist theorizing since they are only relatively stable and always interacting with their environment, producing perpetual change.’

Once again, to not embrace environments of perpetual change, I believe, results in what Bailey (209: 24), from a Lacanian perspective, calls:

‘non-recognition of and obliviousness to something; it is sometimes translated as “misrecognition” – a translation I find wide of the mark. “Misrecognition” suggests that something has been recognised, only wrongly. In my preferred translation of *obliviousness* or *non-recognition*, the subject is completely blind to the object.’

By introducing a theological twist, which leads to a politics of love and faith, I am seeking to lift the scales of analysis that would cause such blindness. Despite, the fact that this pursuit does not bring a sense of wholeness or cohesion that has been previously overlooked; it does offer some core ingredients for the community activist to consider.

As I started out by saying, my hope has been not to create a dead academic cipher but a text that can be seen and read as a complementary extension of my current work praxis and linked to my future learning and community engagement. I move now to the conclusion, seeking to capture the main learning points and developments already achieved by this thoroughly enjoyable quest.

## **WAYS FORWARD**

This research has undoubtedly been one of the most rewarding and challenging tasks of my entire life. I can think of no other way to explain the imaginative and intellectual discipline that this exercise has demanded and forged within me other than describing it as a blessing. Without diverting to, or divulging, my personal life, this research has been extremely healing in my post-divorce and single-parent landscape. In a sense it has saved me from aspects of myself, which have not really reached these pages. To quote a well-known phrase – ‘it’s been emotional!’

Funny as this last point may seem, it does allow me to initiate, by starting with emotions, the identification of the key areas of learning produced by this study. Having done so, I then conclude by discussing three areas of specific development – academic engagement, work-based learning and creative partnerships – emerging from this exploration of community activists’ lifeworlds.

### **Internal Dialogue and Emotional Reflectivity**

Debra King (2005: 154) writes that political engagement comes at a cost, and for activists:

‘to sustain this level of emotion work over long periods of time, they need to become skilled in practices of emotional reflexivity and have a supportive emotional culture within which to explore the emotional and cognitive aspects of the framing process.’

The dual ideas of becoming skilled in practices of emotional reflectivity and the development of a supportive emotional culture have clearly been identified within this study. The data and its findings – concerning the importance of passion, gifts, associations and violations, identity formulation, and connections, creation and change – endorse this. Further still, the importance of King’s (ibid.) observations, have also been supported by the very process and praxis of conducting this research. As I stated in Chapter One:

- I am embarking on a self-examination, in which I hope to dislodge and disrupt my own lifeworld and work-based learning
- Another trajectory is to strengthen the ability of participants to appreciate, reflect and learn from what they have achieved and how they have achieved it

I believe that both of these aims have been achieved, and additionally recognise that the research process has enhanced (personal) emotional reflexivity and the development of a supportive emotional culture between all the participants. This is evidenced in our ongoing working relationship(s), which continue to develop, whilst engaging in our various political engagements. This was particularly identified in the initial workshop context and continues in various smaller group

sessions, in one-to-one encounters, and in a general sense of ongoing interest in each other's well-being and work-based learning.

In a sense this could be seen as one of the central by-products of the MSAR process. Although this is a decentralised framework, the cross-fertilisation of learning has undoubtedly enhanced emotional reflectivity and a general culture of emotional support within and between the participants' specific working contexts.

Additionally, the Lacanian framework developed within this research indisputably supports the idea that:

'we should broaden our understanding of the emotions so that social movements direct towards themselves as well as towards their opponents' (Flam 2005: 37).

Hence, the disruption of lack, fantasy and hysteria with the construction of identity, via the use of the symbolic universe, clearly requires a journey into the emotions to guard against fragmentation of the self and also nurture the birthing of fresh ideas, hope, resistance and love.

Additionally, the work of Archer (2003, 2007) concerning the role of internal conversation has undeniably driven this investigation and myself to value the role of emotions in a way that was previously underdeveloped. The demand and discipline of listening to the self, whilst deliberating and acting, has been an inestimable area of learning. It has been argued that this concept locates the interchange of agency and social construction, the dynamic element of choice and decision making. Clarified by emotional reflectivity and supportive emotional communities enhances this even further.

### **Ivory Towers and Everyday Life**

The second area of learning in need of address is the importance of fusing academic and work-based experiences. I entered this research with a strong conviction concerning this alliance, but this has been strengthened beyond measure. I am left with a tremendous challenge – what can I do to make this happen more? As I discuss below, in my current and future developments I have already begun to make sense of this, but recognise it as a new stage of a lifelong pursuit.

Thus, the idea that activists' identities and subjectivities can be reconfigured and become subject to negotiated development, due to an alliance of academic thinking and work-based experiences, is a crucial point of learning. The common dualism and separation between the ivory towers of academia and the apparent inevitability of much of day-to-day life have been and continually need

to be challenged. Without wanting to come across as sycophantic, this research contributes and reinforces the wider aims of the Institute of Work-Based Learning, from which it stems.

This exploration of lifeworlds has sought at every step to fuse these two areas. As argued, in terms of my own epistemology, praxis and ontology, this has been invaluable, but once again the workshops have identified a far wider reward from this pursuit. The frameworks of interpretation offered by academic thought have much to offer community activists' core characteristics of translation, interpretation and brokerage.

However, this should not be seen as a one-way street. This study has identified a series of complex, sophisticated and sensitive modes of engagement and operation within community activism. This learning offers unique, creative and innovative lessons back into academia, for example via research techniques, alternative communication processes, and partnership working.

### **The Incomplete Activist – Post-ideology, Politics and People**

The landscape of abeyance and weakness, which has been travelled around via this research, offers some unique insights into current community activism within the UK. The lack of ideological underpinning found within all the participants may to some be very alarming, in the sense that people have no cause to fight for, or have lost hope in the idea that real change can take place. Nonetheless, I would like to offer another interpretation to these findings. The people with whom I work and with whom I have engaged with in this research are without doubt not people without hope. Nor are they, in my experience, people without thought or strategies for the future. However, they are people who are developing various nomadic approaches to existence in a very complex and challenging world. Much of what they are hoping for is not yet seen, or is located mainly at the subterranean level of culture and politics. In that sense, I understand community activists as people of faith – not in a religious sense but in the sense that they are carrying hope for things not yet manifest.

This research has identified that such faith requires much endurance and love if it is to avoid complete capitulation with the dominant patterns of turbo-capitalism. It also requires much honesty and reflection on the areas in which this struggle is currently being lost. The employment of a Lacanian analysis is, to my mind, extremely helpful for these purposes. The dynamic nature of this borrowed psychoanalysis offers alternative sightlines for individuals and groups engaged in the development of alternative moral economies.

## Current and Future Developments

In conclusion of this study, I shall now explore, via the areas of academic engagement, work-based learning and creative partnerships, the current and future developments emerging from this action research.

- Academic engagement:

In addition to this thesis and its impending completion, I have two areas of academic development in process:

At the beginning of this year (2013) I was approached by SAGE Publications to submit a case study to their forthcoming reference publication *Cases in Methodology*. This publication will comprise a unique collection of over 500 case studies for use in the teaching of research methods. The cases will be drawn from around the world, from established academics, from post-docs and from PhD students, working across a wide spectrum of academic disciplines and working with the widest range of different research methods. The goal of the collection is to provide students and faculty with short usable examples of methods in action and research in action, drawn from real research projects that can support teaching and learning in research methods. My study, entitled 'Exploring the Lifeworlds of Community Activists', shares the journey of this research and has been received as highly innovative and unique.

I am also currently in conversation with my supervisor regarding the submission of a journal article – 'Merging Waves: The 'Learning Conversations' in Work-based Learning and Transformation into Action'. This paper, jointly authored by a candidate and an adviser, illustrates what underpins our working alliance on a professional studies doctoral programme. It explores what both of us bring to the encounter: positionality and intentionality; the importance of the conditions that need to be in place to support the co-generation of synthesised, distinctive or new knowledge; the skill of interpretation across difference; the privileging of practice; an attitude of respect; and the responsibility of research to the communities in which we live. It is our intention that this attempt to explicate what actually happens between us will contribute to thinking about the role of the adviser in this evolving and exciting area of higher education, which seeks to engage more fully with work practices in a wide range of sectors.

It is also my intention to write further journal articles and investigate the potential of reconstructing this thesis as a book.

- Work-based learning and creative partnerships:

As I have already made evident within this research, I have continued to facilitate numerous one-day workshops, which focus upon the findings of and learning from this research. To date, I have conducted fifteen of these workshops across the UK and have a further three planned for the autumn of 2013. These workshops are described as ‘The Incomplete Activist’ and aim to strengthen, disrupt and encourage individuals engaged in various aspects of community activism.

Additionally, in partnership with CreativeConnection,<sup>17</sup> I have recently finished a short animation film entitled *The Incomplete Activist*. This innovative partnership has enabled me to capture the core aspects of learning from this research within an animation. I shall be distributing this film via YouTube across the fifty networks connected to my current work-based context. It will also be used to promote the one-day workshops.

In reporting on all of these current and future developments, the important message I am trying to communicate is that this research process is ongoing. This thesis is simply part of the disruption and change caused by this lifeworld exploration. In bringing this part to an end I must reiterate my intention to continually engage in exercises that enable others and me to make sense of this complex and beautiful world in which we live. Turbo-capitalism is at this point clearly the narrative of dominance but in abeyance, in the cracks, are exquisite parables of hope. These parables have been found to be weak, incomplete and contradictory – but they will always also be my home.

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<sup>17</sup> The **CreativeConnection** team offers a range of services within five key channels:

**Visual minutes:** the CC team will transform ideas into compelling sketches and diagrams that help people understand complex issues and decide what to do next.

**Animations:** animation is very effective as a branding, viral or internal marketing tool. The CC team work in a variety of styles.

**Facilitation and coaching:** with over 40 years’ facilitation experience, CC work with individuals and teams of all sizes and levels to increase productivity and performance both professionally and personally.

**Visual minutes training and workshops:** CC offer visual minutes training workshops for corporate groups and individuals.

**CC Events:** the ‘School of Unknowing’ and the ‘11<sup>th</sup> Hour Meetings’ are two of CC’s exclusive annual events held for clients. CC artists can work in many languages and offer all services in multilingual formats.

See more at: <http://creativeconnection.co.uk/?p=whatwedo#sthash.3YI9zbNk.dpuf>

**APPEDIX 1 – RECENT EXAMPLE OF SHARED LEARNING GATHERING**

## **APPENDIX 2: SAMPLE OF INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION**

### **STAGE 1: NARRATIVE**

CE – 0:00 - Ok. Hi (S) thanks so for agreeing to be part of the research, its really good. Hopefully it will be of benefit to you as i'm sure its going to be of benefit to me. What i'd like to do it to just start off with your story really. For you just to tell me just a little bit about yourself and the initiatives that you are involved it.

(S) – 0:26 – Ok. So, em I live in Peterborough and was born in Peterborough and I grew up here. And then I spent five years living in Brighton. And when I was getting to the end of those five years, an opportunity came up for me to come back to Peterborough, and started working on a project, which I have now done. So the project is called the GBY, and its run primarily between myself and my Dad. Um, and it came about because dads always been heavily involved in teaching and the environment and woodwork. Working with kind of natural things and sharing that. He used to run an allotment in another part of the city with another allotment holder. And that grew and got quiet a lot of good press. And he ended up taking school kids round it and stuff like that. So quiet naturally its was mare than an allotment. And they succeeded in getting some really good feedback and pissing the Council off quiet a lot. Um because you are not supposed to do that on an allotment site. So rather than kick them straight off, they asked Dad if he would consider moving to another site? And thats when we started looking around for other bits of land, and its kid of then that I got involved, more from a distance while I was still in Brighton. They then found this piece of land, which an old allotment site and said that we could basically have that. We need to do a load of stuff. We needed to form a company so we could take on the license, lease thing so that we could take on the land legally. And there was a whole lot of 'smoozing' to be done, but yeah that how we can to have this piece of land. Then I moved back to Peterborough and we started this community garden basically. Uh, so we had to do a load of really boring stuff like get public liability and spent quiet a few months months messing around trying to get the paper work right. And then opened in January 08, yes 08. And started with two open days a week, and we've had them ever since. So they are just like volunteer days. You know, we just put the word out on the internet and the local paper. You know saying right we are open from 11-4 anyone can come down and volunteer, anyone. And the site was completely empty, it had been vacant for 16 years before we got it. So it was totally overgrown.

CE – 3:06 – Yep

(S) – 3:07 – Um, we got a lot of help. Somebody came in who was a farmer and ploughed over the land, but most of it was done by hand. And its literally been developed like that. Sort of twice a week people have been coming down, some of us have been going down more. Ah and thats how its developed. And its now, em, its now successful I think. You know we have, lote of buildings, we got composting toilets. We've got chickens and rabbits. We still have our two volunteer days, but we also have courses that we run. We have had art exhibitions, we have had conker championships. So loads of different events, that we have had. We started doing events off site as well, which is nice. And Dad is still doing a lot of work in schools and using the GBY to support the work that he does in schools as well.

CE – 4:00 – Yep. Ok thats really helpful. Um, in terms of. If you was just to think. What would be? Obviously you have got the land itself. What size is the land

(S) – 4:10 – Its 2.3 acres.

### **STAGE 2: RESOURCE MOBILIZATION**

CE – 4:16 – right ok and in terms of the other resources. You know where have got all the resources to build all these things? You know you said that you have connection with farmer...but actually think about what have you had to mobilize in terms of resources and where have you got all that stuff?

(S) – 4:30 – Haha pull a lot of favours. We've, I think for the size of the project we have got we have done a lot of things on not much money. We've had some funding that's come in through (SB), through yourself and small amounts through the Community Fund from the Council. It's not Council money it's from the local councillor themselves to invest in the community. So there has been little pots that have come in, that have helped with running cost enormously. And other things that have help with getting materials to build a certain building for example. But a huge amount of material that we have got have been kind of scavenged or donated. So we've got windows in most of the buildings that are from a College. The wall panels are from a building site in (E). Um, and often we didn't go out and find this stuff. People kind of came to us and said do you want this? Or we were driving past and saw it and asked. And they were like 'yeah take it'. Um, the resources like the physical building material we have been pretty fortunate to have been source them fairly cheaply. And obviously, Dad has got a lot of contact having been a carpenter for 30 years.

CE – 5.49 – Right.

(S) – 5.50 – And he is a fairly well known, I guess, kind of figure in the community. So, and he's got his workshop. He's got a massive store of timber, so that's been used as well. Um, it's just the resources that we have been able to use. It's just people that we know in the community.

### **STAGE 3: POLITICAL OPPORTUNITIES**

CE – 6.11 – So picking up on the community. You said that there are groups and volunteers coming into the community. Can you elaborate a little bit more on that? Who there are and what opportunities have been created for them in that?

(S) – 6.27 – So who the volunteers are that are coming in?

CE – 6.31 – Yeah

(S) – 6.33 – Um, it's really varied. Some people who started volunteers are still volunteering now. They literally saw us in the paper. Had never done anything like that before, had never done gardening before, never been involved in a community organisation before and just turned up, which is really cool. And still come two years later. Um, lots of other people, like I said knew my Dad or knew me. Initially we used the (GO) – local arts and community centre, which was open then to kind of advertise to potential volunteers, but later realised that they are more interested in getting pissed quiet a lot of the time – haha. Um, and initially that's where a lot of the interest can from. Um, but it was a really varied mix. So the farmer who came to do the field, we know him because he lost a daughter. And Dad did um a memorial birthday party, activity session with her friends and her

family. Um, that meant a lot to them and so he has always said to Dad 'look I will help you out when you need it'.

CE- 7.43 – Wow.

(S) – 7.44 – And he is completely removed from and GO, slightly alternative culture. He live right outside of Peterborough. So it was a real mix.

CE – 7.56 – Ok. So can you just , you know, what was the GO?

(S) – 8.03 – Ok. So my understanding of it, because i wasn't involved. The GO was an Arts and Community centre run in a former pub, but it did operate as a pub as well. Ah, it was rund entirely by volunteers and its was open for, I think, three years, thats about right. And they, it was really just a more alternative setting if you like. For people who tried to run craft workshops, art exhibitions along with lots of live music, just a really social place. And for me it was really useful, because when I came back to Peterborough I had been out for five years and had pretty much severed contact with most of the people that I knew in Peterborough. And i knew thats where I would go, and thats where I should go to meet people who would be interested in the same stuff as me.

CE – 8.52 – Yeah. Ok so you have got the GO and you mentioned that your Dads working in schools. And so have you got young people coming to the GO now? Have you got other groups coming there now?

(S) 9.02 – Yeah. We have a regular school group that comes and we have regular one off groups of young people that come. Um, we have got all the graffiti boards up, so its a legal graffiti site. So that attracts a lot of young people, even if they just come and take photos of the graffiti and don't want to consider digging up any vegetables. But thats fine because ot does bring them on the site. Um and we have also got, through PCVS (Peterborough Community Voluntary Service) more. We have people with various learning difficulties that get referred to us and sent down. And I think that word of mouth has played a big part in that. I always get people ringing me up saying, 'oh I care for this person, and can we bring them down'? There has been a lot of people come through that way.

CE – 9.49 – Yeah.

(S) – 9.50 – Yeah so pretty mixed backgrounds.

CE – 9.55 – And have you not got a connection with the Probation Service as well?

(S) – 9.59 – Oh yeah we do yeah. They were great, right from the start. Even before we held our liability insurance, because they have got there own so they could come on site and work. And so yeah we have been having work parties of people come over, since we started. And they have had a really big impact, partly because its just a big chunk of labour. Um but also because some of the people have really like it and stayed on after their sentence, if you like.

CE – 10.32 – Yep ok. Yopu mentioned at the beginning of the conversation that you had to pull in a loot of favours. But that you also had to do a lots of 'smoozing' with the bureaucracy. Can you tell me a little about that? The relationship with the Council and things like that

(S) – 10.41 – Yeah that was interesting because, um. There is sort of an establishment Environment Network, if you like in Peterborough. That's a lot more, for want of a better word, I guess corporate. So it's your environment sections in the Council, its PECT – Peterborough Environmental City Trust, its the Greater Peterborough Partnership. Its all kind of office based organisations, who are doing kind of project work in the city. Doing really good work, but its really removed from all the guys down on the allotments. You know they are at totally different ends. And I hadn't really anticipated how much I'd need to get involved in that side of things. And understand things like, you know, Peterborough's Development Strategy and how we would fit in that. So that was completely a bit of a shock. Um, yeah so I started to going to meetings, but we had another partner who was helping us get the land and helped us set up the company and things like that. Who was, I mean he is an ex-investment banker, so 'smoozing' is what he does. His blood 'smoozes' around his body. Um, and he was employed by the City Council at the time and was in a fairly senior position. So he had a lot of fairly useful conversations in corridors, that we just would not have been able to have. And I think, I think I'd be alright now, but my knowledge of Peterborough and experience in those situations. And Dad's the same. Dad would not have necessary the experience, if you like, to get it done.

CE – 12.23 – Yep.

(S) – 12.24 – So having his help was pretty invaluable. I mean he's probably been to the site, actually been to the site maybe 10 times. So he's not, he's pretty hands off, which is fine that suits us right down to the ground. But he just saw what we was trying to do. And all he does is make money for other people and himself and saw that it could be quiet nice if he could use his skill somewhere else as well.

#### **STAGE 4: IDENTITY FORMULATION**

CE – 12.51 – Great. Ok so just the last bit about trying to discover about the GBY. What has this done for you. Thinking about your identity. How have you changed? What kind of impact has this had, in terms of the person you are? The people that you know. The things that you want to do with your life. That kind of stuff.

(S) – 13.11 – I think its crystallised a lot of the stuff I want to do with my life. And its made me a lot happier, definitely. Em, but its raised a lot of questions, because its all very well saying I want to get a bit of land. And everyone will be happy. But the actual practicality of that isn't always that easy. Um, but no its definitely made me a lot happier and much more satisfied. I think its...one of the things I think now is that I doubt now where I think I would be able to go and have a normal job. I don't think, well I know I don't want that.

CE – 13.52 – Yeah, sure.

(S) – 13.55 – Ah so I feel like finding this other way of working means that I can't go back.

CE – 14.01 – Yep sure. So two things really. Tell me a bit more. Crystallised and what was there before?

(S) – Well I think. When I finished Uni and I was temping in the job I did before. It was all kind of stuff that I had fallen into. And didn't really enjoy, but just got on. So there was this constant nagging thing going – there is a better way to live and to do things. And there was lots of things that I wanted

to do, but didn't really know where to start. So, I mean that it's crystallised that I can do those things and that they can happen. And that I do want that and sort of helped me pull out the things that I want for my life and what I do.

CE – 14.52 – Yeah. And in terms of, like you are saying this alternative road. How are you living?

(S) – 14.56 – Haha, I haven't got any money. Um, well the first year, I moved back in with my parents. And then I was on Job Seekers for a year, so that I had the time to put into the GBY. And then I moved out and, you know was just on the dole and Housing Benefit and living with some friends. And then I took a job which was four days a week, um and was doing the GBY in my spare time. And being employed meant I had less money and worse off so I had to move back to my parents again, which is kind of where I am now half the time. But I now only work two days a week, in a job that is nice, you know it's good. Um, so yeah I'd love to be living on my own or with friends, but I just can't. But I'm really lucky in that I can stay at home and stay at my partner's and basically able to survive not too unhappily.

CE – 16.06 – And you are saying the job that you have connects, you like as well. Did you get that job as a result of the GBY? Do you think?

Yeah definitely, in the environmental circles in Peterborough, everyone knows my Dad and I was known as (R) daughter. I certainly was not known, I had never done anything in that sector. But I became known, through the GBY and got to know people at PECT and people at GPP. And yeah got this job with PECT for six months and four days a week. Pretty much because they knew me and that job finished, which I was very glad it finished. But then they had this other role coming up and they said that they wanted me to do it. So it was definitely through the GBY that I got that.

CE – 17.00 – Ok, and then just the final thing. We have talked about different people, different events. How many people do you think have had some kind of connection with the GBY. Not just in the physical place but also, you talked about these satellite events and publicity.

(S) 17.22 – Yeah, yeah the local newspaper have been very good. Anything that we do, they are keen to put it into the paper. I think partly because it makes a nice picture, but yeah they have been really great. I think really thousands of people, definitely in single day events we have had several hundred people come down sometimes. But I think that the thing that we can't measure are the people that are aware of the project. They might not have necessarily come through the gates, but they have seen it they kind of know what we are about, um they walk past it on the way to work and stuff like that. And I think that's still a valuable thing. That they know that there is something that independent and positive going on, because there wasn't really anything going on like that before.

CE – 18.17 – Yep sure.

(S) – 18.18 – And even just having this sort of open garden thing, you know, people know that they can come along. And that's definitely proved to be right. You know so many people have just turned up through the gate because they have seen us through the paper, or have walked past and always wondered what it is. There is definitely a curiosity there and so I think that people knowing that we are there is a good thing too. And then also there are the events that we have done outside.

CE – 18.45 – Yeah. So have you got any kind of website or anything like that?

(S) – 18.49 – Yep we have got a website that was built for us by my old housemate, which is really nice. He is a professional web designer, so we did well out of that one, haha. And, you know, we use Facebook a lot, and my best friend who lives in London she does Twitter, because I don't know how to use it. So she Tweets stuff. But Facebook has been really, pretty important actually. Not so much for the courses or getting of volunteers, although it was in the first instance. But now, for the events, Facebook is really, really useful.

CE – 19.29 – Yep, in what way?

(S) – 19.32 – Just making people aware of what you are doing. Because there is no 'What's on in Peterborough'? Really, there a few magazines that are a bit crap, so people don't really read them. There is no one place to see listings of what's on. You put it in the ET (Evening Telegraph), but young people don't really read the ET. Um, so you have to take this, you have to send it out everywhere and hope that people see it. So Facebook reaches a lot of people really quickly.

### **STAGE 5: DREAM DEVELOPMENT**

CE – 19.57 – Right, that's really helpful in understanding what you are involved in and establishing the different components of that. Um, what I'd like to do now is move onto, this section is called dream really. Which is look at the imagination and the possibility of what you are involved in. I'll start by saying just imagine where you could be, in terms of where you have come over the last two years. Where would you be in another two years?

(S) – 20.32 – Um, hopefully still on the site, for one. That's going to be a big battle, possibly, you know whether we can even keep the land. So hopefully, still there. And I don't really want to see too many developments on site. I expect the garden to establish itself and to grow. I think the main building is done – stop them building anything else. Um, so really for me the changes that I want to see is more in terms of the group and the organisation and the number of events that we run, certainly. I'd like to see the group to be more established, with more people taking an active role in terms of the running of the project. With more people investing some kind of time that's not, weeding, it's kind of mental time as well. And actually buying in to what we are trying to do. That I think is really important. Um, and just to have a really well established timetable, if you like, of courses and events that are planned well in advance. And we have our set advertising channels and we have a crowd that we appeal to and that are easy for us to reach. So really just extend down that path and network.

CE - 21.59 – Yep, ok.

(S) – 22.00 – Yep I think and the other thing that we need to concentrate on over the next two years is how we bring revenue in. Um, so making things to sell, selling food and drinks and things like that. And establishing those and kind of getting a reputation for doing things, as well as growing some veg and weaving some willow. That, I think is where I'd like to go anyway.

### **STAGE 6: MOTIVATION AND INSPIRATION**

CE – 22.27 – Yep. Ok, and in terms of you being there in two years time, where is your source of motivation? What's motivating you to be there now and how is that going to sustain you into the future?

(S) – 22.39 – I think that at the moment there is so much to be done and still to be achieved for the project. And it is amazing now, like I'm really proud of what we have achieved in two years. It's quiet remarkable I think, but I think the hard work is still ahead and there is still so much to do. So that's what's really motivating me because I think that we can really reach so many people. And, in the last two years I've seen just how people can benefit from having access to this sort of case. Enormously in some cases, it changed for a couple of people, it's changed their lives. And we never expected to have that much impact straight away and that's pretty motivating.

CE – 23.28 – Yeah sure.

Um, so, I would be, I would be happy that if in two and half years we are a sustainable organisation. So there are roles that are fairly defined. So that, if I wanted to leave it's not based on any one person; or if my Dad could leave and go and do something else.

CE – 23.52 – Yep

(S) – 23.53 – And the groups will carry on. For me definitely and I think it should be for my Dad as well, because, you know anything can happen to any of us at any time. And the site and the project needs to be bigger than any of the personalities involved and the people who are pushing for it. Well you need people to be pushing it at the beginning, but I'd like at some stage people to go back and for it to go forward and have a life of its own.

#### **STAGE 7: RESOURCES AND ROLES OF OTHERS**

CE – 24.22 – Yep, ok so that leads me into the next bit of this dreaming thing. So how do you see the roles of others actually developing? So if in two years, how many people would be involved in the decision making? How many people would there be involved in these program of events that you are going to have? What do you envisage?

(S) – 24.44 – Well the things that we do. It's quiet a wide variety of the things that we do, so you have the actual gardening on site, but then you might have a craft show or and art exhibition. Or your woodwork class, or you might have a party with DJ's. And they are all totally different types of events. Um and so, it could be a lot of people all doing what they are good at, as long as that all feeds in centrally to the GBY and to what we are trying to do. And it all fits in with furthering our goals if you like, then it can be loads of people.

CE – 25.23 – Yeah. So in essence what are the goals then? If I was to come along and say, 'I'd love to put on a book fair'. How would I know that I was talking to the right people, about the right place, and that would be possible to do?

(S) – 24-41 – Good question, haha. Um at the moment it's pretty much set by whether you talk to me or my Dad. You know, and I don't think that a good way of doing it, but that has 'been on the hoof'. It has been so far the way we have done it. We have defined, what the GBY is, um so yeah people just come to us. So the goals that I have for it I suspect are different than the goals that even my Dad have for it.

CE – 26.10 – Yep, ok so how to you go two and a half years down the line. What would you have done to tackle that?

(S) – 26.19 – Hammered them out! Yeah, no really, we need to all be signing from the same sheet.

CE – 26.27 – Yep, do want to elaborate on that a bit? How are you all going to look from the same sheet? And does the same sheet have just one song or does it have multiple, is it multi-tracked?

(S) – 26.35 – Haha, massive metaphors. Em, well we have started...obviously at the beginning I was living with my Dad and working with him. So we saw each other all the time. So there was not really, we didn't see at the time, any need to have any set meetings. We were there all the time anyway, everything was being talked about just constantly as you went, you know decision as you went. Um, and even when I moved out and was not living with him I still saw him loads. So it was only as more people have got involved we have seen the need, right we need to have a meeting to actually sit down and plan and talk about these things. So we have started doing that, which is useful and I think will be more useful as we go along and people get use to planning things out and discussing ways that we are going to work. So thats one way we are starting to, kind of bring a bit more structure to it and hopefully define these goals as well. So what we are trying to do through these meetings is establish a group of people, who are interested in doing more than weeding , like I say. Who we can then discuss, right, what are the goals that you think the GBY should have? What do you want to get out of it and ask all of the people those questions and kind of have a big open conversation about that, and debate it, and then actually pin them down. Which is something we should have done two years ago, but i think that had we done it two years ago the answers would have been very different. Because the reality of doing this kind of work, is different than you imagine it. You imagine it of being all sunny and wonderful, and often it is. But I think in having the experiences of the last two years mean that hopefully we are now in a really good place to kind of understand what we can do. What are limitations are and what the real good points that we can build on are.

CE – 28:50 – And what level of commitment is there for that broad conversation to take place. For that including people in the way in which your are looking to include them, in terms of decision making; the shaping; the direction – you know?

(S) – 29.06 – It varies who you ask . I mean I really do think it is important. Because if it's not a community led thing then you can't call it a community project. It's just a couple of people on a peice of land, making a nice garden. Saying look what we did! And it can't be that, it has to be more involved, it has to be. Um, so from my dad, as we said before, he is coming from a more traditional way of working. He has always been self employed, he has always been his own boss and he is stubborn as hell – thats where i get it from! Um, so I don't think he quiet sees the necessity to work in that way, like I do. Because all he sees is that he's getting it done, it looks the part and he's getting it done. And I don't think he see the gap, in terms of complete involvement from other peopleand the way that we enable that to happen. I think that in the past it's been a bit of a barrier.

CE – 30:08 – Yeah - (S) 30.10 – Having such a strong figure head, if you like. I think that people see it as kid of your project and not theirs. Not something that they can have a part in.

### **STAGE 8: PRAXIS DEVELOPMENT**

CE – 30.32 – Yeah. That then leads me, which is great, leads me onto the next bit. How creative do you think you are going to need to be? And how much do you think you are not just going to have to draw upon the practice of what you do but also theory and potential to take that forward?

(S) – 30.38 – I don't know what you mean.

CE – 30.38 – Well in terms of to achieve what you are thinking about. To achieve getting more people involved in decision making. To achieve creating an agenda which is owned by people. Do you do that by traditional roots? Or do you think that you are going to need to be really creative. Have you thought that through in terms of the practice of that and the theory underneath that?

(S) – 31.04 – The way i see it. and I don't know if this is answering your question or not. But the way I see it is starting with what we have got. Establishing an understanding, even if it's just between two or four people that are most key to the project. I think that's where we start. So that's not really very creative, but I think that's the base that we have got to work on. So initially I don't imagine it will be massively creative. But hopefully the way we reach out to other people. ....I see it being more creative as we go, because once we have got this solid foundation of mutual understanding of the people that are already involved....we will then be able to go and bring other people in and allow them to get involved as and when they come to us. But I think getting it right....because it's perhaps something that we were guilty of in the past. You know saying to people 'come on, let's get involved', but not really understanding how that would happen. So doing it for us first is pretty important.

#### **STAGE 8: REFLECTION**

CE – 32.14 – Yep that's great. What I'd like to do now is move onto the third stage [of interview]. The third stage is made up of two bits that I want to explore, which is the thing about the design and the destiny of where you are going. In terms of, you have started to unpack some of this stuff. But I want to look at the connections that you have established; how you think you might use those in the future. The role that plans and strategies might have in terms of that, and how you work that through in terms of the ways that you are currently working. Specifically I'd like to start up in terms of reflection. You have talked about that you have already started to introduce this by-weekly meeting. How important do you think that reflection is going to be? In terms of reflecting upon what you are doing and into achieve where you would like to go?

(S) – 33.21 – So reflection for me?

CE – 33.25 – Yeah. And the wider network of of the GBY really as well.

(S) – 33.30 – OK. Me first. Um, I don't know. Reflecting on what we have done, Um, oh sorry. Um, it's useful for me. I think that I can get really caught up in, you know, 'I want to be here, but we are here', how are we...how on earth are we going to get to where we want to be? And so reflecting back on everything that we have achieved actually is really useful. And helps you see the good in the project, when sometimes you can't see 'the woods from the trees'. Do you know what I mean?

CE – 34.15 – Yeah sure, definitely.

(S) – 34.17 – And so, that been, that's really important for me do to quiet often. Um, particularly when it's muddy, and winter and there is nobody there. And the chickens are attacking you. Um. And I imagine it's the same for the other people that are involved. Particularly for the people that were not around at the beginning and don't have that – 'this is where we have come from, kind of aspect. But, you know for dad, certainly he is very aware of what has been done on that site over the last 10 years.

CE – 34.55 – Yep. And maybe, I suppose, another way of thinking about reflection is trying to understand. How you have achieved the good things that you have achieved? And the way you went about doing that. And how some of the things that didn't quiet work out the way in which you intended then to. Do you do any of that kind of stuff? Do you do any – right we have just had an event lets sit down and explore?

(S) – 35.24 – We have just done it. And we should have always done it, but believe it or not it something that we hav only just started to do. So we had a big event in February and had a little debrief afterwards. Looking at what worked, what didn't work, and that was really helpful, but its not something that we have done before.

CE – 35.34 – And so, what were your reflections on your reflects? Why was it helpful?

(S) – 35.48 – Because, for me I was really heavily involved in organising the event. Um, and by the time it came round it was just like a big whirlwind, you know. And I wasn't, because I had organised it, I wasn't the best person to understand whether it had gone well or not. Um, so getting others people's feedback was really invaluable. And getting peoples feedback, who weren't, because we had put this one on in a club, um, and I was uncomfortable in that environment, because I go there quiet a lot. But people like my Dad, and people my Dads age had never been there before and don't usually go to that night club. So, you know, it was good to get their take on things definitely. Its something we will do again, and should do for every event that we have. It was really good because it informed completely how we want to run events in the future. The conversation naturally goes, right what worked, so next time we should do it this way and next time we should do it that way. Um, which is great.

CE – 36.50 – Yep and how many people did you get involved in that? How many people didi you ask, what did you think of that?

(S) -36.56 – Um, how many people were there in that meeting? There were only probably about six, seven people. Um, I got lots of kind of incidental feedback from people on the day, on the night. And people who got in touch afterwards saying that they had enjoyed it. so we got feedback from other people, but actually sitting in that room it was probably only about sven people.

### **STAGE 10: DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT**

CE – 37.19 – Yeah, ok. that's really helpful. Ok so the next bit is if you are going to try and achieve this, you know, more broad based decision making, more ownership from people to create an environment, where you can say that I'm going off to Mongolia for a couple of months. And you don't need to worry about how that's going to happen. Um, what are the key things that need to change in terms of the way in which you plan and develop strategy at the moment?

(S) – 37.58 – I think we need to plan and develop strategy

BOTH = Laugh

(S) – 38.01 – Yeah, no we do. Dad works in such an off the cuff way. He is so dynamic, which is brilliant, particularly when starting out. It was absolutely what we needed. If we had waited for all the permissions to come through and done all the planning properly , we wouldn't have grown a

single thing. But, now we really bdo need to have a more structured plan, and like I say. An idea of where we are going, as in a strategy. Because i feel like now the basic ground work is done and we could quiet easily start pulling in different directions for where we want it to go, and what we what it to be, so I think its quiet critical really that we do develop that. Um but as I said before, not very much planning happened at all, it was all and experiment, planting what and where, that was an experiment. We were all massively pushed for time. You know Dad's trying to run a business as well as doing this. You know you have suddenly got two and a half acres of ground to cultivate. So, it was a big undertaking, so I think fairly naturally a lot of it was...i'm trying to think of a nice way to say it...not slap dash, but yeah it went in the ground ....if it worked it worked and if id didn't it didn't. So not everything was thought out thoroughly and some of the things that came out of that were great. And some things didn't work as well. But now we have got that experience we can work forward from it.

CE – 39.42 – Yep ok. An then thinking about, if you look back over the time that you have been involved in the GBY. What kind of change do you think has happened? I have asked you about the changes that have happened to you and a couple of individuals that you saying its changed their lives, literally. Can you think a bit more about the city in which you are in and the issues about the environment which you are carrying. How much change do think has occurred in those kind of things, in terms of the city? I think that people, i'd like to think anyway, that people have a slightly more positive view of the city. This city can be so apathetic, and people think that they can't change anything and I hope that we have, kid of, set an example that shows a small group of people can change things. And can do things and even if we don't get everything right 100% of the time I think that we are setting a really good example, in that sense. You know, that people just need to do something We are very visible, because of where we are, because we are in the city centre. Um, and i think we are a visible sign of that working, and eh, of different groups working together. You know we are a garden, but if you go alongside one side of the road most of what you see is graffiti. Em, and that really effects peoples perceptions of the project, em which I think is good.

CE – 41.26 – And what about? You spoke quiet a bit at the beginning about the 'power that be'. How do you think that their perception of the dream that you had at the beginning is now ?

(S) – 41.35 – We I think its really divided, thats the way I see it, from having actually sat down and having conversations with people in the city Council. Some people just see that land as a big chunk of money that's sitting there and not getting used at the moment; and some people do really understand what we are trying to do. Um, there is definitely economic reasons why they should just kick us off and sell the land. Um and not all of them understand, the value that the site has in being used in the way that we use it. So I have sat, with the Chief Executive of the city council and her heads of Planning or whatever they were. And they have sort of said that we could make this much money of this piece of land once we have de-classified it as not allotment land any more. Do you really want to have what currently on there, on there? And she has said yes, yes I do. But I think it will be a bit of a battle coming up, you know because the site is prime development land, really. Um, but hopefully we have done enough convincing and demonstrating of the value of what we are doing. To sort of save it.

## **STAGE 11: LEARNING**

CE – 42.51 – Yeah. Ok so the final bit is about the learning. What do you do with all the learning that you have just talked about? Have you got any thought about sharing just that experience that you've gathered? Imagine yourself coming into, starting up a project three years ago and now all that you have got. Have you thought about that?

(S) 43.16 – Yeah well we already get people coming to us and saying well we want to do something similar; what information can you give us; can you help us? Can we come and have a look. There is a guy setting up a community garden in another part of the city that's been struggling for a couple of years. And I put him in touch with community service and just suggested some things, and it's nice to be able to do that. You know as you go along, you don't really consider that you are learning, but you are. Then to suddenly to be the person that people come to for help is brilliant. You know it's really nice. Um, god, my boyfriend keeps on going on how we should write down how we did it so it can be like a model for other people in other cities. I'm kind of in two minds about that. I think that everything is so specific to the place and the people that are involved. I think that we were to go into another city and basically tell them how to do it or help them, it would still lose a little bit of the value of that project. Ah, but if it got something of the ground, maybe it would be a worthwhile sort of thing to do. I think personally, that not something that I would be interested in doing, just because it's not really the way I would like my life to go. I don't want to be some sort of consultant, however nice that person would be, but I can see that there would be a lot of value in doing that, so maybe that's a piece of work that will come up? But it might not be me fronting it.

CE – 45.01 – Yep, ok. So I'm quite interested in the bit about other people coming though and talking to you. So do you see yourself as being...there is obviously a network of things happening in and through the GBY, but being something broader than that? In terms of how many people from other places have been in touch with you? There are other initiatives going on in the country, which maybe you might fit into or they fit into you. Has there been any kind of those connections been created?

(S) - 45.35 – yeh, we seem to tick a lot of boxes for people, so like...I went to speak at the local inter-generational conference, because we seem to be doing a lot of good inter-generational work. It's not even a word that we have considered when we started out, it's just what we do. Dad going, kind of a similar thing, is going to talk to the U3A which is like a national thing. Recently we have had people from the Black Environment Network come down and that's a national group. Em, things like the Transition Town Movement is something that we might get involved with. So, yeah there is a lot of ways that we can tie into things that are going on on a bigger scale. And I think that we didn't really expect that there would be that much that we could get involved with. Um, and a lot of the arts as well, you know, we are a garden growing carrots and potatoes. We have had blooming plays, you know, performed at that space; art shows; live art demonstrations; live poetry; and music....

CE – 46.56 – So in terms of networks, you are definitely plugging into other networks.

(S) – 47.04 – Yeah, and it's just through having a space. I really think it's just by having a space and saying 'what do people want to do here? A lot is what they want to do there, a lot.

CE – 47.13 – Yeah, yeah, yeah. Ok to finish it off. Three things that you think are the most important things that you feel you have learnt yourself in this whole journey?

(S) – 47.23 – Wow that's a good question. Um, Three things that I have learnt – definitely have a positive approach – there are so many things on the way to do anything that can just knock you down and you have just gotta keep going. And I think be open with people would be the second one, because, particularly if you are getting a lot of attention. People often, in doing this thing, people often look to you as being the answer and may not see that being the answer as being something that they are involved with. So I think be open about the problems that you have and the flaws that you have is really important, because otherwise you are just setting yourself up to fail. And setting yourself up for quiet a lonely time of it, because if your just doing it on your own and not letting anyone else know when you need any help , then that's quiet a danger to be in. Um, and what the third thing? Um I don't know just make sure that you don't take it all too seriously – haha

CE – 48.35 – Haha. Can I just pick up on, you saying about that loneliness. Are you say that because that, because you have experienced that and that's why it's important to not find yourself in that space?

(S) - 48.45 – Yeah, I think so and also because I see that now that I don't want that for my Dad. Because he has got this, he's in his fifties and people really look up to him and he finds it very difficult to say if he has not got something right or if he is struggling, because he see's that as people seeing that as a weakness. And I hate to think of him being on his own., because he has put people off. And you know I have definitely found that in myself being in a position when you take it all on you think I can do it and you don't want to put it on other people. Then suddenly you are doing it all on your own this is no fun on my own. Really for me that have been time at the GBY when I have not enjoyed it, I have not enjoyed being there and it's the people that make it enjoyable and you have to get on with those people. You have to be honest and open with those people Otherwise you are on your own digging around on your own and it's not enjoyable.

CE – 50.01 – Great, thanks (S)

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